

PROJECT IDEA STARTER

American Sign Language

by Marla Berkowitz, MA, CDI, ASLTA Certified, ASL Program, The Ohio State University; and Kara Detty, Clover Bees 4-H Club Member and Supporter of ASL, Ross County. Special thanks to Abby White, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Educator, Ohio School for the Deaf



American Sign Language (ASL) is the official language used mostly by deaf and hard of hearing people who are immersed in the deaf community. The deaf community includes deaf and

hard of hearing people, ASL interpreters and hearing people who use ASL and are familiar with deaf culture. Different sign languages such as French, Japanese, British and many more are used all over the world.



ASL and its users have influenced our world. For instance, William “Dummy” Hoy (born in 1862) was the first deaf baseball superstar and a graduate of the Ohio School for the Deaf. Hand signals became necessary for Hoy to understand the plays during the games. Other players and the fans found them useful and these signals became commonplace. The football huddle was invented in 1892 by Paul Hubbard, a deaf student at Gallaudet University, who urged his teammates to “huddle up” to prevent other teams from seeing what they were signing to one another.

Formal education for the deaf began in the early 1800s and many schools for the deaf were built in the United States during this century. Gallaudet University was established in 1864 and was the first university for the deaf and hard of hearing in the world. It is officially

bilingual, using ASL and English for all instruction, and is located in Washington, D.C.

As ASL became recognized as a language, it cleared the path for various laws leading to the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. Most deaf and hard of hearing people now have better opportunities in a wide array of jobs and careers.

Today, awareness of ASL is growing rapidly and classes are now offered in high schools, colleges and in local libraries, agencies and other organizations. Opportunities for jobs and careers include teaching deaf and hard of hearing students, providing services to the deaf community and interpreting for the deaf and hard of hearing in a wide variety of settings including hospitals, courts and at public events. Speeches or entertainment are ASL interpreted at

PLAN YOUR PROJECT

Use this idea starter AND publication 4-H 365 *Self-Determined Project Guide* as the starting place for your 4-H self-determined project. The *Self-Determined Project Guide* is available from your county OSU Extension office or on the Web at ohio4h.org/selfdetermined. You may choose to do a little or a lot depending on your level of interest. Be sure to register your project with your county OSU Extension office.

the Ohio State Fair, Ohio State University football games, political rallies and theaters, to name a few. Many of these events are hosted by the deaf community. Enjoy your exploration into this fascinating language and culture!

AREAS OF INTEREST AND THINGS TO DO

Every self-determined 4-H project can be broken down into areas of interest. These are the specific things members want to address during their project adventures. Using 4-H 365 *Self-Determined Project Guide*, identify at least three areas of interest with at least three activities per area to explore. Take your ideas from the list below or make up your own.

Components of a Sign

- To learn about handshape, learn the fingerspelling alphabet (A–Z) and teach a friend.
- In front of a mirror, practice the signs for the question words (who, what, when, where, why and how). These signs have facial expressions along with hand movements.
- Find out about different palm orientations.
- Learn about single, double and multiple hand movements to perform a sign. Create a list of ten words that demonstrate different hand movements. Show them to a parent.
- Use the handshape “a” to make different words in different locations on your body.
- Research the five components of a sign and make sure you include it in your project display.

Six Great Reasons to Learn American Sign Language

- To learn a visual-gestural language using your hands, facial expressions and body language.
- To learn about the culture and history of American deaf and hard of hearing people.
- To communicate with members of the deaf and hard of hearing community.
- To build a foundation for further studies in deaf and ASL-related fields.
- To gain valuable skills and knowledge that can increase job opportunities within a diverse group.
- To experience a different way of learning.

The History of ASL

- Research two famous deaf or hard of hearing individuals who used ASL.
- Create a display that shows how the treatment of deaf and hard of hearing people has changed through the years.
- Talk to your grandparents or to other trusted, older adults about how deaf people were treated when they were growing up.
- Explore the history of Gallaudet University and share it with your club.

Audiology

- What is audiology? Research this topic and find out how it relates to ASL.
- Meet an audiologist and shadow him or her at work.
- What are hearing aids? What are cochlear implants? Find out why they are so controversial and host a debate with some of your 4-H club members.

- Take an audiogram test and find out how good your hearing is. Compare your hearing to that of someone who uses a hearing aid, a cochlear implant or is deaf.
- Draw an audiogram and use it to explain audiology to your 4-H club.

Deaf Awareness

- Learn a nursery rhyme to perform using ASL in front of a Cloverbuds club in your area.
- Create three sentences and learn how to sign them.
- At your next 4-H meeting, play charades. Compare how the reenactment of words or phrases is similar to signs in ASL.
- Talk about the value of hearing at a local festival, charity event or some other gathering.
- Create a display for your county fair about the difference between you and your dog, and a deaf person’s service dog.

Community Service

- Teach students in a local elementary school about American Sign Language.

- Call a deaf school in your area and ask if you may observe a class to see how students interact. If you are allowed to meet them, consider doing so.
- Host a signing clinic where you teach your students some ASL words they are likely to use.
- Visit an ASL organization and ask if you can participate in an upcoming community event to raise ASL awareness.
- At a local talent show, sign an entire song or speech in front of a crowd.

RELATED RESOURCES

- The American Sign Language Program at The Ohio State University, asl.osu.edu
- Fingerspelling practice, asl.ms
- ASL dictionary, lifeprint.com
- Deaflympics, deaflympics.com
- Best of deaf blogs and vlogs, deafread.com
- Deaf Studies internet resources, infoguides.rit.edu

