The purpose of my presentation is to show my audience how to teach Deaf students to learn how to develop their American Sign Language (ASL) literatures. The term, ASL literature, is a relatively new term, but Deaf people have been using it for ages. We have not always called it ASL literature, but we have had storytelling since time immemorial. Many older Deaf students have taken the lead in modeling storytelling traditions for younger deaf students in the Deaf community and the residential schools for the deaf.

The definition of literature is "writing of enduring interest" in English, and I use "signed expressions of enduring interest" in ASL. In our case, we may not have a written form, but now we have videotape available. It is crucial for any ASL literature program in any institution or organization to have a library of its own. In English, they say "a picture is worth a thousand words," in ASL it is worth a million expressions.

American Sign Language, ASL, can be defined as the visual gestural language used by the Deaf community. English can be defined as relating to or characteristic of England, the English people, or it can refer to the English language.

I have videotape samples and transparency samples to show my audience various types of ASL literature that were created and developed by the students at the Kansas School for the Deaf throughout this school year. I have examples of number stories using the handshapes from the numbers zero through 10.

When the children begin, they create simple stories. The girl you will see is a 5-year-old kindergarten student. The story she created is called "Good Morning." This type of literature is called Numerstory. The students collaborated in class to develop this. They learned to sign in the exact same way. Why is this uniformity important? Some of the students come from Deaf families, some from hearing families. They have not had equivalent exposure to the language. Some are more fluent than others. Those less fluent have the opportunity to emulate the more fluent signing of their peers, and that helps everyone's language acquisition and their mastery of nonmanuals as well as signs. You saw the signs on the tape and how they matched up with what was
on the overhead next to the television. We use the English glosses to preserve the order of the signs and to aid the students’ memorization of the piece.

The next part was written by a group of 10-year-old students. This is an ABC’s story, and I am calling it Alphantasy. The genre is Alphantasy; it is a combination of the words alphabet and fantasy. I found this word in Ken Glickman’s book Deafinitions. (Ken also explains his “deafinitions” on his video titled “Deafology 101.”) The strategy here is to have one student come up in front of the class. Then another student stands behind me at the blackboard. As the first student signs to the class, the second student writes the glosses for the signs on the board. The classmates begin by proposing a letter—“A”—and everybody would throw out a sign that might work. The person standing in front of the room would watch everyone’s suggestions and pick the one that he or she likes. The students may not be sure how it’s going to work. It might be a difficult word to translate, but when they agree on a translation, the person at the board writes that term there. Next, the class goes on to the letter “B,” and everyone signs suggestions. Again, the person at the front of the room picks what he or she likes. This is one way of making it a positive experience, so that one person does not feel totally responsible for the creation. The whole class is involved in the process. They banter back and forth about the ones that they like. They won’t accept one suggestion or turn down another. It’s a back and forth negotiation process which has value as well. This is an Alphantasy story called “The Titanic.” I do have them write the English translation of their stories into more expanded form, with help. There was no sign equivalent for this part, “The smoke stacks were smoking.” The students noted that it required more words than the English sign.

Next, I’d like to show you Namantasy. With this activity, the students had to develop a personal story, something that they really felt passionate about, maybe a sport or something like that. One student came up with a cartoon that she liked, Tom and Jerry. Her name is Jennifer dawn Carley. The genre that I’m talking about here is Namantasy. This girl is in 6th grade, so the 6th graders are 11 and 12 years old, and you can see how their individual creativity is budding. They have already had the opportunity to take advantage of input from everyone else. Now they’re ready to go on their own. They have forgotten their inhibitions. They are ready to develop something on their own, something they feel proud of. This is an ASL poetry class using Namantasy as part of the genre within their ASL poetry.
This next genre is called Vocabantasy, a combination of the words vocabulary and fantasy. Here the words being spelled out are Deaf Studies and Deaf Heritage, and I have some handouts for these. The overhead is shown for the audience to read the English glosses while I sign in ASL simultaneously. It is important for me to model things for the students. It is not just their use of ASL literature that is relevant, but their teachers’ as well. It is important for me to be a role model. The things that we create on the blackboard in the Deaf Studies classroom are left up for a long time, for a couple months. They can be refined more over time. This is one story that resulted from that kind of development process. At the beginning, we have two words that use the same handshape as the letter “D,” Deaf and inspect. Some Deaf people require that you only use each letter once, because there is a strict convention is Alphantasy and Namantasy. However, I allow the students a little artistic license. Besides, it draws out more sign vocabulary from them.

This is ASL Poetry and the goal is to get the students to look at patterns. In this instance, the pattern is role shifting. It was signed by a black male high school student who is a sophomore. It was created with the help of group input, but it is based on his life experience. It is somewhat touching, as life experiences tend to be. He was explaining the dichotomy between what happens with his life at home and in the dormitory and how his language and experience are different in both places, causing an internal struggle. In the beginning of his story, he stated he was hurt on the football field. The accident helped him gain a perspective on his two lives while he was unconscious. That is how he started to find the connection between his life at home and his life in the dormitory. It was a bit emotional when he signed “I love you” to himself when he woke up. Again, in this assignment, he practices his written English skills based upon what he created in ASL.

In ASL Storytelling, you notice more of the complete facility of the language rather than being constricted by trying to use PSE, for example. In ASL storytelling, the person facilitates the creativity of the person coming forward. You notice how blunt she is, and she talks very directly about things that are typically taboo, for example, the messy diaper and hitting her baby brother on the top of the head. From her description of all of her experience, you understand that she was very blunt. She is Puerto Rican, and she did her story without any notes. It was all extemporaneous.
Appendix A

Resources for ASL Literature Development


D. Videotapes of various types of ASL Literature by KSD students since 1991.

E. Videotapes of several professional Deaf people signing.
Appendix B
ASL Handouts

(1) KSD Cheer

(clap, clap, clap)

K People
A Emphasize
N Memory
S Strong
A Attitude
S Feel Great

(clap, clap)

S Support
C Class
H Join
O Learn
O Teach Us
L Language

(clap, clap)

F Important
O Degree
R Responsible

(clap, clap)

T Tradition
H History
E Cherish

(clap, clap)

D Deaf
E Cherish
A Pride
F Spirit

(clap, clap, Upplaud!)
(2) KSD Mascot
Jackrabbit

J  shape of Jackrabbit's ears
A  practice, practice, everyday, everyday
C  active, active, get together, get together
K  both teams, let me seem, let me see

R  ready, ready
A  versus, competition, ambitious, patience,
    Team behind, team ahead, so forth
B  Jackrabbit ear, Jackrabbit ear, moving
B  Jackrabbit ear, Jackrabbit ear, moving
I  imagine that
T  Tradition, team, team
S  support, support, work, work

D  Deaf, really
E  cherish
A  pride, self
F  esteem
    well well well

S  confidence, support
T  traditions
U  history
D  correct, Deaf, signing
I  Deaf school (institution)
E  environment
S  kiss fist, Deaf power

Deaf Studies classes at
Kansas School for the Deaf
Instructor: Charles E. Marsh, Jr.
(3) Deaf Heritage

D  Deaf, inspect
E  evidences
A  open (history books)
F  finding
H  names, history
E  cherish
R  research
I  Deaf institutions
T  traditions
A  pride, interesting
G  articles, show (actual Deaf heritage book)
E  cherish

Deaf Studies classes at
Kansas School for the Deaf
Instructor: Charles E. Marsh, Jr.

(4) KSD Jackrabbit Beats

Hail, Hail to our KSD Jackrabbit       Hop, Hop          hop, hop, hop
Our KSD School Colors           What                   Blue White
All our enemy fear KSD      Why KSD always give them   Tough Time
How can our KSD remain, remain,
When KSD self no matter            Tall Short
Fast Slow
Big Thin
Ugly Pretty

Still Jackrabbit                Hop, Hop           hop, hop,
hop
Remember our KSD School Colors   What           Blue White
Football—rush, tackled, pass, tackled, sweep, tackled, dive,
touchdown, won
Volleyball—serve, point, bump, set, spike, save, set, spike, kill, won
Basketball—pass, catch, shoot, rebound, dribble, steal, fastbreak,
lay up, won
Track and Field—sprint, long distance, line in circle, relay,
pass baton (4), lead, won
Know it our KSD School Colors    What           Blue White
Marsh

What if KSD shows
Disappoint  Disappoint
Desperate  Desperate
Frustrated  Frustrated
Oppressed  Oppressed
Weak  Weak
Breathe  Breathe
Snort  Snort
Fall down  Fall down

What if scores
Football  21  0
Volleyball  15  0
Basketball  88  22
Track & Field  team  last

Give up, thumb down, so long, wave out, (step) (step) (pause)
Hey, Hey, Wait, Wait, KSD always stubborn, Fight, Fight
From morning, sun up, bright, all day, sun set, dusk, dark

Hail, Hail, to our KSD Jackrabbit  Hop, Hop  hop, hop, hop
Remember our KSD still have What  Spirit, Spirit
Know it our KSD School Colors What  Blue  White

You, You
Cooperate  Cooperate
Support  Support
Spirit  Spirit
Stimulate  Stimulate
Yell  Yell
Well  Well

You support our group Through, Through Successful Successful

Upplaud  Upplaud  Upplaud

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