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TELECOMMUNICATIONS/TECHNOLOGY

Captions in Written American Sign Language? Someday, Who Knows?!

CMP CAPTIONS VIDEOS FOR THE SIGNWRITING LITERACY PROJECT

by Valerie Sutton

Captions Encourage Literacy

English has a written form. It is called the English alphabet, or the Roman alphabet. The Captioned Media Program (CMP) uses the English alphabet to create its captions. The alphabet is CMP's "tool" to bring us information.

Now try to imagine a world without the alphabet. Written English would not exist. And without the English alphabet, no captions could exist either. CMP would be out of a job. Well, actually, CMP could never have existed in the first place, if there was no way to read and write!

And without a way to read and write English, people would be cut off from each other. Communication would only be face-to-face, and deaf people would be more isolated, too.

So, thank goodness for reading and writing! Literacy has value, and CMP encourages literacy through captions.

It is kind of funny, how we take the English alphabet for granted, isn't it? We assume it was "always there."

But historically, that is not true.

Written English did not always exist. People spoke English, without writing it. Five hundred years ago, most people were illiterate. Some monks knew how to write by hand, but most people didn't.

Then gradually, over centuries, it became the norm for all people to learn to read and write, including children. Today reading and writing is so much a part of our world, that it shapes our very society.

Sign Language Literacy

Signed languages are real languages too. They are not spoken, but language does not have to use sound to convey concepts. In the 1960s and '70s, a researcher named Dr. William Stokoe proved that signed languages are true languages, equal to spoken languages in grammar, structure and vocabulary.

So if you are deaf and use American Sign Language (ASL), you should be proud of your beautiful and

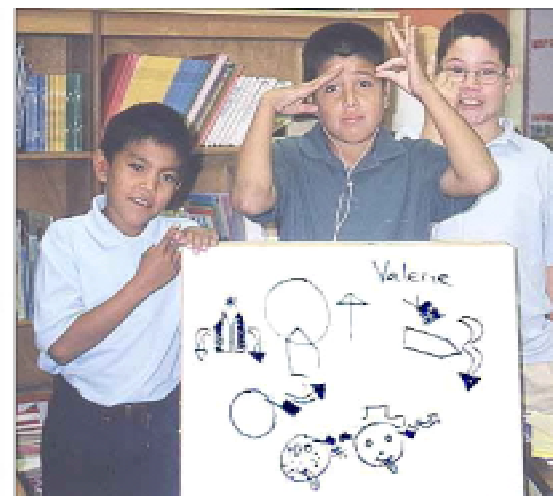
expressive language, which is not English, but equal to English in its sophistication.

The current generation of born-deaf adults, who are native to American Sign Language, grew up with no way to read and write their first language, ASL. English is their second language, and they cannot hear their second language.

Now our society is changing in a new way. American Sign Language, and all signed languages, are becoming WRITTEN languages too.

This is a major social change, that is happening gradually. Many people, both deaf and hearing, are unaware that signed languages are now being written in 18 countries.

Small pockets of deaf people, teachers, and researchers are now reading and writing the facial expressions, hand movements, and



Children from new mexico present a note in signwriting. Translation is below.



Translation:

"Valerie, Thank you for the books, Fernando"

over...



Helps With Your Communication Needs



American Sign Language

*Beginning ASL Videocourse:
Breakfast With the Bravo Family*
#3109

Cued Speech

An Adventure in Cued Speech
#8411

Filipino Sign Language

Tagalog (1-3) #8420-#8422

Spanish Sign Language

Signing Fiesta (1-7) #8413-#8419

And Many More!

*SignWriting

Deaf Perspectives on SignWriting
Video Series #8464 and #8465



**For more information about SignWriting, see the article "CMP Captions Videos for the SignWriting Literacy Project" by Valerie Sutton*

Captioned Media Program

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body shifting of their country's signed languages.

Yes. American Sign Language is now a written language. Its written form is called "SignWriting." There is written literature available in ASL, a way to type ASL, Bible passages translated into written ASL, a Web site for people who want to learn to read and write ASL. Avid SignWriting fans love to read and write signs, and slowly but surely, the writing system is taking hold.

CMP Helps the SignWriting Literacy Project

The SignWriting Literacy Project is pioneering a new concept in Deaf Education. SignWriting books, videos and software are donated to classes of deaf students. In return, teachers, students and parents provide documented feedback. The results are published on the SignWriting Web site and in an annual SignWriting Literacy Project Report, distributed to educators.

SignWriting is a way to read, write and type any signed language. All materials donated to the schools are written in American Sign Language (ASL), authored by deaf, native ASL signers. The SignWriting videos are taught in ASL with English voice-over. Fluency in reading and writing American Sign Language is used as a bridge to teach written English. Although this is a new project, feedback is already coming in, and the results are positive.

The CMP has added videos from the Literacy Project to its inventory, so you can sample our materials there. Some of the videos were not cap-

tioned until CMP selected them and performed the task. Thank you, CMP!

Would you like your school to participate in the SignWriting Literacy Project? Your students must be deaf and use sign language. One teacher must be online, so they can receive technical support through email. For more information, contact: The SignWriting Literacy Project, Deaf Action Committee for SignWriting (DAC), P.O. Box 517, La Jolla, CA, 92038-0517, USA. 858-456-0098 Voice, 858-456-0010 TTY, 858-456-0020 FAX, DAC@SignWriting.org email, www.SignWriting.org Web.

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About the author: SignWriting was first invented by Valerie Sutton in Denmark in 1974. It is one of the five sections of Sutton Movement Writing, a system for reading and writing body movement. Sutton has continued to work full time with SignWriting since 1981. She is the designer and Webmaster of four Web sites, including the internationally popular "SignWritingSite." As the moderator of the SignWriting List, Sutton teaches SignWriting through email. For more information, visit <http://www.SignWriting.org>.