

NITA'S FIRST SIGNS

Teacher and Librarian Guide



Benefits of Signing with Young Children

- Like Nita, babies can sign long before they have the ability to speak. Using American Sign Language with young children can reduce frustration for both children and adults, because little ones can tell you what they want without throwing a tantrum!
- Children exposed to American Sign Language early in life will not only find it easy to learn ASL later, they will find it easier to learn ANY language later.
- Early exposure to multiple languages can increase I.Q. and social skills.
- Studies show that signing with young children increases spoken vocabulary in the long term, as it encourages more interactions with adult language models. Just as Nita can start a conversation with her parents, so can nonverbal children tell their grown-ups what they want to say – and they will be more likely to stay engaged in a conversation that they started themselves.
- Signing in storytime or the classroom provides a welcoming environment for children with special needs and can provide a language bridge for those who speak different spoken languages.
- Signing addresses different learning styles. Children who are more visual or who need movement in order to learn respond well to stories and lessons that incorporate American Sign Language.
- Teaching basic signs and reading stories about American Sign Language introduces children to a new language and culture.

Tips for Getting Started

- Teach the signs for everyday objects and activities first. Use the signs in context to reinforce them often, until the children begin to sign back. Remember, they can understand you before they sign back, so keeping at it.
- Be consistent. Make sure you use the same sign each time for the same object or concept.
- Use your face. 80% of American Sign Language is on your face and body, NOT your hands. The sign “HAPPY” doesn’t mean “happy” unless you’re smiling!
- Children won’t always make a sign correctly the first time they sign it, just like they won’t always pronounce a word correctly the first time they speak it. Keep signing it the correct way and the children will soon learn.
- Reinforce signs in multiple ways: books, rhymes, songs, games, ASL storytelling DVDs, and more!
- Make sure that any books or other resources you select use American Sign Language. There’s a big difference between American Sign Language, which is a whole language, and Signed English, which is just a manual code to represent English words. By using ASL, you’re showing respect for Deaf Culture and giving the children (and yourself) a chance to become bilingual!

Find more resources for signing in storytime and the classroom at LittleHandsSigning.com.

Ideas for Sharing *Nita's First Signs* with Children

- Prepare to teach the signs by watching the author's demonstration video at LittleHandsSigning.com.
- Conduct a choral reading in baby storytime by passing out multiple copies of the book so that the adults can read to the children sitting in their laps. Invite the group to read each page aloud together, and then slide open the pages to practice the signs. Choral reading helps keep caregivers engaged with the children, allows you to model and help parents practice early literacy techniques, and builds warm and positive associations for babies with books. It also encourages the adults to practice the signs and makes it more likely they will use them later.
- Take the time to open each page and show the sign, then put the book down to demonstrate it. You may need to explain the signs step-by-step, particularly for toddlers and twos. For example, to explain the sign PLAY, you might say, "Give me two thumbs up. Now put out your pinkies too. Now wiggle your hands to make them play! That's the sign PLAY!"
- Follow up with a signing quiz! Show a sign and have the children and adults identify what it means. Or say the word and ask them if they remember the sign.

Suggested Follow-Up Activities

Sing a Song!

Use this fun song to the tune of "If You're Happy and You Know It" to practice the manners signs in the story:

To ask for something nicely, I sign PLEASE.

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Oh, I want to show good manners, yes I really want to show them,

So to ask for something nicely, I sign PLEASE.

When someone gives me something, I sign THANK-YOU.

When someone gives me something, I sign THANK-YOU.

Oh, I want to show good manners, yes I really want to show them,

So when someone gives me something, I sign THANK-YOU.

Roll the Ball

Sing this cheerful ball-rolling song to the tune of "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" and roll a soft ball in turn to each child. The back and forth nature of the song imitates the back and forth of communication, and children love to take a turn and have their names featured in the song. Sign BALL in the song, and use the sign MORE each time you repeat the song, PLEASE as you ask for the ball, and THANK-YOU when the children roll it back. Then use ALL-DONE when the game is over (or as needed to remind a little friend that their turn is all done).

Roll, roll, roll the BALL,

Happy as can be,

(Name) rolls it back to me,

Quick as one two three.

Thank You

Finish up storytime with this rhyme that incorporates the sign THANK-YOU:

Our hands say THANK-YOU with a clap clap clap.

Our feet say THANK-YOU with a tap tap tap.

Clap clap clap, tap tap tap.

THANK-YOU everyone!

