

Process Paper

Since the theme of this year's history day is *Frontiers in History*, we wanted a topic that touched people's lives and made a difference. We were interested in seeing how deaf people became successful. In our first search, we came across a website with 200 deaf successful people including Claudia Gordon, the first deaf African American lawyer and nobel prize winner John Cornforth. We became interested in how deaf people learned and communicated. We decided to focus on sign language and how it affected deaf people's lives. As we did research, we discovered that there are many variations of sign language, so we decided to focus on *American Sign Language (ASL)*. Even then, the topic was broad, so we decided to focus on the *Evolution and Impact of ASL*.

For our research, we tried to vary our sources. Our first, biggest source was the internet. We also went to the library and borrowed many books relating to the development of sign language, an ASL dictionary, biographies and interviews of deaf people, and books with advice to families with deaf children. Our third source was interviewing deaf individuals, a mom of a deaf person, a professor of ASL, an administrator at the American School of Deaf, and members of organizations supporting the deaf.

The hardest part of the project was not only research, but narrowing down the information. We found many details that seemed impossible to fit into 1200 words. Another difficulty was getting people to respond to interview requests. We chose to make a website because we had experience with creating websites. We also thought a website with information broken up into different pages with pictures would make it interesting for others to read and learn about ASL.

Our argument is that ASL had a huge impact in America on deaf people's quality of life, education, and access to services. Using ASL has given deaf people a way to communicate, feel

confident about themselves, and feel a sense of belonging which affected their quality of life. It provided them with a way to gain education, get a college degree, and work with both deaf and hearing individuals. The success of deaf people has led them to be recognized as individuals with needs and rights that should be met. This has helped shape the laws passed by the government for deaf people.

Before the development of ASL, it was believed deaf people weren't capable of learning. ASL gave the deaf a way to communicate and prove that they are capable of becoming educated. It led to the opening of several schools for the deaf, which in turn led to the opening of several colleges for them. In 1988, Gallaudet University hired their first deaf president, proving that deaf individuals are capable of doing what non-deaf individuals can do. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act and Americans with Disabilities Act were passed, which included giving deaf individuals rights to be accommodated. ASL made it possible to offer these accommodations.