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## Literature with characters who are deaf

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Until recently, children's literature did not often include characters with disabilities. Instead, books with these characters tended to be informational in nature rather than fictional. The purpose of these informational books is to teach children about disabilities by describing individuals with a disability. In these books, the disability is the salient feature and the character is secondary.

Books with well-developed characters who have a disability, whether the disability is important or not to the plot, can offer young readers an understanding of the disability within a realistic yet engaging story line. But finding books with characters who have disabilities can be a difficult and time-consuming task for teachers and parents.

The following books have characters who are deaf. In gathering this list, we conducted a search of books published during the past 20 years. All of these books are currently available in print. Readabilities were determined with the Spache and Dale-Chall Readability formulas. Books at the lower readability levels can be used by younger readers, students during cross-age reading aloud, or by adolescents who are reading below grade level.

### GRADE TWO TO GRADE THREE

#### **Cosmo gets an ear**

Gary Clemente and Eugene Yelchin

1994, Modern Signs Press

ISBN 0916708241. Grade 2. 46 pages.

When the doctor tells Cosmo that he has lost some of his hearing and needs to get a hearing aid, Cosmo becomes frightened. He fears that his classmates will make fun of him so he and his friend, Gilbert, try everything that they can think of to get his hearing back. Once Cosmo finally gets his hearing aid, he finds that it really isn't so bad.

#### **Dad and me in the morning**

Patricia Lakin and Robert G. Steele

1994, Albert Whitman and Co.

ISBN 0807514195. Grade 2. 27 pages.

This is the story of a young boy, Jacob, who is deaf. He enjoys spending special time alone with his father early in the morning before anyone else is awake. They go for walks together and watch the sunrise.

#### **Deaf Smith: Scout, spy, and Texas hero**

Jo Harper and Virginia Roeder

1996, Eakin Press

ISBN 1571680632. Grade 3. 42 pages.

Erastus "Deaf" Smith was a deaf man who lived in the late 1700s and early 1800s. He was known as a brave man who fought in the Texas Revolution. In the story, Deaf Smith fights for independence and helps conquer the Mexican army.

#### **Dina the deaf dinosaur**

Carole Addabbo and Valentine

1998, Hannacroix Creek Books

ISBN 1889262048. Grade 3. 26 pages

[including illustrations of sign language]

Dina, a dinosaur, is found sitting on a log by a chipmunk named Camilla, an owl named Otto, and a mole named Moliere. Dina is crying but she doesn't respond when they talk to her. They realize she is deaf and they use finger-spelling to communicate. Dina tells them that she left home because she wanted to learn sign language but her parents wouldn't let her. Her parents find her and Dina is very happy.

#### **Going with the flow**

Claire H. Blatchford and Janice Lee Porter

1998, Carolrhoda Books

ISBN 1575050692. Grade 2. 40 pages.

Mark is nervous about attending his new school. He thinks that everyone is staring at his hearing aids and talking about him. Just as he is about to give up, he finds that when he plays basketball with some of his classmates, he doesn't feel so different.

### **Moses goes to a concert**

Isaac Millman

1998, Frances Foster Books/Garrar, Straus and Giroux ISBN 0-374-35067-1. Grade 3. 37 pages  
[including illustrations of sign language]

Moses and his classmates go on a field trip to a concert. All of the children are deaf. They are surprised to find out that the percussionist is also deaf. The children learn that with determination and will power, they can achieve anything they want.

### **Silent lotus**

Jeanne M. Lee

1991, Farrar, Straus and Giroux  
ISBN 0-374-46646-7. Grade 3. 28 pages.

Lotus was a beautiful girl who was born a long time ago in Kampuchea. She learned to express herself and communicate to the hearing world through dance. She was very talented and practiced very hard, and eventually became the most famous dancer in the kingdom.

### **Silent observer**

Christy MacKinnon

1993, Kendall Green Publications/Gallaudet University ISBN 1-56368-022-X. Grade 3. 42 pages.

This is the autobiography of Christy MacKinnon, who was born in rural Nova Scotia in 1889. Christy loses her hearing when she is two years old after battling whooping cough. Christy is an adventurous and curious little girl with a gift for art. She tells of the challenges and the adventures she experienced while growing up in the late 1800s and 1900s.

### **When I grow up**

Candri Hodges and Dot Yoder

1995, Jason and Nordic Publishers  
ISBN 0-944727-26-3. Grade 2. 32 pages  
[including illustrations of sign language]

Jimmy is a young boy who is deaf. He wonders if he will be able to hear when he grows up. To show him that people who cannot hear can be successful, Jimmy's mother takes him to school for a Career Day bus trip. On this trip, Jimmy meets several deaf people at varying ages who hold important jobs. Jimmy sees that his opportunities are endless and that he can be both deaf and successful.

## **GRADE FOUR TO GRADE SIX**

### **Apple is my sign**

Mary Riskind

1981, Houghton Mifflin

ISBN 0-395-65747-4. Grade 5-6. 146 pages.

This is the story of Harry Berger, a boy who was born deaf in the early 1900s. Harry must adjust to life in a school for the deaf away from his family and friends. He is an adventurous young boy who finds that although the deaf world and the hearing world are very different, both have much to offer him. He faces several challenges that include learning to use his voice and overcoming his feelings of rejection because his deaf parents sent him to live and study at the school for the deaf.

### **Belonging**

Virginia M. Scott

1986, Kendall Green Publications/Gallaudet University ISBN 0-930323-33-5. Grade 5-6. 171 pages.

When Gustie becomes ill with meningitis and gradually loses her hearing, she feels as if her life is out of control. Suddenly, communicating with her friends and family is difficult and consumes her energy. After much pain and frustration, Gustie finds that the key to social acceptance is self-acceptance.

### **Cheshire moon**

Nancy Butts

1996, Front Street Books

ISBN 1-886910-08-1. Grade 4. 105 pages.

Miranda, a deaf girl, is convinced that she will never again find a friend like her cousin, Timothy, who died the past summer. No one else is able to understand her. When she meets Boone, a young boy who helps her aunt with yard work, Miranda realizes that maybe there will be other friendships for her. Why are Boone and Miranda having the same dreams at night? Are the legends of Summerhaven Island and the Cheshire moon true? Boone and Miranda find that they have a lot more in common than they thought at first.

### **Death in the afternoon** (Hear no evil #1)

Kate Chester

1996, Scholastic

ISBN 0-590-67326-2. Grade 5-6. 244 pages.

When Sara Howell's father dies in a hit-and-run accident, her whole life changes. She must adjust to moving in with her brother and leaving the comfort of the school for the deaf that she had attended for many years. Sara's curiosity about the events surrounding her father's death leads her right into the middle of a murder investigation, which she is determined to help solve.

**Gaps in stone walls**

John Neufeld

1996, Aladdin Paperbacks/Simon and Schuster  
ISBN 0-689-81640-5. Grade 5-6. 186 pages.

There is a mystery to be solved in Martha's Vineyard in 1880 and several of the residents have no alibis, including Merry Skiffe. Merry is a twelve-year-old deaf girl who is suddenly suspected of murdering Ned Nickerson. She must find a way to protect herself and prove her innocence at the same time.

**The gift of the girl who couldn't hear**

Susan Shreve

1991, Beach Tree Paperbook/Tambourine Books  
ISBN 0-688-11694-9. Grade 5-6. 79 pages.

This is the story of two best friends, Eliza and Lucy, and the stresses related to being thirteen years old. Eliza is having a difficult time adjusting to the changes she is experiencing and finds comfort and strength in Lucy, her best friend who is deaf. The two young women must decide if they want to deal with the competition involved in trying out for the seventh-grade musical.

**Hasta luego, San Diego**

Jean F. Andrews

1991, Kendall Green Publications/Gallaudet University ISBN 0-930323-83-1. Grade 5-6. 94 pages.

When Donald's mother decides to take the "Flying Fingers Club" to San Diego to celebrate his birthday, no one has any idea what adventures are in store. Donald, his sister Susan, and his friend Matt, who is deaf, stumble upon a theft of rare gang-gang cockatoos from the San Diego Zoo. While Donald and Matt are involved with the burglars, Susan finds a way to help their new friend Hector, who has bumps and bruises that he can't explain.

**Mary Mehan awake**

Jennifer Armstrong

1997, Alfred A. Knopf  
ISBN 0-679-89265-6. Grade 5-6. 119 pages.

Mary Mehan is a young Irish woman who worked as a nurse during the Civil War. To escape the pain and devastation that she witnessed, Mary numbed her emotions and senses. It isn't until she begins working as a domestic for a kind and loving couple that her life begins to change. She becomes the friend of a young deaf man who teaches her to experience the world again.

**Nick's mission**

Claire H. Blatchford

1995, Lerner Publications  
ISBN 0-8225-0740-4. Grade 5-6. 148 pages.

Nick stumbles upon the adventure of his life during

summer vacation. While trying to avoid going to speech therapy, he meets Peter, a reporter. Peter believes that the local lake is in jeopardy. Nicks gets more than he bargained for when he agrees to help Peter investigate the situation.

**A season of change**

Lois L. Hodge

1987, Kendall Green Publications/Gallaudet University ISBN 0-930323-27-0. Grade 5-6. 100 pages.

Thirteen-year-old Biney is determined to prove to her family that she can take care of herself even though she is deaf. In order for her to do this, she must learn that it is all right to ask for help.

**Jessi's secret language** (The baby-sitters club #16)

Ann M. Martin

1988, Apple Paperback/Scholastic  
ISBN 0-590-60410-4. Grade 5-6. 145 pages.

Jessi is excited and scared about baby-sitting Matt Braddock, a young deaf child. She worries about how she will communicate with him. Once Jessi begins to take lessons in American Sign Language from Matt's mom and sister, she finds that having a "secret language" can be a lot of fun. Before long, all of the kids in town want to learn the secret language and the members of the Baby-Sitters Club are busy acting as teachers.

**Sudden death** (Hear no evil #5)

Kate Chester

1997, Scholastic  
ISBN 0-590-87991-X. Grade 5-6. 228 pages.

Sara, who is deaf, suspects that the death of her friend, Amy, wasn't an accident as everyone else believes. She has seen her boyfriend's temper and knows that there is more to the death than what appears. Sara makes it her responsibility to find out the truth.

**Tuck triumphant**

Theodore Taylor

1991, Avon Books  
ISBN 0-380-71323-3. Grade 5-6. 150 pages.

When Helen discovers that her newly adopted six-year-old brother, Chok-Do, is deaf she is determined to find a way to communicate with him and make him part of the family. After all, she was able to train her blind dog, Tuck. Helen finds that a remarkable bond develops between Chok-Do and Tuck, one that helps her to communicate with her brother.

**Won't someone help Anna?** (Sweet Valley twins and friends # 69)

Jamie Suzanne (created by Francine Pascal)

1993, Bantam Skylark  
ISBN 0-553-48056-1. Grade 5-6. 135 pages.

Everyone at Sweet Valley Middle School is surprised to find out that Anna, the new deaf girl, is a lot like they are. Anna immediately fits in and everyone accepts her, with the exception of Cammi Adams. Cammi resents Anna for fitting in so easily and knows that life isn't always so easy for people who are deaf. Cammi fights to hide her knowledge about deaf culture from her peers and fears that everyone will find out that both of her parents are deaf. When Anna begins to have difficulties at school, Cammi is the only one who can help her.

### GRADE SEVEN TO GRADE EIGHT

#### **Missing!** (Hear no evil #2)

Kate Chester

1996, Scholastic

ISBN 0-590-67327-0. Grade 7-8. 182 pages.

When Kim Roth disappears, everyone in town thinks she is just looking for attention, except for Sara Howell. Sara knows her friend would not just disappear, leaving so many questions unanswered. Sara is determined to find out the truth about what happened, which is often difficult because she can't hear.

#### **Playing with fire** (Hear no evil #6)

Kate Chester

1997, Scholastic

ISBN 0-590-87992-8. Grade 7-8. 227 pages.

When an arsonist strikes Radley, Sara wonders when the havoc will stop. Suddenly, Sara is involved in the arsonist's spotlight when she rescues a young boy from a burning house. She becomes a hero and inadvertently takes attention away from the arsonist. Sara soon realizes that all of the fires have some connection to her. Now it is up to Sara, who is deaf, to figure out what the connection is and how to stop the arsonist from doing more damage.

### NINTH GRADE TO TENTH GRADE

#### **A maiden's grave**

Jeffery Deaver

1995, Signet/Penguin

ISBN 0-451-18848-9. Grade 9-10. 419 pages.

A bus full of deaf school girls and their teachers fight for survival while being held hostage by three escaped convicts in an abandoned slaughterhouse. Outside the slaughterhouse, the action doesn't subside while Arthur Potter, a hostage negotiator for the F.B.I., and his co-workers fight to save them.

#### **Sign of foul play**

Penny Warner

1998, Bantam Books

ISBN 0-553-57587-2. Grade 9-10. 275 pages.

Connor Westphal is a deaf reporter who is suddenly placed in the middle of a murder mystery. When a dead

body is found on the construction site that is owned by a rival publisher, Connor seeks to discover the truth about what happened and why.

### TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

The use of literature with characters who are deaf offers an opportunity for children to learn about the culture of deaf individuals, often referred to as Deaf culture, with a capital "D" because it represents the pattern of beliefs, values, behaviors, arts, customs, institutions, social forms, and knowledge that are shared by deaf individuals. Deaf adults from organizations such as the National Association for the Deaf; teachers of deaf children who belong to professional organizations such as the Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf and the Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf; and teacher educators preparing undergraduate and graduate students to become teachers of deaf children who belong to professional organizations such as the Association of College Educators: Deaf and Hard of Hearing can be resources in providing the following kinds of information about deaf culture to classes of hearing students. All of these organizations can be contacted via the Council on Education of the Deaf web page at <[www.educ.kent.edu/deafed](http://www.educ.kent.edu/deafed)>.

#### **American sign language**

- ♦ Linguistic differences between ASL and English
- ♦ How ASL developed as a visual-gestural language of the deaf community in the United States
- ♦ Interactional norms and conversational rules in ASL

#### **Political activism**

- ♦ Movements such as the Deaf President Now protest at Gallaudet University in 1988
- ♦ Advocacy activities that have led to the passage of laws and regulations designed to improve education and accessibility for individuals with hearing loss

#### **History and biography**

- ♦ Deaf individuals who have made important contributions to society
- ♦ Contributions from the deaf community such as the football huddle, originally developed at Gallaudet University by all-deaf football teams

#### **Theatre, art, and literature**

- ♦ Groups such as National Theater of the Deaf
- ♦ Visual art of deaf artists
- ♦ Literature of deaf authors

#### **Clubs and organizations**

- ♦ Information about and participation in the activities of local deaf clubs, organizations, fraternal orders and sororities, churches and synagogues, and deaf sports
- ♦ Competitions such as the Deaf Olympics and Miss Deaf America

#### **Folklore**

- ♦ Legends and traditions of the Deaf community
- ♦ Jokes and humorous stories
- ♦ Games and sign play
- ♦ Naming practices
- ♦ Customs, rituals, and celebrations