

“James and the Giant Peach”

Sign Stage on Tour

Teacher’s guide

Sign Stage on tour’s production of “*James and the Giant Peach*” is a Deaf Theatre adaptation of the book written by Roald Dahl. We utilize quality theatrical experiences and educational programming to promote deaf awareness and sensitivity to deaf and hearing adults and children. Productions address real life conflicts found within deaf culture and feature deaf characters. In Deaf Theatre the script is translated into American Sign Language (ASL) and the characters in the play use American Sign Language when communicating. But... we also speak every line! Our productions are performed in spoken English and American Sign Language (ASL) simultaneously.

This improves the theatrical experience for the deaf audience because they can both follow the action and the signed words, rather than the customary practice of watching an interpreter off-stage. For a hearing audience, the simultaneous integration of two languages improves the theatrical experience because the fluidity and grace of ASL creates focus and enhances their comprehension.

The adaptation of plays into sign language involves more than just a word for word translation. It also requires attention to the intent of the words because many signs portray whole ideas or feelings. Spoken English may use one word for several different meanings where ASL may use three different signs for the same word depending on the definition or how the word is used.

Facts about American Sign language (ASL)

American Sign Language is a visual language. It relies on the eyes and hands for communication. Any thought, idea, or emotion can be expressed through ASL. It is a complete and unique language on its own. In fact, Sign Languages are not universal. Just as verbal languages are different in different countries, so are sign languages different in different countries. Even in England where people speak English... their sign language bears no resemblance to American Sign Language. An ASL user would have a hard time communicating in England if they used ASL.

When speaking, a hearing person changes the tone, volume and intensity of their voice to express feelings. A person using ASL uses facial expressions, body movement, and signs to make their feelings understood. Facial expressions are exaggerated in order to communicate the importance or intensity of the feeling. For example, when signing, “I am happy”, the size of the smile will show precisely how happy you are. Facial expressions also show the difference between a question and a statement. For example,

when a person asks a question in ASL, generally the eyebrows will lower and the head will tilt slightly.

ASL is a spatial language, a language that uses space. Unlike English, where we speak one word at a time, someone using ASL can combine and overlap signs when expressing themselves. A person using ASL will use the space around their body to create the language.

It's important to know that ASL is not a picture language. Watching ASL will not help you understand the meanings of the signs. If you don't know the language, you will not be able to guess what is being said based on how it looks. Still, it IS possible to understand some signs just by the way they look. For instance... "tree" and "phone" are fairly easy to guess. But, most signs will only have meaning if you study and learn them.

ASL sentence structure and grammar is different from English. The first thing signed in an ASL sentence is usually the time. Then the signer usually indicates the object of the sentence, then the subject, then the action. For example, the sentence, "I went to the movies yesterday" might be signed as... "Yesterday movie I go." As with every language, this general structure is flexible. The same information can be communicated in different ways.

Exercises for Deaf Awareness

1. TV: Have students watch a scene from a video or DVD with the sound turned off. Have them write down what they think the people are talking about. Then turn on the closed captioning and replay the same scene, first with the sound off... then with the sound on. Compare what the students write to the actual scene. What happens when you must pay more attention to what your eyes see? How do the students feel about the closed captioning?

2. Storytelling: Have someone, yourself or a student, tell a familiar story to the class without using their voice. They must *move their lips* as if speaking normally and at a normal speed, but they must *NOT use their voice at all*. This will show what a deaf person sees when a hearing person speaks. Students should try to read the speaker's lips. Have the class write on paper what they think the story is about. Then re-tell the story using your voice. Discuss how much they understood, and how difficult it was to read the speaker's lips and guess what the speaker was saying.

Class Discussions:

1. Discuss if any students know anyone who is deaf or if they've ever met anyone who is deaf. Did they try to communicate with the deaf person? How could they communicate with the deaf person if they do not know Sign Language?

2. Would they consider someone who is deaf as disabled? (i.e. handicapped, or physically challenged) Why or why not? Would they react the same or different towards someone who is blind, in a wheel chair, developmentally challenged or missing a limb? Why or why not?
3. Have students discuss how they would feel if they could not hear. What sounds would they miss the most? What sounds would they miss the least? Would they feel differently if they've NEVER been able to hear?
4. Have a little contest. Students must spend as much of the day as possible without using their voice to communicate. Everyone starts together. If they need to communicate they must gesture, move their lips without their voice, or use a paper and pencil. Reward those who last the longest before they speak out loud. Have the students discuss their frustrations.
5. Discuss the five senses - Taste, Touch, Sight, Hearing and Smell. How is each important in keeping us safe and protection us from danger? Have the students rank their senses in the order of their importance. Which sense would the students least like to lose and why? Which sense would they choose to lose if they had to choose one and why? Discuss the different ways each sense is used to communicate, gather information and engage in social interactions.
6. If possible have a deaf person visit the classroom. They can answer questions and demonstrate sign language. If needed, contact your local hearing and sight center and see if they might suggest someone. An alternative would be a sign language interpreter. They can also answer questions and provide a discussion on deafness and Deaf Culture. American Sign Language is considered a foreign language and many local university and community colleges offer ASL classes. They too might help you find a suitable guest.

Protocol with the Hearing-Impaired

1. Place yourself facing a source of light. For instance, a lamp or a sunny window.
2. Keep your hands and food away from your mouth when speaking. This will help those who read-lips.
3. Use a physical signal to get the deaf person's attention. It's normal to lightly touch them on the shoulder or wave your hand.
4. Make eye contact with the hearing-impaired person. Look at the deaf person even if an interpreter is being used.
5. If you know the deaf or hearing-impaired person is reading your lips, speak slowly and clearly but **DO NOT** exaggerate your lip movements or the way you speak and do not shout. Use facial expressions, gestures, and body language to make yourself clear.

REMEMBER... Not every deaf person can read your lips. Lip reading is a LEARNED skill. Only about one-third of English speech is visible on the lips. Think about how the words to, two, and too all look the same on your lips when they're spoken. The same

holds true for words like bat and bad. Some deaf or hearing-impaired people are good lip-readers because they have practiced it for a long time. Sometimes “lip-reading” is called “speech reading” because deaf people use other clues as well as reading lips to help them understand what is being said. Facial expressions are VERY important.

Even if someone is legally deaf, loud noises can still bother them. If a deaf or hearing-impaired person wears a hearing aid, very loud sounds can cause pain in their ears.

Deaf and hearing-impaired people have **normal vocal chords**. Many deaf or hearing-impaired people choose NOT to speak at all or they may speak a little more slowly than you, or their voice might sound different than yours. BUT... almost all deaf people have normal vocal cords and, if they choose, can make as much sound with their voice as any hearing person.

Deaf people can do anything a hearing person can do *except* hear.

Stories By and About Deaf People

At Home Among Strangers by Jerome D. Schein

Belonging by Virginia M. Scott

Dancing Without Music by Beryle L. Benderly

Deaf Like Me by James and Thomas Spradley

In This Sign by Joanne Greenberg

Seeing Voices - A Journey Into the World of the Deaf by Oliver Sacks

What's That Pig Outdoors, a Memoir of Deafness by Henry Kisor

The Feel of Silence by Bonnie Poitras Tucker (a deaf person who never learned sign)

Stories By and About Hearing People Growing Up in Deaf Culture

Mother Father Deaf: Living Between Sound and Silence by Paul Preston

Train Go Sorry: Inside a Deaf World by Leah Harper Cohen

On the Edge of Deaf Culture by Thomas Bull

American Sign Language Books

A Basic Vocabulary of American Sign Language for Parents and Children by Terrence O'Rourke

Come Sign With Us by Jan C. Hafer and Robert M. Wilson

Gallaudet Survival Guide to Signing by Leonard G. Lane

My First Book of Sign by Pamela J. Bake

Interpreting as a Career

Learning Sign language is different from learning to interpret. Merely becoming bilingual is not enough. The interpreting process requires that both languages be held in the consciousness at the same time, with constant interactive reference while listening intently to an ongoing feed of incoming informational content. The real key to becoming an interpreter, however is to DO IT. Too often, beginning interpreters quit too soon because of fear or anxiety. Everyone was a beginner once upon a time. It's important to work with supportive deaf people and a supportive experienced team of interpreters who will provide supportive encouragement and positive feedback. Don't compare yourself to interpreters with many year's experience.

Currently, the interpreting community is experiencing dramatic and sudden changes on a revolutionary scale. Video Relay Service providers (VRS) are establishing systems to provide relay services to deaf and hard-of-hearing customers to let them link with telephone callers via video phone systems. This is a great opportunity! It creates a sudden demand for qualified interpreters.

Interpreting is an exciting, rewarding and stimulating career. You can work as a staff employee or a freelance independent contractor. If you work as a staff interpreter, you generally have less flexibility in picking and choosing assignments but this type of position offers stability, predictability and the security of holding a "staff" position. Working as a freelance interpreter gives you a wide range of diverse experiences. You'll see many dimensions of the community you live in, from the best to the worst. You'll go to weddings, banquets, seminars on interesting subjects and meet celebrities, politicians and many entertainment figures in sports, TV and movies.

Recommended books about interpreting: In addition to books from DeBee Communications or Dawn Sign Press, read any book by Lou Fant or Tom Humphreys and Carol Padden. Lou Fant has produced a number of books and videos over the years and was widely recognized as the greatest sign language interpreter ever. Also, Irene

Duke has written an excellent book, “The Everything Sign Language Book“. This is an excellent introductory resource that gives a clear, easy to follow view of what sign language is, where it came from, how it works, and how you can be a part of it all.

“JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH”

Ten Facts about the Author, Roald Dahl

- He was born on September 13th, 1916, in Llandaff, Cardiff, Wales. (His parents were Norwegian.)
- He did not start writing for children until he had children of his own.
- He wrote all of his children’s stories in a small hut at the bottom of his garden.
- He was a Hurricane Fighter Pilot during World War II.
- He had two steel hips and six operations on his spine.
- He wrote the screenplays for *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, and the Bond movie *You only Live Twice*.
- He originally wrote short stories for adults which were later published as *Tales of the Unexpected*.
- He loved chocolate, but not chocolate cake or chocolate ice cream.
- He always wrote in pencil on yellow paper.
- Roald Dahl died on November 23rd, 1990 and is buried in the churchyard of St. Peter and St. Paul’s church, Great Missenden.

Story Synopsis:

A young orphan named James is forced to live a miserable existence with his cruel aunts. He pretends he’s deaf so his aunts won’t think he can hear them gossip and complain or talk about him in a bad way. One day James meets a strange, tiny old man who teaches James sign language. The tiny old man gives him a bag of what looks like magic crystals. They’re supposed to make his life marvelous, but James accidentally drops the bag, scattering the contents under a old peach tree. A single peach at the top of the tree starts growing, and growing, and growing until it’s as large as a house! Seeing a hole on the side of the peach, James crawls inside where he finds the peach pit is inhabited by a peculiar group of oversized bugs. With a snip of the stem, the peach starts rolling down hill and the adventure begins!

Characters in the book:

James Henry Trotter - protagonist

Aunt Sponge - overweight and extremely mean

Aunt Spiker - skinny and extremely mean

Tiny Old man - mystery man who gives James a bag full of crocodile tongues

Creatures in the Peach:

Old-green Grasshopper

Spider

Ladybug

Centipede

Earthworm
Silkworm
Glow-worm

Vocabulary words:

1. Amble - to walk in a leisurely manner
2. Beckon - to call or signal to a person
3. Blunt - having a thick edge or point
4. Crafty - sly, clever
5. Deluge - a drenching rain, huge flow
6. Desolate - isolated, barren
7. Imbecile - of very low intelligence, very stupid
8. Luminous - giving off light, glowing
9. Malevolent - acting with evil intent.
10. Mammoth - huge
11. Martyr - one who sacrifices something of great value for a principle
12. Peculiar - strange, different from the usual
13. Nuisance - annoyance, bother, pest
14. Pandemonium - chaos, wild confusion
15. Shilling - a former unit of British money
16. Sinister - threatening disaster, evil
17. Spellbound - condition of dulled senses, lethargy
20. Tapered - to make or become gradually smaller toward one end
21. Wistful - sad thoughtfulness

Web sights for information and resource materials:

<http://eprentice.sdsu.edu/j03OJ/lewis/teacherpage.htm> (Excellent integrated lesson plan)

<http://www.shakespearefest.org/PDFs/PeachTeacherGuide.pdf> (Good student activities)

http://www.thechildrenstheatre.com/onstage/2005_james_sg.html

www.roalddahl.com

www.roalddahlfans.com

www.roalddahlmuseum.org

www.roalddahlfoundation.org