

Rationale

We wrote these stories to delight signing deaf nonreaders and readers alike, and to fill a void in the field for realistic, natural science materials. When children read and learn about the development of great egrets from nesting to migration, they can reflect on their own development. The 12 stories are presented in 10 to 12 sentences and are illustrated with one drawing each. Individual stories can stand alone having a plot with a beginning problem, with its progress, and a resolution. The 12 stories form a whole comprising a sequence of science concepts from nest building to migration. All stories contain science vocabulary (i.e. nest, hatch, claw, egg, sticks, bill, feathers). The stories are translated into ASL by Tanasha Slack and Joseph Mann, two deaf skilled signers. We think our nonfiction stories will appeal to deaf nonreaders and readers alike, particularly for boys who often are not motivated to read fiction.

Design

Our design is based on research and development with emergent and developing deaf and hard of hearing and hearing readers that focuses on reading comprehension before word identification. The stories, we believe will appeal to a broad and diverse audience as deaf children of all ages, to Deaf adults who cannot read well, to parents, speech-language pathologists, audiologists, teachers of the deaf, and teachers of special education who work with deaf and hard of hearing children. The stories may also appeal to hearing children learning ASL as a second language and hearing children with other disabilities.

American Sign Language (ASL) and English Bilingual Approach

For deaf and hard of hearing children who use sign language, reading and comprehending English print is a cognitive and visually perceptive experience that we do not fully understand. We believe that presenting stories with simple sentences and illustrations which are then translated into ASL can promote skills in thinking, reasoning, socialization, sharing of emotions and ideas, language development, enjoyment and independent reading.

Stories play an important role in the family and school reading experience as they can teach, tell, comfort, plan, direct, entertain, and socialize. Stories for young, non-reading deaf children might best be accomplished in small groups where children can see and have the text signed and where they can watch and interact with their peers, the adult signer, and the book material. All are focused in different ways to the meaning of the pictured text.

Our stories are presented in two languages—ASL (movies) and English (printed texts). We do not translate the text word for word but provide a conceptual interpretation of the text. This bilingual format allow the teacher to start with meaning then focus and point to the pictures, explain the meaning of the print using signs and fingerspelling to help deaf readers understand the structure of the English language at the story, sentence, phrase, and word levels.

Teachers can use the reading lessons to follow up with meaning-based and code-based activities such as encouraging the children to sign, fingerspell, and practice writing the words, phrases, and sentences after understanding the story as a whole. We also

provided spoken language and audiology support for those children who benefit from oral/aural English.

Features and Format

The features of our stories include the following:

1. Observations of the natural world
2. Interactions of the protagonists
3. Story progression of problem/ work on solution/ solution
4. Stories are entertaining and contain relevant topics, amusing events, use fun repetitive language, and have surprising endings.
5. Story progression of protagonists is from birth to adulthood.

All of the stories of the great egrets are based on the two authors' actual observation and documentation of behaviors of great egrets. The stories will teach deaf children about science concepts about great egrets and by analogy about themselves as they read and enjoy the stories presented in ASL movies and in English print.

The format of our great egret picture book stories is based on three areas of research:

1. Emergent Literacy Little Books research and development is applicable to deaf children as they learn to read and understand text materials (Mason, 1980; McCormick & Mason, Andrews & Mason, 1986; Andrews, 2011).
2. Early access to signs and fingerspelling to support English literacy (see Andrews & Ruser, 2010 for reviews).

3. Non-Fiction, science, informational texts are needed for young readers (Duke, Bennett-Armistead & Roberts., 2002; Duke, 2000; Mason, Peterman & Kerr, 1989; Anderson, Heibert, Scott & Wilkerson, 1985).

Since 1980, Jana Mason and her colleagues have published studies that show how emergent and developing readers are able to develop reading comprehension skills as well as vocabulary, print concept and alphabet knowledge skills through picture phrase books. She and her colleagues have developed the Little Book concept and product (Mason, 1980; McCormick & Mason, 1990) and have tested this intervention with more than 400 children in Illinois and Newfoundland, many of whom were classified as “at risk.” Mason’s design was also incorporated into another set of stories for *Shared Book Reading series* with Chinese Hearing Children (Li, Anderson, Mason, Shu, & Wu, 2012). Both set of stories follow a balanced approach to early reading instruction combining meaning and code-emphasis activities beginning with shared book reading in groups.

Mason’s (1980) early work with Little Books was replicated by Jean Andrews in 1981 using Total Communication (ASL, English signs and speech) in a school for the deaf in North Carolina. In this longitudinal study, Andrews & Mason (1986a, b) found that even if deaf children have limited sign language, they can build English literacy skills on their existing sign language and fingerspelling. This study was again replicated in 2011 at the Alabama School for the deaf where 25 children used Little Books translated into ASL. Called Adapted Little Books, these were stories presented in both ASL and in English (Andrews et al., 2017). After one full school year, children showed gains in bookreading, bookreciting, vocabulary, fingerspelling and writing using these picture book stories with ASL translations. Our great egret stories incorporated the

design of Mason's original Little Books and Andrews and Mason's Adapted Little Books in this new set of stories.

To summarize, the great egret stories are non-fiction, science, and informational text and offer children an expanded view of their development through the text and picture stories of great egrets. They also address a critical need in the field for informational texts for young developing readers.

Contact

For more information, please contact Jean F. Andrews (jean.andrews@lamar.edu)