



Celebrating Deaf Awareness Month

September is Deaf Awareness Month. This issue of Multicultural Moments will highlight information about the Deaf community and culture in addition to covering myths about deafness, Sign Language, and Deaf art.

Overview. This section will explain deafness and present data and important dates related to the Deaf population in the U.S.

- **What does "Deaf" mean?** Deafness is defined as a profound loss of hearing, while hard of hearing can range from mild to severe loss of hearing. To learn more about the range of severity of hearing loss as well as causes, symptoms, and treatment options in this Healthline article, visit [Hard of Hearing vs. Deaf: Differences, Symptoms, Treatment \(healthline.com\)](https://www.healthline.com/health/deaf-differences-symptoms-treatment).
- **Statistics about the Deaf population in the U.S.** According to the National Institute on Deaf and Other Communication Disorders, "2 to 3 out of every 1,000 children in the United States are born with a detectable level of hearing loss in one or both ears," and nearly 15% of Americans age 18 and up experience some level of hearing loss. For additional statistics about hearing loss by age group and gender, see [Quick Statistics About Hearing | NIDCD \(nih.gov\)](https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/statistics/quick-statistics-about-hearing).
- **Timeline of significant events.** In a 2021 piece called [Deaf History and Culture in the United States](https://www.npr.org/2021/03/13/981111111/deaf-history-and-culture-in-the-united-states), National Public Radio (NPR) presents a timeline of significant events related to Deaf culture, including Abraham Lincoln chartering Gallaudet School for the Deaf and Blind in Washington, DC in 1864 and the first celebration of Deaf History Month in the United States on March 13, 2006.

Myths about the Deaf community. Many people with disabilities face challenges that result from stereotypes and common myths about the Deaf community.

- In [8 Myths About Deaf People](https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/584848/8-myths-about-deaf-people-by-marta-belsky-brenda-cartwright/) (2022), Marta Belsky and Brenda Cartwright provide facts to dispel common myths about the Deaf community. Here are a few:
 - *Myth:* Most Deaf people have Deaf parents. *Fact:* 90% of Deaf children are born to hearing parents.
 - *Myth:* If you learn sign language, you can interpret for Deaf people. *Fact:* There is a difference between signers and interpreters. Signers can communicate in social and casual settings. Still, in formal settings (such

as courtrooms and hospitals), one must have the skills of an interpreter to accurately and effectively communicate with and on behalf of a Deaf person.

- *Myth:* Deaf people have an easier time lip reading than hearing people.
Fact: Because it is difficult to distinguish certain letters (such as *b* and *p*), less than 1/3 of spoken words can be read successfully via the lips.
- In his TED Talk, [Why we need to make education more accessible to the Deaf](#), Nyle DiMarco describes his experiences growing up with 25 Deaf family members and explains the benefits a Deaf person like him can contribute to an environment. His account could address another common myth that most Deaf people wish they could hear.

Sign Language. Just as spoken languages vary around the world, Deaf people around the world communicate using different sign language systems. According to [How Did Sign Language Originate?](#), the non-verbal language system can be traced back to a 16th-century Italian doctor, Geronimo Cardano, and has been used among "medieval monks who have taken a vow of silence, Native Americans, and African bushmen."

- **Popularity of sign language.** Up to 300 different types of sign languages are in use globally, and many, including American Sign Language, are derivatives of French Sign Language according to the following video from Sign Language Around the World: <https://youtu.be/J80Vc2y9Fcs>
- **ASL Alphabet and phrases.** A simple web search can uncover numerous resources for learning the [American Sign Language alphabet](#). In addition, resources such as the video [25 ASL Signs You Need to Know](#), teaches common words and phrases as well as the importance of hand shape, palm orientation, movement, location, and non-manual signs.
- **Sign language in different countries.** Richard Brooks gives a comparison of different sign languages around the world in his 2018 blog post, [A Guide to the Different Types of Sign Language Around the World \(k-international.com\)](#). The piece includes the number of users and how sign language is recognized or supported by several nationalities, including Chinese, Brazilian, British, Irish, French, and Indo-Pakistani.

Deaf Art. Members of the Deaf community have made significant contributions to Deaf art and culture, from visual art to poetry and even music.

- **Visual art.** You might be surprised to learn of a visual arts genre called Deaf art. But what makes Deaf art unique? According to [The De'VIA \(Deaf View/Image Art\) Manifesto](#), Deaf art represents Deaf experiences using "Deaf metaphors, Deaf perspectives, and Deaf insight in relationship with the environment...spiritual and everyday life." In addition, Deaf artists may commonly "use contrasting colors and values, intense colors, contrasting textures," and their work can include a "centralized focus, with exaggeration or emphasis on facial features, especially

eyes, mouths, ears, and hand." See if you can identify these elements as you explore the gallery of images, videos, and student portfolios at <https://deaf-art.org/>.

- **Poetry:** Deaf/ASL poetry has a dynamism not present in written or even spoken poetry. Deaf poetry involves using both hands, so the poet can express more than one idea simultaneously. The expressive movements in Deaf poetry can communicate emotion and drama. See examples of Deaf poetry videos in [Deaf Culture Values: Art and Literature | Start ASL](#)
- **Music/Dance.** You may have heard stories of Beethoven continuing to compose music after losing most of his hearing around age 44. However, how do other Deaf artists experience or share music? In [How Deaf People Experience Music](#), Deaf dancer Shaheem Sanchez explains how he feels music through vibration. He often signs the lyrics as he dances and can hear music minimally using a hearing aid.
- **Acting/Film.** Deaf actors have made their marks in the film industry. The film CODA, the story of a hearing child of Deaf parents, earned top honors at the 2022 Screen Actors Guild (SAG) Awards. The cast included several Deaf actors, including Marlee Matlin, who became the first Deaf actor to win an Academy award for her performance in the 1986 film "Children of a Lesser God." Read more about CODA's SAG success in the Huffington Post article, ['CODA' Wins Top SAG Award: 'We Deaf Actors Can Work Just Like Anybody Else'](#)

May we avoid blaming or bias based on our circumstance and continue to be grateful for the gifts of the global community.

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