

# Promoting Literacy in Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children: Understanding and Applying Principles from the Shared Reading Project



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# Learning Objectives

- **Identify key principles:** List 15 principles for reading to deaf and hard of hearing children.
- **Implement strategies:** Demonstrate shared reading strategies at home.
- **Evaluate implementation:** Outline steps to start a Shared Reading Saturday program in the community.



- Many parents and caregivers know they should read to their deaf or hard of hearing children but struggle with **how** to do it.
- Schleper and Fernandes explored how culturally Deaf parents read to their Deaf children, as research shows these children achieve higher academically.



- Lartz and Lestina found that mothers reading to young deaf children used sign placement, real-life connections, facial expressions, and body posture to enhance storytelling.
- Maxwell's study showed a deaf child's development over five years, starting before age 2, was similar to that of a hearing child.



# This led to ...



## 15 Principles for Reading to Deaf Children

The following 15 principles are best practices for how to read aloud to deaf and hard of hearing children. They are based on research on how Deaf parents read to their Deaf children. These principles were developed to give parents and teachers of deaf children skills and strategies for reading aloud in American Sign Language.



## 15 Principles for Reading to Deaf Children



A MANUAL FOR PARENTS  
AND TEACHERS

### Reading to Deaf Children: Learning from Deaf Adults



DAVID R. SCHLEPER



## THE 15 PRINCIPLES FOR READING TO DEAF CHILDREN

*(For a more in-depth coverage of these principles, please refer to your copy of the manual entitled: Reading to Deaf Children: Learning from Deaf Adults by David R. Schleper.)*

1. Translate stories using American Sign Language.
2. Keep both languages visible.
3. Do not be constrained by the text.
4. Re-read stories from on a storytelling to story reading continuum.
5. Follow the child's lead.
6. Make what is implied explicit.
7. Adjust sign placement to fit the story.
8. Adjust signing style to fit the story.
9. Connect concepts in the story to the real world.
10. Use attention maintenance strategies.
11. Use eye gaze to elicit participation.
12. Engage in role-play to extend concepts.
13. Use ASL variations to sign repetitive English phrases.
14. Provide a positive and reinforcing environment.
15. Expect the child to become literate.

# Principle 9: Connect concepts in the story to the real world.

Observe the real-world connection.



# Language and Cultural Factors

## Visual Orientation

Name signs for characters  
Fingerspelling, descriptive and arbitrary name signs.  
Replace sound words with visual signs.

## ASL-English Relationship

Connect ASL signs to describe the location to indicate relationship.

## Rhyme and Rhythm

Use handshape and hand movements to predict next sequence of events.  
Use ASL handshape to show rhyme and rhythm patterns in English.

# ASL-English Relationship



What  
factors did  
you notice?

## What Is the Shared Reading Project?

It is a literacy initiative aimed at improving the reading and language skills of deaf and hard of hearing children.

- **Purpose:** Creating bilingual, interactive reading experiences with an emphasis on American Sign Language (ASL)-English literacy development.
- **Main goal:** To foster a love of reading and develop early literacy skills through shared reading experiences.



**Reference:** Delk, L., & Weidekamp, L. (2001). *Shared Reading Project: Evaluating implementation processes and family outcomes*. Washington, DC: Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center, Gallaudet University.

## How the Shared Reading Project works

- **Matching with Tutors:** Families are paired with trained deaf and hard of hearing tutors.
- **Reading Demonstration:** The tutor visits the family and demonstrates how to read a children's book using ASL.
- **Practice and Feedback:** Family members practice signing the book, receiving constructive feedback from the tutor.
- **Final Reading:** The family then reads the book to their deaf or hard of hearing child using ASL while the tutor observes and offers further support.



# Introducing



A successful adaptation of the Shared Reading Project



## What Is Shared Reading Saturday?

A community event that:

- Helps families build storytelling skills with guidance from trained deaf and hard of hearing instructors and tutors in a group setting
- Connects families through group activities in a supportive environment
- Offers activities to enhance parents' storytelling and children's literacy development



## Structure of Shared Reading Saturday

- Held once per month on a Saturday
- Single location (e.g., community college, school, library)
- Breakfast and lunch provided for all participants
- Instruction and group sessions by trained deaf and hard of hearing instructors and tutors
- Language interpretation support available
- Full-group storytelling time for a shared experience
- Child care and arts & crafts activities for children
- Free book bags for every family
- Story signer videos available for families



## Shared Reading Saturday Schedule



9:30 AM

Program opens

9:30 - 9:55 AM

Breakfast

9:55 - 10:00 AM

Announcements and  
introductions

10:00 - 11:45 AM

Instruction/group sessions/  
child care/arts & crafts

11:45 AM - 12:00 PM

Full-group story time

12:00 - 12:30 PM

Lunch

12:30 PM

Program ends

## Impact of Shared Reading Saturday

- Enhanced parent-child interaction through shared reading experiences
- Community building by creating connections and fostering support networks
- Knowledge development through providing access to resources and opportunities



## 2017 *Odyssey: New Directions in Deaf Education* article on Shared Reading Saturday



## Massachusetts Offers Trilingual Reading Saturdays to Increase Reading Skills and Confidence

By Kathleen M. Vesey

*"We look at and read books more thoroughly now."\**

*"Hardly any more frustration between adult and child."*

*"We LOVE having books that we know how to sign the story. We like to have ideas for discussion and the ability to talk about the book in ASL."*

*"The program helps parents and children communicate better."*

These comments affirm the experiences of so many of the families of the deaf and hard of hearing children who come to Shared Reading Saturdays at Northern Essex Community College (NECC) in Lawrence, Massachusetts. The program, which includes monthly gatherings and is coordinated by the NECC's Gallaudet University Regional Center, features deaf individuals helping hearing parents learn how to read with their children in American Sign Language (ASL) in response to research that indicates young children whose families read with them on a regular basis do better academically and achieve more success in school (Trelease, 2001).

Approximately 12 families from throughout the Greater Merrimack Valley region of Massachusetts attend the program. The children range in age from infancy to 11 years old. They are joined by their parents and siblings—and often by their grandparents, aunts, and uncles. The sessions give the adults the communication tools to read with their children, and organizers hope that they do so multiple times per week.

*Photos courtesy of Kathleen M. Vesey*

**Kathleen M. Vesey**, MBA, MA, is the recently retired director of the Gallaudet University Regional Center (GURC) at Northern Essex Community College (NECC), a position she held for 27 years. She holds master's degrees from Boston University and Gallaudet University and a bachelor's degree from Regis College. Vesey has served on a number of boards and advisory committees in the Deaf community, including the Massachusetts Newborn Hearing Advisory Committee. Under her tenure, the NECC GURC provided creative programs for families with children who are deaf or hard of hearing, including the Family Sign Language Program and Shared Reading Saturdays, both of which are accessible for families who speak Spanish and English. In her spare time, Vesey can be found on the golf course or kayaking on the rivers of New England.

For more information about the above-mentioned programs, visit [www.necc.mass.edu/gallaudet](http://www.necc.mass.edu/gallaudet).

# Introducing Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center



**BREAKING BARRIERS  
FOR DEAF & HARD OF  
HEARING CHILDREN**

If you believe access to language is a human right, you've come to the right place.

The **Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center** researches, trains, and models best practices in the education of deaf and hard of hearing students from birth to 21. Our work supports families and caregivers, education and healthcare professionals, and state leaders.



Deaf Education  
Connections



State  
Partnerships



Early  
Intervention



Demonstration  
Schools



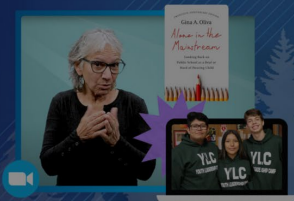
Resources  
& Trainings



## BEYOND CLASSROOM WALLS

Exploring Family Learning and Camps for Deaf Children

[LEARN MORE](#)



## Deaf Education Video Library

In 2024, the Clerc Center education team is producing hundreds of best-practice, hands-on instructional videos for teachers. Sample topics include:

- Establishing a language-rich environment
- Reading to children in ASL and English
- Deaf Immersion Programs & ASL Youth Camps



## NEW DIRECTIONS IN DEAF EDUCATION ODYSSEY

Odyssey magazine is an award-winning publication published annually by the Clerc Center. Each issue is theme-based, focusing on topics of importance as they relate to research, philosophy, and application of practice of instruction in the deaf education classroom.

[LEARN MORE](#)



# Deaf Education Connections

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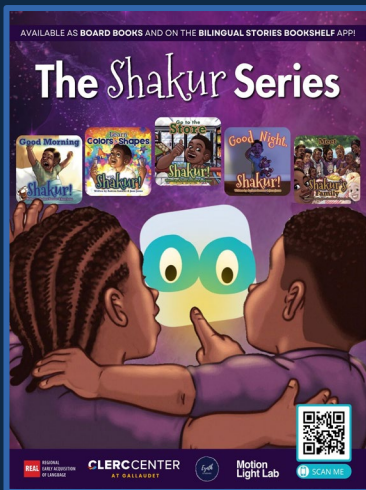


## BILINGUAL STORIES BOOKSHELF APP

The Bilingual Stories Bookshelf app is a central feature of the **Regional Early Acquisition of Language** (REAL) Project, led by the Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center and Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind. Our mission is to provide deaf and hard of hearing children and their families with bilingual storybooks in both American Sign Language (ASL) and English, supporting early language acquisition from birth to age 3—a critical period for developing a strong language foundation.

Through this app, entire books are translated into ASL, offering a virtual bookshelf of signed storybook videos. Users can engage with the app through three interactive modes:

**WATCH** **READ** **LEARN**



## Accessing the APP and Stories

**Free downloads:** Published books will be available for free download through the app.

## Special Access for Families with Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children

Families registered with their **REAL regional center** or the **Clerc Center early intervention** team will receive:

- Free downloads of the Shakur series and future paid content added to the app.
- Access to published books through the REAL Family Resource Packages distributed by the REAL regional centers.

If you are a family member with a young deaf or hard of hearing child (Ages 0-3) and would like to see if you qualify for free access to the Shakur series, please fill out the form.

[FORM](#)

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a brown jacket, is kneeling on the floor and smiling at a young girl. The girl has blonde hair with blue bows and is wearing a floral shirt. They are in a classroom setting with educational cards on the wall, including one with a pig and the word 'pink'.

# Thank you! Questions?

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