

Experiencing Hearing Disability through Music

The purpose of this lesson is to introduce the concept of disability to students by exploring the everyday experiences of people who have a hearing disability. Through hands-on exercises such as using sign language and appreciating music by means of sound vibration, students explore similarities and differences in the daily lives of people with and without a hearing disability. In addition, students are encouraged to challenge assumptions about the abilities of people with disabilities in general.

Objectives:

- Students will hear a piece of music and listen for different sounds and instrument.
- Students will learn the terms disability and hearing disability.
- Students will learn how people with a hearing disability can experience music through sound vibration.
- Students will learn some basic sign language.
- Students will learn how people with a hearing disability perform daily functions.

Requirements:

American Sign Language handout

Friends Who Care: Hearing Disabilities Worksheet

Moses Goes to a Concert by Isaac Millman, balloons, basic art supplies, chart paper, construction paper, crayons, markers, pencils, stereo with speakers, writing paper

Part 1 (35 minutes)

1. Play a song or piece of music (preferably a cultural piece that represents the ethnic or cultural background of one or more of the students). Ask students to listen to the sounds they are hearing, and to draw or write the sounds and instruments they recognize in the musical piece.

Tell students about the cultural significance of the song or musical piece. Ask students to share some of the sounds or instruments that they heard. Chart responses and paste up student writings and drawings.

2. Write the words "HEARING DISABILITY" on a separate piece of chart paper and ask students:

-What is a disability? (Explain that a disability is a mental or physical condition that limits a person in being able to see, hear, speak, walk, or learn).

-What is a hearing disability? (Explain that there are various levels and degrees of hearing impairment. People who are deaf may have either a total or partial inability to hear, but are not assisted by hearing aids; whereas people who are hard of hearing have a partial ability to hear and may be assisted by the use of devices like a hearing aid.)

-Do you think a person with a hearing disability would be able to experience the song we just listened to? Why or why not?

3. Give each student an inflated balloon. Have each student hold the balloon in their lap, and replay the musical piece from earlier.

The volume of the music may have to be turned up moderate to loud in order for students to feel the vibrations of the music through their balloons. Students may need to hold their inflated balloon up to the speaker, or place their hands on the speakers, to ensure they can feel the vibration of the music.)

Ask students:

-What was it like to feel the music through your balloon?

-Did some of the sounds feel different to you? How did the sounds feel different from one another? (Explain that different sounds create different levels of vibrations which can be felt through a balloon, or through the playing of an instrument such as a piano or drum.)

-What does this experience tell us about how people with a hearing disability can appreciate music differently?

-How might a person who has a hearing disability be able to play an instrument?

Part II (50 minutes)

1. Invite students to join you in reading the book, *Moses Goes to a Concert*, by Isaac Millman.

Ask students the following questions in response to the book:

-How was the percussionist who is deaf able to play in the orchestra?

-What types of things did you learn from this story about people with a hearing disability?

-Do you know any sign language?

-If not, did you learn any sign language from this story?

2. Distribute the American Sign Language handout to each student, and demonstrate how to sign the words “Hello, I am...” Have students practice signing these words, and then divide the class into pairs. Using the handout, have students work together to learn how to sign their name.

Name(s): _____

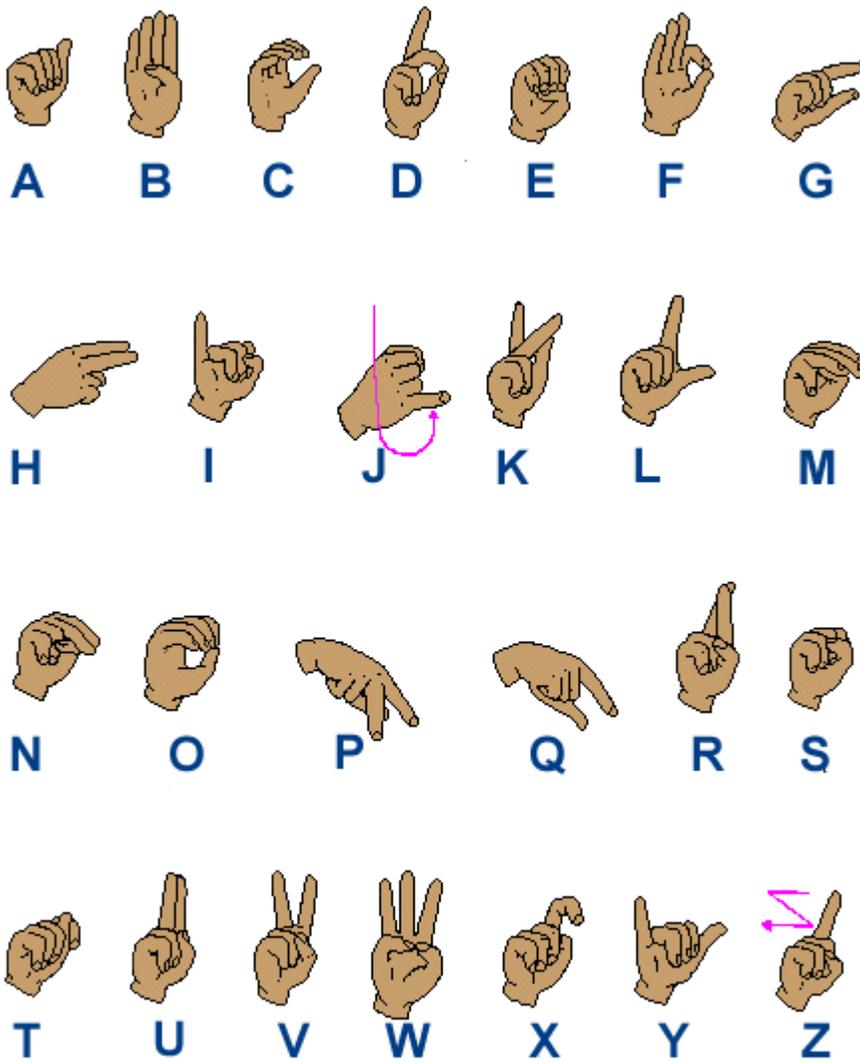


"Hello"



"I am"

Now use the American Sign Language alphabet to spell your name...



Sources:

- Center for Disability Information & Referral
- Lesson Tutor, www.lesstutor.com

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3. Reconvene the whole class, and ask students to walk around introducing themselves using sign language, "Hello, I am [their name]." Explain to the students that some people with a hearing disability do not use their voice when they sign, whereas others do, so it is optional for students to vocalize when they are signing.

Extension Activities Related to Hearing Disabilities:

a. Clarify for students that American Sign Language (ASL) is not a word-for-word translation of English, there are also phrases and expressions that are unique to ASL that students can learn. Distribute the ***Friends Who Care: Hearing Disabilities Worksheet*** to students (found at http://www.adl.org/education/curriculum_connections/fall_2005/fall_lesson_2_2005.asp?cc_section=lesson_2). Have them learn three or four phrases and expressions included in the worksheet. They may also choose to research and learn new expressions not included in the worksheet and teach them to the rest of the group.

b. Ask students how it felt to communicate differently. Explain to them that communication is one way that people with a hearing disability do things differently. Have the class brainstorm other things that people with a hearing disability might do differently, and chart responses. Offer one or two examples from the list below, but allow the students to generate as many ideas as possible.

-waking up to an alarm clock to go to school

-watching TV

-playing games

-talking on the phone

-dancing

-going shopping

c. Invite a local community member who has a hearing disability to visit the class (or have the class visit them) so that the students have a chance to meet a person with a hearing disability. In preparation of the visit, have students develop a list of questions that they would like to ask about living with a hearing disability.

If this is not possible, here are some suggested titles of nonfiction books about what it means to live with a hearing disability:

Can You Hear a Rainbow?: The Story of Deaf Boy Named Chris by Jamee Riggio Riggio Heelan

Let's Talk about Deafness by Melanie A. Gordon

Jordan Has a Hearing Loss by Jillian Powell

Hearing Loss by Carol Baldwin

d. After students have had an opportunity to learn more about living with a hearing disability, revisit the list that students brainstormed earlier about daily things that people with a hearing disability might do differently. Ask students if there is anything they want to add or change on the list. Add the following points if not mentioned by the students:

-People with a hearing disability can watch TV or movies using closed captioning technology (a system that “captures” words being spoken and displays it as text on the bottom of the screen).

-People with a hearing disability can communicate over the phone using TTY (teletype writer) technology (a system of typing out words over the phone where the words are either read on a lighted screen display or printed on a paper printout).

-In addition to using sign language, people with a hearing disability can sometimes read lips, and can sometimes use their voice to communicate. It is always best to ask in what way a person with a hearing disability would prefer to communicate. When speaking to a person who reads lips, always face the person when speaking, and communicate at a normal speed.

-People that use hearing aids can hear normal tones and voices, so it is important not to raise your voice or shout at a person with a hearing disability.

Close by asking:

-What were some of the most surprising things that you learned about people with hearing disabilities?

-How have some of your assumptions or ideas about the abilities of people with hearing disabilities changed?

-What have you learned about making assumption about the abilities of people with disabilities in general?

e. Have students write a pen pal letter to kids who are deaf and/or hard of hearing. Have students express what they learned about people with hearing disabilities, and about using sign language. Have students request in their letter whether they can visit the other kids who are deaf and/or hard of hearing, so that they may learn more about a school for children with hearing disabilities is both similar and different from their own school. Have the students prepare some basic phrases in sign language to communicate with other kids who have a hearing disability. Also, if possible, have the kids attend an event together, like a musical performance, and have the kids share their experience of the event with one another.