

# Classroom Spice



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## The “Sound” of ASL

ASL, American Sign Language, is used by most of the Deaf community in the United States. This easily allows communication with those who know the language, but what about the millions of Americans who do not? In particular, think about the deaf parents with hearing children, or the hearing children with deaf parents. Add to either of those scenarios being in an immigrant family and we see that communication through ASL alone may be somewhat limiting.

Jose Hernandez-Rebollar, an electrical and computer engineer who is not deaf, but is bilingual in Spanish and English, may have come up with a possible solution to that problem. Dr. Hernandez-Rebollar, was born in Puebla, Mexico. He earned his bachelors and masters in Mexico and then came to the United States of America on a Fulbright Scholarship to earn his doctorate. His doctoral engineering project was an electronic glove that translated sign language into spoken words or written text. His “AcceleGlove” could quickly translate all of the ASL alphabet and hundreds of words/phrases.

If a person is learning another language the bilingual dictionary associated with that language is essential. However, when Hernandez-Rebollar started his work, there was no written version of ASL and no two-way dictionary, i.e. English to ASL, ASL to English. The dictionary

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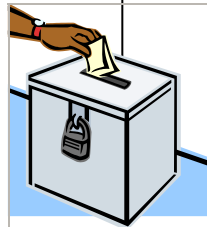
## The History of Voting Rights in America

When you think about the Bill of Rights (or any part of the original Constitution) you may be surprised to find that there is no right to vote included. Since the right to vote was not described federally, it has been left to the states to determine who can and cannot vote.

Initially most states allowed only white *men* over 21 owning property to vote, but excluded Catholics, Jews, and Quakers. In 1792 New Hampshire became the first state to eliminate property ownership and/or tax-paying requirements for voting. It took until 1856 for North Carolina, the last state, to do so.

U.S. citizenship was still not always enough to earn the right to vote. Following the Mexican American War, 1848, Mexicans living in Arizona, California, New Mexico, Texas, and Nevada were granted full U. S. citizenship, but those states added English proficiency and/or reinstated property ownership to deny them the right to vote. The Civil

Rights Act of 1866 granted citizenship to all native-born Americans, but states still did not give voting rights to Native Americans or African Americans. Interestingly, even before the Civil War, there were a few northern states which allowed a small number of free black men to vote, but it took the Fifteenth Amendment of the U. S. Constitution ratified in 1870, to give African American “men” the right to vote in every state. Unfortunately



states proceeded to utilize “Black Codes, state laws to limit Black voters; including such strategies as literacy tests, poll taxes, hiding the locations of the polls, economic pressures, threats of physical violence, and the infamous “grandfather clause.” In 1915 the U.S. Supreme court ruled in *Guinn v. United States*, that Oklahoma’s grandfather clause, requiring a voter to prove that their grandfather had voted, was unconstitutional. However, the literacy and poll tax requirements were not raised in the case and therefore not dealt with, thus continuing the limitation on African American voting.

Remember it was not just African Americans who were

denied the right to vote. In 1920 the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified, giving women the right to vote. Voting rights for women had been proposed earlier, but it took 72 years to get it passed.

While some Native Americans were able to become citizens in 1887 if they gave up their tribal affiliations, most were still not allowed to vote. It was not until the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 that all Native Americans were granted full citizenship and voting rights, but again states were able to exclude them through various voting requirements until 1948.

In 1790, Asian Americans were barred from becoming citizens and thereby voting, but the 1943 Chinese Exclusion Act and the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act provided the right to citizenship and eventually voting to Chinese immigrants and Japanese Americans respectively. Note that prior to this, during World War II, when 77,000 American citizens of Japanese ancestry were put in *internment camps*, their right to vote had been denied them.

It was not until 1975 when

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## *Chinese Games*

Fingers Out and Throwing Fists are simple guessing games which can help develop quick thinking, addition and logic skills while having fun! The shuttlecock games have been used traditionally in kicking games of skill in China.

Reference— [http://www.activityvillage.co.uk/traditional\\_chinese\\_games.htm](http://www.activityvillage.co.uk/traditional_chinese_games.htm)

**FINGERS OUT—Age:** Any

**Players:** Two

Players face each other and count to 3. On "3" they put out one hand - either as a fist or with 1, 2 or 3 fingers extended, shouting out at the same time a number between 0 and 6. Add up the number of fingers extended. If a player guessed the exact number of fingers shown they score 2 points. If they guessed nearest the number of fingers shown, they score 1 point. If there is a tie, no points are scored. The first to a given number or points - perhaps 5 or 10 - wins.

**THROWING FISTS—Age** 6+

**Players:** Two or more

On the count of 3, the players throw their fist out in front of them with anything from 0 to 5 fingers extended. At the same time, one player (take it in turns) calls out a number. If the fingers extended add up to that number, the player wins. The player must call out a number which might come up, so if there are 2 players, they guess between 0 and 10; if there are 3 players, guess between 0 and 15, and so on. To prevent accusations of cheating admonish players to be sure and throw their fists on time!

### SHUTTLECOCK GAMES

**1 person games:** 1) Throw the shuttlecock into the air, then keep it in the air bouncing from the *palm* of one hand to the other. How long can you keep it going? 2) Throw the shuttlecock up in the air, then keep it up in the air using only your *feet*. See how long you can keep it going before it hits the ground! After some practice, try hitting it up into the air with your *knees*. As you get more proficient try alternating between your feet and your knees, and between left and right, too!

**2 person games:** One of you throws the shuttlecock up in the air, and the other kicks it back. How many times can you pass the shuttlecock between you? Again try batting with hands, knees, etc.

**Group games:** 2 or more players. Players stand in a ring and see if they can keep the shuttlecock in the air using only their feet, passing it around the ring.

Put the best player in the center of the circle and pass it from the centre out and back each time.

One person throws the shuttlecock high into the air and calls out the name of the child who should hit it next. That child hits it as high as possible, too, with the palm of her hand, calling out the next player, and so on.

See if you can pass the shuttlecock down a line of children with your palms, your feet, or your knees.

(The Sound of ASL —cont'd from page 1)

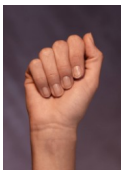
ies were just English to ASL. Recognizing the need for an electronic means to translate ASL, he decided to design an Interactive ASL to English dictionary.

What would Dr. Hernandez-Rebollar have to take into account? To interpret ASL, he had to be able to address many facets of signing such as hand/finger shape, hand/finger orientation, initial and final hand/finger positions, and hand/finger movements. Of course the engineering was a major consideration. The glove and the arm skeleton it attaches to (the latter is basically a light weight frame) have accelerometers which serve as sensors to identify the aforementioned gesture elements. A microcontroller then analyzes the information in milliseconds, turns it into text and, with a voice synthesizer, verbalizes the word/phrase in English or in Spanish if desired.

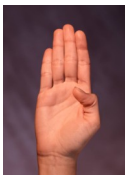
He continues to refine the sensitivity of the sensors and the mathematical algorithms that are the basis for the translation and hopes to be able to incorporate "two hand" signs in the future. He strives not only to increase the number of words and phrases, but to expand to additional languages, such as French. His work with artificial intelligence is allowing his interface to anticipate phrases and complete sentences based on a few key gestures—somewhat like one of the texting options on your cell phone. This device also has potential military use allowing soldiers to communicate silently (using the text option instead of the voice synthesizer), and commercial use in virtual reality, animation, and graphics.

Thus, the sound of ASL may be English or Spanish, or in the future some other language. But ultimately the sound of ASL is a shared understanding.

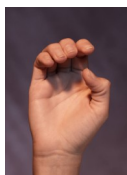
A



B



C



## The Literature Connection

Once again you will be introduced to some wonderful books. No particular theme this month, just an assortment of good children's books. For a change this segment will start with a couple of excellent books appropriate for middle school and older.

Ann Rinaldi is quickly becoming one of my favorite authors. There are two historical fiction books, *Taking Liberty* (ISBN 0-689-85188-X) and *Come Juneteenth* (ISBN 978-0-15-205947-7), she has written that are definitely worth your time to check out. *Taking Liberty: The Story of Oney Judge, George Washington's Runaway Slave* is the story of one of George and Martha Washington's slaves.

It follows the life of Oney from the age of three to seventy-three, from being a child through being a servant, a house servant, and finally the personal servant of Martha Washington. It shows the perks and drawbacks to being a house servant. And even though she loved the Washingtons, was the personal confidante of Martha, and almost a member of the family, it shows the development of her understanding of what it is to be a slave and the cost of freedom. The historical information provided over the colonial period of 1745 through 1796, is very enlightening. A similar thread of slavery and freedom runs through Ri-



naldi's book *Come Juneteenth*. Unless you are from the South, you may not know about Juneteenth. In Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation he stated that as of January 1st, 1863, "all persons held as slaves within any States, or designated part of the State, the people whereof shall be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free." Note that not all slaves were freed, only those in the states that were fighting for the Confederacy. Texans, chose not to tell their slaves about the proclamation, and it was not until June 19, 1865 when Union soldiers arrived were the slaves informed of the proclamation and their freedom.

This book tells the story of a white ranching family and the slave of "high color" or "bright," i.e., nearly white, who is raised as a member of the family, or so it appeared. While the book is written from the perspective of a White child, it highlights the struggles of Black and White alike, in Texas during the war. Again Rinaldi weaves a captivating story around significant historical facts.

*The Listeners* (ISBN 1-58536-419-3) by Gloria Whelan is a book for the elementary level. It shows how even the youngest slaves had a role to play in the quest for

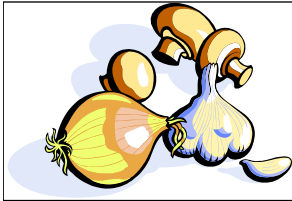
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## The Invention of the Windshield Wiper

Mary Anderson was born on a plantation in Alabama in 1866. When she was 27 she moved to California where she operated a cattle ranch and vineyard, as well as becoming a real-estate developer. Then one day she found it necessary to move to Birmingham to care for an elderly aunt. Her aunt was a little eccentric and each week had Mary, with her eyes closed, open one of the seventeen trunks in the aunt's room, remove a tray and give it to the aunt. Upon her aunt's death, it was discovered that the trunks were filled with jewels, gold, and other treasures, of which Mary received a large share. So Mary no longer needed to worry about a livelihood, but she was still bright and curious. So one day in 1902 while riding a trolley in the rain and sleet, she noticed the trolley driver struggling to see out of his windshield. At that time there were limited

options to keeping a windshield clear. One option was to open the split windshield, which of course let in the rain, sleet, or snow. Others were to use a plug of tobacco, half an onion, or a piece of carrot rubbed over the wet windshield, but the oily mess didn't really solve the problem. Mary sketched a design for a "hand-operated" device and received a 17-year patent for her "window-cleaning device." She received a few royalties over the next 17 years and tried selling the rights to companies but they said there was no commercial value to it. Unfortunately for Mary the patent expired just before the automobile business took off, and her windshield wipers became standard equipment!





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**In This Issue...**

Voting Rights; The Sound of ASL; Chinese Games; Literature Connection; Windshield Wiper

**What Part of A  
Modern Car Did A  
“Blind” Man Invent?**

Ralph Teetor invented the Cruise Control. Ralph was blinded in a shop accident when he was five years old. When he was twelve he built his own one-piston automobile with the assistance of his cousin. He majored in Mechanical Engineering. He invented the cruise control during WWII when the government set the speed limit at 35mph to conserve on gas and rubber, and after a particularly irritating ride with his lawyer who would slow down when talking and speed up when listening.

*(Voting Rights—Cont'd from page 1)*  
all Mexican Americans received the right to vote, and Congress extended the Voting Act of 1965 to include provision for language assistance if that language minority group composed more than 5% of the voting age population or comprised at least 10,000 votes in the jurisdiction.

Progress continued to fully enfranchise African Americans. The Civil Rights Act of 1960 required election officials to maintain voter registration records and allowed the U. S. Department of Justice to inspect them. In addition African Americans could apply to a federal court for a voting referee if their voter registration had been previously rejected. In 1964, the poll tax was outlawed and Civil Rights Act of 1964 made it illegal to discriminate on the basis of race, national origin, religion,

or gender in voting, public places, the workplace, or school.

Other legislation has impacted many potential voters: the Voting Rights Act of 1965 prohibited literacy tests and any other barriers to voter registration; the Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990, required ballot and poll accessibility for those with disabilities; the National Voter Registration Act, 1993, required states to allow voter registration by mail, and easier voter registration; and the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act, 2009, established procedures for voter registrations and absentee ballot applications to be handled by mail and/or electronically.

The next time you have a chance to vote, do it! The right to vote is something to be used and cherished. Just ask those who have been denied it.

*(Lit. Connection—Cont'd from page 3)*  
freedom. Their job was to listen outside the plantation owners' windows to find out important information including who would be sold and who would stay. Whelan, the award winner author, collaborates with Mike Benny an award winning illustrator to create a beautiful and touching book.

Eve Bunting's *A Day's Work*, (ISBN 395-84518-1) is an NCSS notable Children's trade book. It tells the story of an Mexican immigrant family, the bond between a boy and his grandfather, and the importance of honesty and integrity. In many immigrant families the child is thrust into a role of interpreter, and can easily fall into the trap of thinking he/she knows more than his/her elder. This story shows that both child and adult have something of value to offer.