

CHAPTER 1: INTRO (0:00-4:38)

This section offers a short introduction to Black ASL and the community who uses it.



KEY CONCEPTS



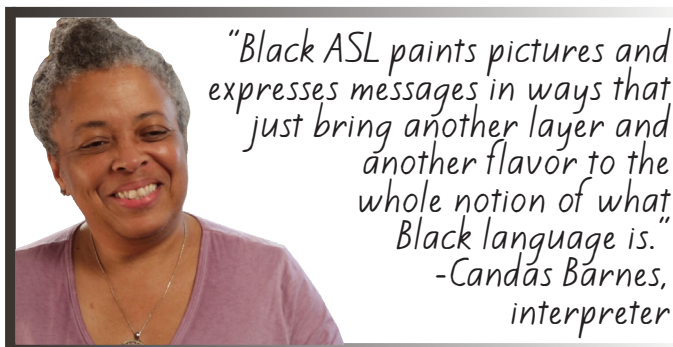
What does it mean to "sign Black?"

Black ASL is a variety of ASL that is used primarily by Black Deaf communities in the United States. It differs from standard ASL in a variety of ways. Signers who use Black ASL often *code switch* between Black ASL and standard ASL as social context and interaction dictate.

The parameters of ASL

Words in a spoken language can be broken down into syllables, and these syllables can be further broken down into even smaller speech sounds. This is what Ceil Lucas is alluding to when she mentions *manner of articulation*, *place of articulation*, and *voicing*. These *phonetic* concepts are used to describe speech sounds. Similarly, signs, just like words, can be broken down into smaller parts. Instead of breaking down into speech sounds, however, signs can be described in terms of *handshape*, *movement*, *location*, *palm-orientation*, and *non-manual signals*. Changing one parameter can result in a different sign, a dialectal variation of a sign, or a meaningless gesture.

More information about the five ASL parameters can be found [here](#).



"Black ASL paints pictures and expresses messages in ways that just bring another layer and another flavor to the whole notion of what Black language is."
-Candás Barnes, interpreter

"We have a unique way of expressing ourselves...our race, our culture...how we feel is shown when we communicate."
-Michai Hanly, ASL performer



COMMON MISCONCEPTION

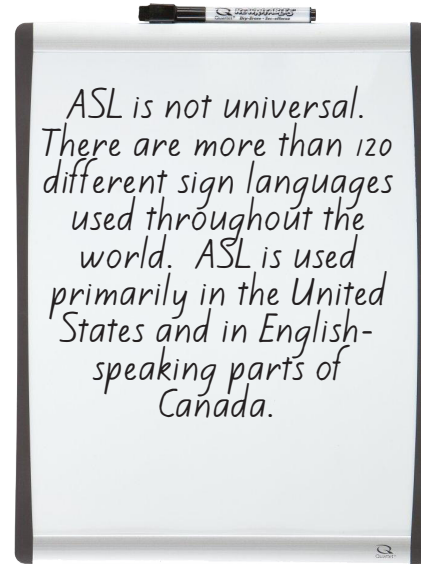
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people may think



Video: [Sign Language isn't universal](#)

the truth is



LINGUISTIC CONSENSUS: Black ASL is a variety of ASL that is used primarily by Black Deaf communities in the United States.

FUN STUFF

Deaf people can enjoy music as much as hearing people do! The scenes in the documentary of performers on stage came from an ASL open mic night at [Busboys and Poets](#) near Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., the world's only university with programs targeted specifically for students who identify as d/Deaf or hard of hearing. (Learn more about Gallaudet University here: <https://www.gallaudet.edu>)



Check out this [YouTube video](#) of Amber Gallaway Gallego demonstrating how ASL interpreters are bringing music to the d/Deaf! (Even rap music can be interpreted for the d/Deaf. Watch an ASL interpreted rap battle of a Wiz Khalifa song, featuring Amber Gallaway Gallego, [here](#). One of the other two rap battle participants is a Deaf woman, and she shares her story about the experience [here](#).)

Mandy Harvey lost her hearing later in life, but that did not stop her from continuing her musical career. [Watch](#) her America's Got Talent debut performance. If you like what you see, you can subscribe to her [YouTube channel](#) too!



Signing Black in America features several ASL performers in interviews and performances. You can see more of them online:



Wade Green - check out this [video](#) in which he shares his story and his work with Inspiringhands



Warren "WaWa" Snipe is a Deaf musician and the musical mastermind behind "Dip Hop," hip hop through deaf eyes. Check out his [website](#) and his [YouTube channel](#) to learn more!



Kasiem Walters, aka DEHPESHCII, is a CODA (Child of Deaf Adult) performer, and has a [YouTube channel](#) with interviews and ASL covers

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRE-VIEWING

1. How would you describe the way that you communicate? Do you have a name or a label for it? How do you think others would define the way that you communicate? **TEACHER TIP:** *If students are unsure where to start, consider creating a list of words on the board to describe dialects. Start with terms like "nasal" or "twangy" and let students go from there.*
2. Think about when you are speaking to someone you don't know on the phone. Can you identify anything about the person based solely on the sound of their voice and the way that they speak? Do you think you could guess their race, ethnicity, gender, or age? How might similar information be communicated when signing?

ACTIVE VIEWING

1. What are some of the descriptions given of Black ASL?

POST-VIEWING

1. In the film, Warren "WaWa" Snipe mentioned that one's background and upbringing can be seen in one's signs. Based on what you learned from the film and from your own personal knowledge and experience, how do you think someone's language relates to their cultural background and upbringing?
2. Several people in the film discussed how personality can be expressed through language. Can you think of some examples in your own life of how you express your personality through your language?
3. Do you think that having different languages and different language varieties is beneficial or divisive? Would a global language, used by all people, be good or bad? Why or why not?

Additional Resources

More about the Language & Life Project and their work on language diversity can be found on their website, languageandlife.org

Here is a short BuzzFeed YouTube video that can help answer common questions people have about being d/Deaf.

[Deaf people answer commonly googled questions about being Deaf](#)

To take a deeper dive, check out this second video from the same two people:

[I'm Deaf, but I'm not...](#)

To learn more about Deaf culture, check out this article from Gallaudet's website: [American Deaf Culture](#).

Interested in reading more about ASL? Check out this information about [Learning American Sign Language](#) from the National Association of the Deaf and this [information about ASL](#) from the National Institutes of Health.

ASL Linguistics has a YouTube channel with a [playlist of videos](#) that help break down linguistic aspects of ASL.

You can take a course on the [Linguistic Structure of ASL](#) online via Dr. Steven Surrency's YouTube channel. Dr. Surrency is a professor in the Department of Communication Science and Disorders at the University of South Florida.