



#3161 BEGINNING ASL VIDEOCOURSE #16: THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE BRAVO FAMILY

OPEN CAPTIONED SIGN ENHANCERS, INC., 1991
Grade level: 4-13+
38 mins.

DESCRIPTION

Billy Seago interviews the actors and producer who created the Bravo family ASL videocourse. Interviews include individual backgrounds, experiences, philosophies, and future plans. Emphasized Deaf people as a cultural group, the interaction and communication between the Deaf and hearing worlds, and the importance of respect and acceptance of the Deaf. The Beginning ASL Videocourse Series.

INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS

- ◆ To introduce the people involved in producing the videocourse series.
- ◆ To emphasize Deaf people as a unique cultural group.
- ◆ To present acting as a career opportunity.
- ◆ To discuss interaction between Deaf and hearing people.
- ◆ To emphasize the importance of respect and acceptance of Deaf people.

DURING SHOWING

1. View the video more than once, with the captions covered during the first showing to evaluate individual progress.
2. Facial/body expressions and mouth movements convey specific grammatical information. Pause and practice these.
3. Note how the signers maintain conversations with head movements, facial expression, and certain signs such as "oh, I see," "wow," and "fine."
4. Present another way to maintain a conversation by copying the last several words of the previous comment and sometimes "holding" them.

AFTER SHOWING

Discussion Items and Questions

1. Summarize each person's interview and discuss the highlights.
2. Chart and compare the backgrounds of the four Deaf actors.

C a p t i o n e d M e d i a P r o g r a m

3. List ways sign language can be taught. List advantages and disadvantages of each method:
 - a. Being self-taught.
 - b. Using books.
 - c. Socializing with Deaf friends.
 - d. Taking formal lessons with a teacher.
 - e. Using books or noncommercial videotapes.
 - f. Using commercial videotapes.
4. Share personal reasons for learning signs and compare these reasons to those of Jen Reece and Jenna Cassell.

Applications and Activities

1. Generate a list of other possible themes for future videocourses, such as animals, travel, and holidays.
2. Identify companies and publications related to deafness.
3. Discuss abilities of people to learn sign language and why some learn easily while others have a difficult time and perhaps give up.
4. Refer to the current Captioned Media Program catalog for other media on sign language and deafness.
5. Research and list other Deaf role models.
6. List other career opportunities for Deaf people other than acting.

SUMMARIES OF INTERVIEWS

Jer Loudenback

Jer Loudenback plays the character of Dennis Bravo, the father. The character's first name honors the memory of Dennis Schemenauer, a staunch advocate for ASL and Deaf culture. The character's last name honors the memory of Mima Bravo, a very good friend of Jenna Cassell's, the producer. Although Jer is not a father, he identifies somewhat with Dennis Bravo's character. Jer was born deaf and raised in an oral program. At the age of ten, he transferred to a residential program where he had a positive educational experience. Jer has taught American Sign Language classes for ten years and offers this advice: Learn ASL before learning other sign systems; don't limit yourself to the classroom, but rather, socialize in the Deaf community. Jer graduated with a master's degree in Deaf Education and plans to work with the National Theater of the Deaf. He visualizes himself as a teacher, an actor, a director, or a technical person in the field of deafness.

Jen Reece

Jen Reece plays the character of the mother, Jean Bravo. There are several comparisons between the real and fictional Jens. The real Jen is single and doesn't work in a big, fancy office. Her real family is hearing. However, both Jens are sweet, affectionate, and open-minded. Both have much respect for ASL and Deaf culture.

Jen explains how she became involved in the Deaf community. She had been involved in the theater at college and had wanted to take sign language because it was “cool” and “beautiful.” Since then, her perspective has changed—it’s no longer a hobby, but rather a language with culture and traditions that she deeply respects. Jen works as a houseparent at the Washington School for the Deaf and plans to return to college to finish her bachelor’s degree in interpreting.

Jen shares two pieces of advice for hearing people interested in learning ASL: Interact with Deaf people and don’t be forever apologizing for slow or limited signing. It takes time to learn a language. One doesn’t become fluent in German after one semester. Learning ASL is an ongoing process. Take pride in developing new skills.

Anna Musick

Anna Musick plays the role of the daughter. The real Anna has hearing parents who sign. She attends Oregon School for the Deaf after encountering some frustration in a mainstream program. Anna’s future goals include teaching and acting. Anna has many Deaf friends at school. She also has hearing friends and teaches them signs. She offers three ideas to people who want to learn signs: First, ask a friend to teach signs; next, buy videotapes like the ones she helped make; finally, use a book. She feels confident the videocourse will have an impact on many people. She looks forward to sharing this experience with her own children in the future.

Scott Pfaff

Scott Pfaff, who plays the role of Scott Bravo in the video, admits that there are similarities and differences between his character and himself. Like Scott Bravo, Scott’s mother is hearing, but unlike the Bravo family, his family does not often go places together. Scott’s parents and his five sisters all sign and communicate with him. He attends a school in Oregon that has a mainstream program and has an interpreter with him all day. Scott’s favorite segment of the video series is the trip to Sears because he enjoys playing with the masks. In response to the question regarding how sign language should be taught, Scott feels that videotapes are the best method. He values sign language and feels that when a family learns to sign, it means they have accepted the deafness in the family are ready to go on with life.

Jenna Cassell

Jenna Cassell, the producer of The Beginning ASL Videocourse Series, explains how the idea to develop these lessons was initiated. Sign Enhancer, Inc. attended different conventions around the country and people there often emphasized the need for beginning sign language lessons. Jenna, a sign language instructor, realized the need was great and decided that Sign Enhancers would take the initiative to produce these materials.

The “family theme” of the videos was established in order to show the potential for good communication and relationships in a family with Deaf children. The idea of

an instructor was developed to help the viewers understand the family interactions. About 50 children were auditioned at the Oregon School for the Deaf, and Anna and Scott were selected. Jer Loudenback was chosen for the role of the father because of his excellent acting skills. It was agreed that there should be a hearing mother in order to show the difference between Deaf and hearing members within a family. Jen Reece was chosen for that role.

One of Jenna's goals for this videotape was to present Deaf people as a cultural group. She wanted hearing people to view Deaf people in a way that not only led to respect but also created a desire to learn their language. She wanted them to realize what a benefit it is to have contact with this culture and this language.

Jenna feels the most memorable experience of making the videos occurred when they were teaching the food signs in the grocery store. They attracted quite an audience, and one man in the audience explained that he had a Deaf granddaughter and could use some of the signs he learned in that one scene with her. That was proof that the videotapes were effective.

Billy Seago

The instructor, Billy Seago, has worked in theater and storytelling and feels that the videos help gain respect for Deaf people and their language. He believes the videos help support and preserve Deaf culture in such a way to help maintain its influence for years to come. In the video, Billy pops in and out, and the viewers never know when he will appear next. Billy's real life is the same way. He takes jobs and opportunities as they occur and goes on with life, waiting for the next opportunity to arise. He feels the important thing is to gain experience.

Billy's most memorable experience in making these videos was watching Anna and Scott improve their sign language skills. They started using more facial expressions, body language, and ASL grammar. It was indeed a "growing" experience for them. Patience, creativity, and group work were instrumental in producing this series of videos. Those involved are confident that it will impact people positively.