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Sheila Donahue developed the Cornerstones lesson plans, games, and activities for the WGBH National Center for Accessible Media. She came to the center after 10 years of teaching deaf and hard of hearing students. Prior to that she had been a supervisor at the Gallaudet University Summer Reading Clinics, where her duties included teaching effective instructional practices to educators of the deaf from all over the United States. She holds an MA in deaf education from Gallaudet University. She can be reached at sheila_donahue@wgbh.org.

CORNERSTONES: literacy units ready for teachers, students

By Jennifer Blasko and Sheila Donahue

Note. This article is written in Jennifer's voice.—The Authors.

Like most teachers of deaf students, I begin preparing to teach my students a story by asking myself questions:

- *How familiar are my students with the concepts and vocabulary in the story?*
- *How will I include all the new vocabulary words in the day's learning to give students the repetition they need?*
- *What additional worksheets and materials should I make?*
- *What teaching method would work best with this story and this class?*
- *How can I make the learning experience challenging and fun?*
- *How much time will I need to plan the lesson and create materials in order to teach the story next week?*

For many of us, the answer to this last question—How much time?—often dictates what finally happens in the classroom. Every day, we face the time-consuming task of adapting materials from curricula that don't meet our students' needs or match their learning styles.

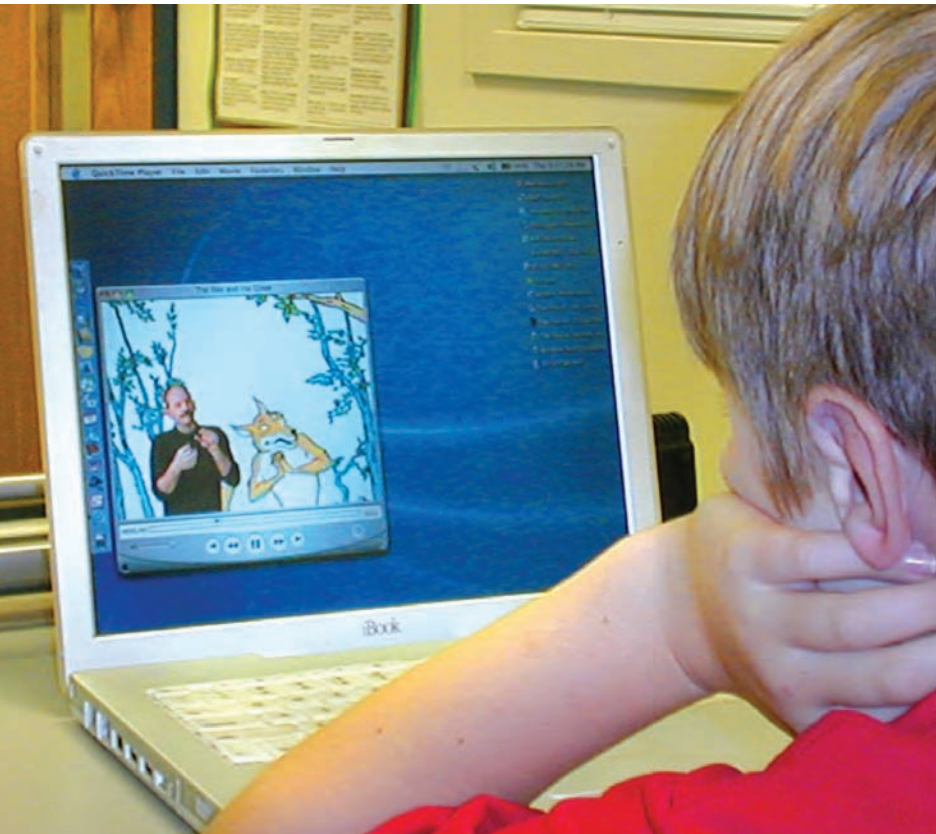
At Last, Ready-Made Literacy Units

Recently, I completed two years of field-testing of literacy units specifically designed for teachers of deaf and hard of hearing students. The units were part of the Cornerstones Project, an activity of the WGBH National Center for Accessible Media. (The units were

Right: Cornerstones units make learning fun and creative.

Photos courtesy of NCAM/Cornerstones





PBS Kids Learning Objectives Teacher Resources Story Games CornerStones building blocks of literacy

Story

Six versions of Joseph Had a Little Overcoat are available. Choose the one that best suits your needs, or use them all. We have links to [download QuickTime](#).

Picture Book
We recommend you start your lesson by obtaining one or more copies of *Joseph Had a Little Overcoat* by Simms Taback (Viking). It should be available at any library, bookstore, or online bookseller.

ASL Video Clip Download
(9-8 MB download) This two-minute animated version features an American Sign Language storyteller. Download and un-compress this file to access the clip. You'll need QuickTime Player to view it.

Cued Speech Video Clip Download
(9-8 MB download) This two-minute animated version features a Cued Speech storyteller. Download and un-compress this file to access the clip. You'll need QuickTime Player to view it.

SEE Video Clip Download
(9-8 MB download) This two-minute animated version features a Signing Exact English storyteller. Download and un-compress this file to access the clip. You'll need QuickTime Player to view it.

HyperText
This illustrated, online version of the story is animated. Each page contains extra information about a key word or concept. The story will open in a new browser window. When you're done, close that window to return here.

Between the Lions, Visitate
This story of an ever-shrinking overcoat is but a small part of a 30-minute episode of *Between the Lions* called *Two Coats, One Coat, and One Boat*. In addition to the animated story, there's a second story featuring the *Between the Lions* gang in their library, word magic, great songs, and more. To view all this fun, you'll need to order the videopac.

[Joseph Had a Little Overcoat | Learning Objectives | Teacher Resources | Story | Games](#)
[CornerStones Home | Email Us | Staff & Credits](#)
[PBS Kids Home | Between the Lions Home | PBS Learning Service | 800.485.3849](#)
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Introduction
What is Cornerstones?
Plug-ins You Need
Videotapes
Teacher Comments

CornerStones

building blocks of literacy

Offering literacy units for teachers of young students who are deaf and hard of hearing.

The Teaching Units

@2005 | [PBS Kids' home](#) | [Between the Lions home](#) | [E-mail Cornerstones Staff](#)
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The Fox and the Crow

(Make sure you have read the [Introduction to Cornerstones](#) before using this unit.)

This teaching unit for *The Fox and the Crow* is specially designed for teachers of students who are deaf and hard of hearing. We recommend you follow the steps below, familiarizing yourself with all the available resources before beginning to teach.

The Fox and the Crow is based on Aesop's fable of the same name. This unit deals with all aspects of the story, from the vocabulary used, and defining characteristics of foxes and crows, to the concepts of pride and flattery.

1. First, read the [learning objectives](#) for this unit. This will give you an in-depth look at the curriculum.
2. Download the [Lesson Guide](#) (446K PDF file). If you have not already done so for another unit, also download the general [Teaching Strategies](#) (80K PDF file) and [Assessment Strategies](#) (300K PDF file). These will be your main guides through the teaching unit.
3. During teaching, make use of our:
 - a. Printable [teacher resources](#) (worksheets, games, and writing activities)
 - b. Five versions of the [story](#)
 - c. Five [online games](#) adapted specially for this teaching unit
4. The rest of the [Between the Lions](#) Web site has other resources.

[Fox and Crow | Learning Objectives | Teacher Resources | Story | Games](#)
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developed with funding from Steppingstones of Technology Innovation for Students With Disabilities, a program of the U.S. Department of Education.)

The Cornerstones Project built the literacy units around three animated stories—*The Fox and the Crow*; *Click, Clack, Moo*; and *Joseph Had a Little Overcoat*—originally featured on “Between the Lions”, a long-running children’s TV program co-produced by Boston PBS affiliate WGBH, Sirius Thinking, Ltd., and Mississippi Public Broadcasting. Each unit is two weeks long, and immerses students in the language and ideas of one story. Students can download on-line video clips of each story (in Windows or Mac) in whichever communication mode they prefer—ASL, Cued Speech, or Signing Exact English (SEE). Free downloads are available at the Cornerstones website, <http://pbskids.org/lions/cornerstones>.

Students can also download a hypertext version of each story. (The stories are also available in their original picture book format at local libraries and booksellers.) By clicking on the highlighted words, they can see additional meanings or uses of the words, each with a matching picture.

The three units also offer interactive games that reinforce target words and concepts in ways deaf and hard of hearing children will find meaningful.

Effective Teaching Practices and Multiple Activities in Each Unit

A downloadable Cornerstones lesson guide for each literacy unit includes a day-by-day sequence of learning objectives and lessons, with a wide range of classroom and seat work activities, all of which reinforce lessons within each story. Downloadable teaching and assessment strategies supplement the lesson guides. These printable resources include exercises, storybook

templates, work sheets, writing prompts, flash cards, and lots of games—all designed specifically for children who are deaf or hard of hearing!

Generally, students who are deaf or hard of hearing have not been exposed to as many English words and concepts as hearing children have, and they often must learn many new words in order to be able to read even short selections. The ready-made Cornerstones materials offer a sustained, systematic approach to teaching vocabulary and strengthening students’ reading skills. This allowed me to devote more time to teaching, and I loved having so many choices. In the first unit I taught, I was so overwhelmed by all the materials that I ended up choosing familiar activities like concentration games and story-writing prompts. However, as I grew familiar with the materials, I began trying new approaches.

Building Vocabulary a Chunk at a Time

Cornerstones suggests that a class spend five or six days exploring each story, with one key difference: Instead of having students learn all of the targeted vocabulary before reading the story, Cornerstones recommends that teachers break the vocabulary into smaller chunks of new words to be learned each day. As the class progresses through the story, each Cornerstone lesson reviews previously learned vocabulary and teaches new words.

When I tried this strategy, I found that building new vocabulary over several days made it possible for students to learn more words, and was far less overwhelming for them. Thanks to the daily vocabulary review and the re-reading of story sections, students were retaining the meanings of words and using them in their writing. Subsequently, I have applied this technique to my regular reading units and have found my students becoming more successful at retaining and using vocabulary.

Free to Be Creative

As my students progressed in learning new vocabulary through chunking and reinforcing activities, they also engaged in complex discussions about character, motivation, and plot. The Cornerstones materials gave me the freedom to add new learning objectives and use creative teaching strategies.

For example, during one unit my students were learning how to use quotation marks around dialogue. I created a series of mini-lessons about English and ASL grammar using the Cornerstones “Character Match-Up” activity. First, the students matched the sentences to characters, as described in the teacher’s manual. Then I asked the students to sign the dialogue in ASL, and we discussed how ASL uses role shifting to indicate dialogue, just as written English uses quotation marks. Next, I asked the students to create their own short dialogues for the characters in ASL, then to translate the dialogues into written English using quotation marks. Next, I asked the students to create their own short dialogues for the

characters in ASL, and translated their dialogues into written English using quotation marks. The students loved reading and signing their dialogues to each other.

Signed Versions of the Animated Stories

At the start of each unit, the Cornerstones lesson guide previews the animated story in a video clip. Students select the communication mode—either ASL, Cued Speech, or SEE. With my own class, I chose to begin by using the picture book itself, which allowed me to observe and address how each student approached authentic print. Later in the lesson, I used the video clips to lead the students in a discussion about how and why the storyteller chose specific ASL signs—in the same way that hearing children might discuss a specific word choice in a written description. We also made a game of viewing a section of the video clip and then locating the matching passage in written English in the storybook.

Word Games and Activities to Reinforce Learning

My students particularly enjoyed the games in each Cornerstones literacy unit—“Lionel the Sentence Maker,” “Library Destination,” and others—and they loved exploring the interactive activities on the website. Having all of these

activities available for a unit meant that I could count on students seeing and using the words they were learning without having to create the materials myself. Because there were so many choices, I could break the students into small groups to work on creative and reinforcing activities that matched their skill levels and individual learning styles. These activities gave me more time to observe and assess how each student used and understood the target vocabulary and concepts. I could then adjust my teaching accordingly.

Building a Bridge Between ASL and Written English

While I can and will apply many of the Cornerstones teaching techniques to other stories, it’s hard to overstate the benefits of having ready access via the Cornerstones website to such visually engaging, fully featured materials.

I would love to see additional units developed using the Cornerstones approach: building a bridge between ASL and written English by encouraging children to explore identification of words in print, word knowledge (including multiple meanings), and story comprehension. Especially if enough units were developed for a full year of teaching across grade levels, the impact on deaf students’ reading abilities and how these children are taught could be tremendous.



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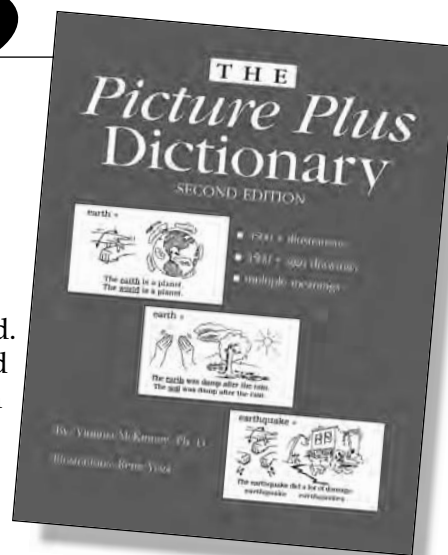
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