

Hands on Stamps: Manual Sign Language

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FIGURE 1: The finger spelling alphabet of British Sign Language. The 4 signs represent, from left to right, the letters of the word “deaf.” Great Britain. International Year of Disabled Persons. Day of issue: March 25, 1981. Value: 18 pence.



FIGURE 2: A hand shape may mirror our emotions. The sign stands for “I love you” in American Sign Language. United States of America. Day of issue: September 20, 1993. Value: 29 and 29 cents.

Socrates says, “If we had no voice or tongue, and wanted to express things to one another, would we not try to make signs by moving our hands, head and rest of our body?”¹ Deaf people and people who cannot physically speak use sign language to communicate. A manual sign language uses hand gestures and signs to transfer meanings. Manual com-



FIGURE 3: A deaf child learning sign language. East Germany. Bicenentary (200th) anniversary of the First National Institute for the Education of the Deaf, established by Samuel Heinicke. Day of issue: April 4, 1978. Value: 25 pfennigs.



FIGURE 4: The sign for “D” in Danish finger spelling. Denmark. Commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Danish Association for the Deaf. Day of issue: November 7, 1985. Value: 2.80 Danish kroner.

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munication may also be used for salience, secrecy, and entertainment. Spatial orientation and movement of the hands are essential parts of a manual sign language, however; arm and body gestures and facial expressions may accompany the hand shapes and contribute to the individual’s ability to transfer thoughts.^{1,2}

Every sign language of the deaf has its own alphabet; therefore, there are hundreds of manual sign languages around the world. The sign languages usu-

ally have no linguistic relation to the dominant spoken language of the people, and the national sign languages are independent of national dominant spoken languages. For example, American Sign Language is derived from French Sign Language and is different from British Sign Language.¹

In manual sign language, a hand gesture may stand for an alphabet, a word, or a sentence.

Figures 1 to 4 depict hands on stamps with the theme of sign language from different countries.

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Hands on Stamps: Braille Scripts

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FIGURE 1: A hand reading Braille script. Netherlands. Commemorating the 150th anniversary of Braille. Day of issue: January 22, 1975. Value: 35 cents.



FIGURE 2: A child's hands reading Braille script. Belgium. The disabled child. Day of issue: September 22, 1962. Value: Post value 40 centimes + 10 centimes for charity.

Louis Braille (1809–1859) invented a tactile print system that has been used by blind and visually impaired persons. Braille codes are found in books

and on elevator buttons, signs, menus, and currency. Braille codes are small rectangular blocks called *cells*. They contain tiny palpable, raised dots. The number and arrangement of these dots distinguish characters of Braille script. Braille characters vary from language to language.^{1,2}

When reading Braille script, the pulp of the index finger is often used and the pulps of the other fingers are used as a guide to keep the finger on track. Braille reading exploits tactile features of the pulp.^{1,2} Hand surgeons are keenly aware of the function of the hand, especially how fingertip and nerve injuries alter the tactile features of the pulp and make finger reading difficult. Figures 1 to 3 depict reading by fingers: “the touch of genius.”

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