

LANGUAGE IN PERFORMANCE

Drama

Many forms of drama have long been popular in the Deaf community. At residential schools for the Deaf, children frequently imitate houseparents and teachers to entertain each other in the dorms. Those who become talented actors and storytellers may later get involved in collaborative presentations such as skits and school plays, as well as performances at Literary Society meetings. Some continue to use these skills in college plays or entertainment at Deaf clubs and community events. Freda Norman was such a child, demonstrating talents very early. She has pursued a career in acting that has involved her in a number of professional theatre groups, including the National Theatre of the Deaf.

Monologue. Sam Supalla introduces Freda's performance of this segment of Rico Peterson's play, *Seeing Place*. In this monologue an age-old question is asked— Is Sign Language a real language? Is it possible for a visual-gestural language to have a highly articulated grammatical structure? Can a language without a written form communicate complex ideas and abstract thought? Is it possible that a visual-gestural language exhibits the same linguistic properties as spoken languages? For those of us who have firsthand experience with ASL and the Deaf community, it is easy to answer the question with a definite YES! But frequently for the rest of the world, the question still needs an answer.

In this scene, all languages are represented as children learning their own language. And like children, they can be very cruel when faced with something different than themselves. As Baby ASL is growing and learning about her language and the world around her, she is confronted and taunted by the other languages. Out of ignorance she is excluded as an "inferior" language. Baby ASL seeks the answer from Mother Tongue.

End of Cumulative Review: Units 13–17