Summer is a great time to spend quality time with your child. Doing a few reading and writing activities together will help your child continue the momentum of literacy learning, and, at the same time, is a fun way to create lasting memories of your time together. This helps children to connect literacy to their own experiences, and make connections of signed or spoken vocabulary to words on a page. Read your stories, and then read them again. Have your child read the stories to the dog, the fish, the neighbor and to grandma.

1) Write Books: Books can be as simple as folding a few pieces of paper in half and stapling.

Writing books can help you take a family experience and make it a language experience. If your child is too young to write sentences, ask them to dictate the words of the book to you. If your child is in preschool each page can have one or two words. For children in kindergarten or first grade, you can use a simple fill-in-the-blank sentence frame like, “We saw birds. We saw trees,” or, “I like books. I like dogs.”

Topics for books:

Every day activities such as, “Our trip to the library” or “What we bought at the grocery store” are great story topics. Other topics could be things we wear, eat, love, members of our family, or things that start with the letter M. It is important to illustrate the books, either through simple drawings or photos. The illustrations will help the child remember the words when they read it again and again.

2) Make a Big Calendar: Many children who are deaf or hard of hearing have fewer opportunities to overhear and talk about time concepts, so “when” questions can be difficult to understand. Using large sheets of paper, make a gigantic calendar for the summer months. Make each daily square big enough so you can write about or draw pictures of events that will be happening in the future. For example, if you are going to the beach on July 25th, draw a beach ball or glue some sand on the square for that day. If you made pudding together, glue the pudding box onto the calendar and talk about it the next day. Ask your child questions like, “What happened last week?” Or, “When are we going on vacation?” Or, “Let’s count the days until we go to the waterpark.” By making a family calendar together, you will help your child learn vocabulary related to time and understand concepts about past, present and future.
3) Make Postcards: Cut up tag board or cardboard postcard size, either 6” by 4 ¼” inches or 7” x 5”. One side is for the message and address. On the other side, have your child draw a picture or paste a photo of the activity you did together. Your child can mail the postcards to friends and family. This allows them to practice addressing a postcard as well as write simple sentence about the activity. My class would send out postcards to their families when we completed a theme or a book. The student would write something like, “Dear Mom and Dad, we just learning about spiders. Please ask me what I know about spiders when I get home.” Not only was the child thrilled to receive mail at home, but it prompted conversation with the parents about what we were working on in school. Have your child write a simple postcard to relatives and friends and encourage them to write back to your child.

Using your child’s language (their words and ideas) to create books, calendars, or postcards helps them to be more actively involved in reading and writing. They will want to go back and read and reread the items they made. Interacting with the print over and over will help them retain the words. Most of all, these fun activities will help you create lasting memories that you can revisit once summer has come and gone.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS TO ATTEND ONE OF THESE UPCOMING FAMILY PICNICS!

WI Hands & Voices Family Picnic - Southeastern Region
Sunday, June 10, 2018
10:30 pm - 1:30 pm
Sunset Park Lion’s Den Pavilion
200 Devendorf St
Elkhorn, WI

WI Hands & Voices Family Picnic - Southern Region
Sunday, July 15, 2018
11:30 pm - 2:30 pm
Harriet Park
151 Mary Lou St
Verona, WI 53593
NASA’s First Deaf Engineer in Active Crewed Mission Control Role Impresses
On April 4, 2017, which was the 34th anniversary of the Space Shuttle Challenger’s maiden voyage, a modified NASA Gulfstream III took off at Edwards Air Force Base in California to become the first NASA aircraft to fly with a twisted wing flap configuration. Meanwhile, inside NASA Armstrong Flight Research Center’s mission control center were engineers working the flight and validating technology to test improved flight efficiency through the use of a twisted flap. They watched their monitors, analyzed the flight’s early stages, and all wore headsets to listen in on communications – all except one.

In the front of the room, wearing no headset, sat a young systems engineer named Johanna Lucht who, on a day of firsts for NASA, became the first deaf engineer to carry out an active role in a NASA control center during a crewed research flight. Lucht, who was born deaf, earned the training position of Systems II engineer for the flight, in which she was responsible for observing and evaluating data related to the aircraft’s GPS and Navigation Systems, as well as analyzing inflight data, to monitor how well the aircraft is performing in flight.

The milestone of having a deaf engineer in a role with such responsibilities was not without its challenges. It was the ability to overcome challenges, however, that made NASA and Johanna the perfect fit.

Lucht was born in Germany, where resources for deaf people were, at the time, limited. As a result, she was unable to communicate through much of her childhood. In fact, Lucht developed an understanding of mathematics before she acquired language. It wasn’t until the age of nine when she learned her first true language, which is American Sign Language, or ASL, followed by English.

It was that passion of math and the ability to face challenges that led Johanna to her eventual studies of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, or STEM, and began her road to NASA.

“Math was the first thing I really understood in school, so I always had a love for it, growing up,” Lucht stated. “It was something I worked at understanding, and it became my favorite subject. I grew up skilled in math.”

Lucht moved to Alaska, where there were more accessible programs for deaf individuals, as well as exposure to the Deaf community. This allowed her not only to mature her communication skills, but to expand her studies in STEM. One program, Summer Academy 2008, introduced Johanna to computer science, and she began to immerse herself further into this study.

As a computer science student at the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities, Lucht began receiving emails about a NASA internship program. Initially, she had no intention to apply for the program, but finally, on the third email, she gave it a try. Shortly after, she was accepted to intern at NASA Armstrong.

“NASA offered me the opportunity, and I was shocked,” Lucht recalled. “When I was a kid, I used to learn about Challenger and the shuttles. It was interesting, but I never really thought I’d be a part of NASA. When I read the offer in the email, I closed my laptop, went for a walk, came back, re-read it, cleaned my glasses, and read it again. I pinched myself, and decided this was really happening.”

As a young intern in NASA Armstrong’s research and engineering department, Lucht worked on the interface for a mobile app version of the Ground Collision Avoidance System, meant to alert pilots to the detection of potentially hazardous terrain.

Lucht’s talent and ability to meet challenges efficiently and analytically were evident to NASA, and she was offered a position shortly following her internship.

Lucht joined NASA Armstrong’s Sensors and Systems Development branch, before transferring to the center’s Vehicle Integration and Test branch in 2016, which designs, integrates, and tests research systems onto airborne platforms. Lead systems engineer Keith Schweikhard says it didn’t take long to notice the magnitude of Lucht’s talent.

“Johanna was given an assignment to run environmental testing with the lab technicians. It could have been a challenge, because she had to communicate with a group of strangers she didn’t know,” Schweikhard remembered. “Under normal
circumstances, I expect it to take four to five days to complete. Johanna did it in two days. She quickly worked out a way to communicate with the team, to conduct the tests.”

Lucht continued working software management, developing instrumentation systems and support testing, and occasionally giving presentations to audiences on how to work with Deaf people. Another challenge was to find an interpreter with technical skills in the language. Many interpreters have liberal arts backgrounds, and may sometimes struggle to verbalize correct terminology and interpret highly technical content in sign, where some of technical terminology does not exist in ASL. Instead, they often have to be spelled out by hand. As a result, Deaf clients and interpreters have to work together to invent some signs in order to ease communication. It becomes a challenge when the technical interpreter who has been trained in the terminology is not used consistently. This results in the Deaf client being forced to teach each new interpreter the technical terminology repeatedly, in a limited time before, during, and after meetings.”

To address these issues for a mission control setting, a system was established in which an interpreter who worked with Lucht regularly during project meetings was arranged to be present at NASA’s Langley Research Center in Virginia, where she is located, and was able to listen to communications of the flight as they happened. Meanwhile, two way visual communication between Lucht and the interpreter was established. As the interpreter, who was completely visible to Lucht on one of her two monitors, listened in on flight communications, she was able to convey those communications to Johanna, using American Sign Language. After successfully practicing the communication, it was decided that Lucht was ready to take on the training Systems II role for the actual flight.

On the day of the actual flight, Lucht says she was more excited than nervous. She settled into her seat, next to Schweikhard, and prepared for the flight. From the moment the flight took off, Johanna focused on her monitors, began analyzing data, and the communications proceeded seamlessly.

Lucht discussed one moment during the flight, in which she was seemingly one of the few people to pick up on a particular flight maneuver before it had even been communicated.

The pilot was to perform a maneuver, called a Pushover-Pull-up, or POPU. In the maneuver, the pilot dips the nose of the aircraft, to produce low gravitational forces, and then pulls up, to create higher g-forces on the aircraft to test structural integrity. The maneuver was scheduled to be coming up, but as it had not yet been stated, it was not yet expected to be done. Lucht noted a change in the data coming in from the aircraft. She looked over to the interpreter, but since no communication had been made about the maneuver, there was nothing for the interpreter to sign over to Johanna. She then looked around the control room, and no one seemed to notice or commented on the maneuver. Then the pilot communicated that he had completed the maneuver. “The communication was a bit mixed-up at that point, and I noticed someone placed their hand on their forehead, so I wrote down on paper and passed it to Keith, asking if the pilot jumped ahead and had done the maneuver. He nodded his head,” Lucht recalled.

Lucht says the challenges she faced while growing up as a deaf person in the hearing world have, in fact, prepared her for her role at NASA. “When I was a child, I essentially missed my schooling between preschool and third grade. The catch-up was of course overload, but that really helped me in being able to work here and handle moderate to large information on a daily basis. My special education teacher in Germany taught me to always try, and to never give up.”

Lucht also points out that she does not consider deafness itself to be a challenge. Rather, she says, the challenge is presented through the environment. “Imagine yourself in a Deaf world instead of a hearing world, where nearly everyone uses American Sign Language. Also imagine anything you can hear through sound, like public announcements, customer services, festivals, work, movies, but this time they all are...”
There are many reasons that a person enters the field of deafness – interest in sign language, family members who are deaf, classes in high school, a TV show or book, etc.

Sometimes a hearing person in their zest to be a part of the community or in trying to help, can end up making decisions, running programs, teaching sign classes, etc. in ways that are not beneficial to deaf people/programs.

This is one of the main reasons that deaf people do not always trust hearing people who sign. Yet, sometimes, deaf people have learned not to complain about the outcome or the quality of services because they are afraid they will end up with even less. Hearing people who don’t sign are often unaware of what is going on or fail to understand the degree of harm that is occurring.

There is always a place for individuals who are hearing people who sign, they often end up being the threshold between the two worlds. However, it’s important to consult deaf people and to make sure that the help is helpful and doesn’t misrepresent the needs of the deaf community.

Insider tip: "258" means "very interesting." If a Deaf person ever jokingly signs to you the numbers "2, 5, 8" what they mean is "very interesting." The two comes from the initialized English sign for VERY. (The English sign VERY uses a "V" as the handshape and uses a position, palm orientation, and movement similar to the sign "BIG." Which is to say, the Signed English sign "VERY" is an initialized version of the ASL sign "BIG.") ASL doesn’t use the sign "VERY," rather ASL uses exaggerated movement, body language, and facial expression to indicate the idea of "very."
conducted in American Sign Language via video. Unless you know ASL, you will experience most of the challenges we Deaf people experience. We all meet the challenges that are presented in the environment, and do what we can to overcome it.” Indeed, in an agency where overcoming challenges is considered the status quo, Johanna Lucht fits in entirely. Meanwhile, Lucht has advice for people who are growing up, facing those challenges. “I never thought I would work for NASA, until they offered me a spot. You must always keep an open mind for opportunities. You never know when one might come by. If it’s not NASA, then maybe other areas, some of them might still entail working with NASA. Keep an open mind, and do what you enjoy. “Follow your motivation.”

Matt Kamlet
NASA Armstrong Flight Research Center

“Follow Your Motivation.”
~ Johanna Lucht

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