

San Diegan Creates Written Form Of Sign Language

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SAN DIEGO -- Imagine a language that can't be written. Until recently, that was the case for American Sign Language. But a San Diegan has revolutionized the way deaf people read.

Most of us have seen it. Deaf people have used sign language for centuries. But what you probably haven't seen is books written in sign language.

While some deaf people excel in reading and writing, others need a little help. Valerie Sutton of La Jolla has created a system of graphic symbols, called Signwriting. It allows signs to be captured on paper.

"I developed some symbols that make it possible -- like a script -- to write what we see when somebody moves," Sutton said.

For example, those who can hear recognize the word house; those who are deaf recognize the symbol for house.

For children born deaf or who become deaf early in life, sign language is their first language. English comes next, making it easier to read and write in Signwriting.

"It's simply because they don't know English because they weren't brought up with it because they couldn't hear it," Sutton said.

This year Sutton has lofty goals. She is unveiling Signwriting in school texts, reference books, religious works and classical world literature. In fact, several parts of the Bible are now available in American Sign Language.

American Sign Language interpreter Nancy Romero said, "There are people that are reading scripture for the first time because it is in their native language of ASL, and that's awesome."

Signwriting is used in over 40 countries and Sutton is working on a way for deaf people to write in sign language online.

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