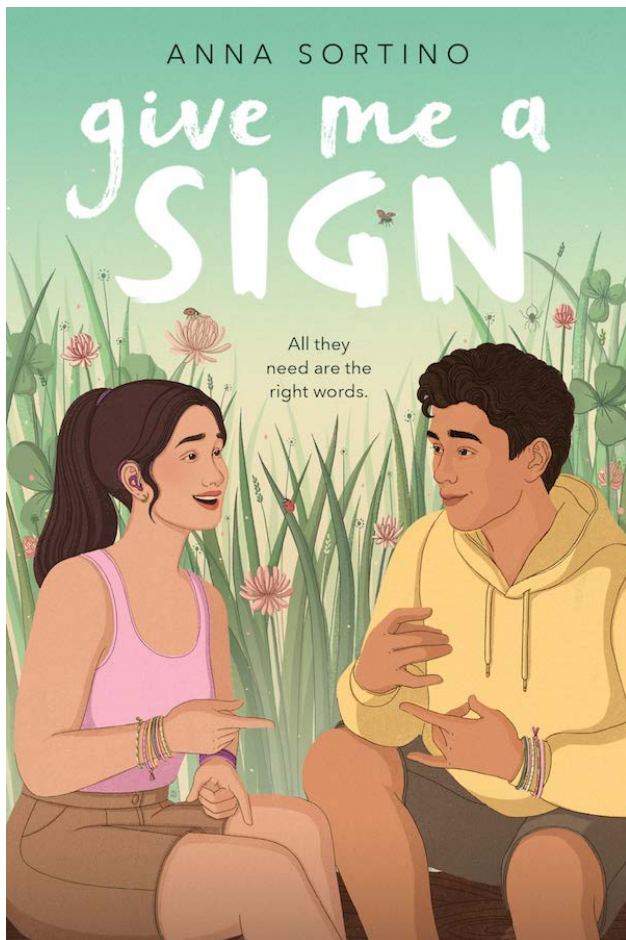


Give Me a Sign

by Anna Sortino



- 02 About *Give Me a Sign*
 - 03 Dear Reader
 - 04 Deaf 101 & ASL Alphabet
 - 05 Discussion Questions
 - 06 Author Q&A
 - 07 About the Author
-

About *Give Me a Sign*

Jenny Han meets CODA in this big-hearted YA debut about first love and Deaf pride at a summer camp.

Lilah is stuck in the middle. At least, that's what having a hearing loss seems like sometimes—when you don't feel “deaf enough” to identify as Deaf or hearing enough to meet the world's expectations. But this summer, Lilah is ready for a change.

When Lilah becomes a counselor at a summer camp for the deaf and blind, her plan is to brush up on her ASL. Once there, she also finds a community. There are cute British lifeguards who break hearts but not rules, a YouTuber who's just a bit desperate for clout, the campers Lilah's responsible for (and overwhelmed by)—and then there's Isaac, the dreamy Deaf counselor who volunteers to help Lilah with her signing.

Romance was never on the agenda, and Lilah's not positive Isaac likes her that way. But all signs seem to point to love. Unless she's reading them wrong? One thing's for sure: Lilah wanted change, and things here... they're certainly different than what she's used to.

“Sortino celebrates Deaf culture and identity in this endearingly funny slow-burn rom-com debut.”

***Publishers Weekly*, starred review ★**

“*Give Me a Sign* is a charming story about fitting in, finding your community, and falling in love at summer camp. This heartwarming debut is a beautifully nuanced representation of Deaf culture and what it means to find your voice in a society that doesn't want to listen.”

Aiden Thomas, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Cemetery Boys*

“Readers will love this sincere Deaf coming-of-age story.”

Kirkus Reviews

Pages: 320 Pages

Publisher: Penguin Young Readers Group

Imprint: G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers

ISBN: 9780593533796

Dear Reader

Growing up, rather than struggling through spoken conversations, I'd hide away from interactions. You could find me in the corner, devouring a book and seeking comfort in the clarity of the written word.

Yet I was often disappointed with the representation I found there. In the rare references to hearing aids, the devices were typically worn by elderly side characters, whom the protagonists would trick or ridicule. Or if a young character was disabled, they only existed in the story to be pitied or helped by the hero. Why didn't a kid like me get to be the main character? Why didn't our experiences get to stand on their own?

The majority of deaf kids have hearing parents. From birth, the odds are against us ever getting access to language or community. In fact, the history of signing itself is fraught with obstacles. Oralism continues to stand in the way of early language access for children. And leaders of eugenics movements, including Alexander Graham Bell, have long wanted to prohibit deaf people from marrying or socializing or even being born.

Therefore, it's a point of pride that through everything, Deaf culture exists.

Like Lilah, some of my earliest involvements with the community and ASL came from going to a deaf summer camp. *Give Me a Sign* is by no means representative of all those with hearing loss, since no single novel could possibly encompass our variety of backgrounds and stories. I simply hope it gives readers a glance into the depth and complexities of Deaf culture, as well as an understanding of why I and so many others are proud to be Deaf.

To all my deaf readers, I hope you know your deaf experience is valid, however you identify or communicate. And if you want ASL to be part of your life, it's never too late to learn. With all the hurdles we face, it's no wonder that so many of us struggle to understand our place in this world—but I promise, you belong.

Anna Sortino

Deaf 101

Many people are born deaf, while others become deaf later in life. Deafness ranges from mild to moderate, severe, and profound. “Hard of hearing” is also used to describe people with hearing loss. Capital-D “Deaf” is an identifier used by anyone deaf/hard of hearing who considers themselves part of the Deaf community and identifies with Deaf culture.

There are many different accommodations available, such as hearing aids, cochlear implants, and BAHAs (bone-anchored hearing aids). Not all deaf people know sign language, whether by lack of access or choice. The majority of deaf children have hearing parents.

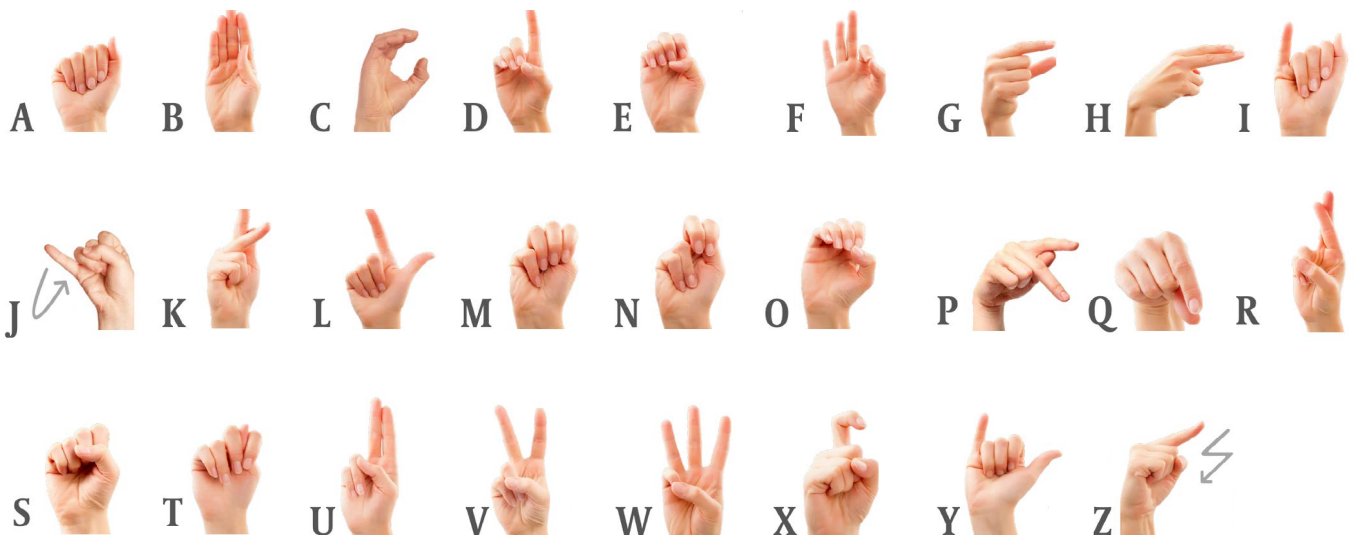
Alongside ASL (American Sign Language), a range of communication styles exist in the United States, such as Sim-Com (simultaneous communication of both sign and speech), PSE (a hybrid of ASL and English grammar),

and SEE (verbatim English). As well as regional dialects, notably BASL (Black American Sign Language). Other countries have their own unique sign languages.

Lip-reading can be helpful, but it’s not as magical as TV and movies often make it seem. While many deaf people are skilled at it, there are a lot of gaps in comprehension when fully dependent on reading lips.

The best way to interact with someone who is deaf is to ask their communication preferences. Keep your face in view and speak as clearly, without unnecessary overemphasis. When they need you to repeat something, try switching up the words to help create more context. Even when communication is relayed through an interpreter, address the deaf person directly.

ASL Alphabet



American Society for Deaf Children | deafchildren.org

Discussion Questions

01

Give Me a Sign includes many disabled characters. When it comes to how they inhabit their identities, how are they similar? How are they different?

02

Since the story is told from Lilah's point of view, the author left blank spaces wherever Lilah wasn't able to hear all the dialogue, or understand the sign language completely. How did you feel having the experience of not being able to fully follow every conversation?

03

Lilah's parents raised her and her brother to wear hearing aids and be "hearing passing". What are some challenges that families face when accessing ASL and Deaf Culture?

04

Camp Gray Wolf has both deaf and blind campers. What are some of the ways they accommodate everyone?

05

Mackenzie is an ASL student who wants to be an interpreter, but she purports to know more than she does for her large social media platform. Do you think hearing people should teach American Sign Language? What are the benefits of learning from a Deaf instructor?

06

At the fundraiser luncheon, Lilah tells the visitors not to use "hearing impaired." Why do you think many deaf people find this terminology offensive?

07

Off campgrounds, Lilah and Isaac are forced into a dangerous encounter due to miscommunication. What are some ways we can make society more accessible to reduce harm to disabled people, especially those who face additional discrimination due to their race, gender, or sexuality?

08

The use of cochlear implants is the subject of a lot of debate. Many deaf people appreciate their devices, while others think the surgery is "fixing something that isn't broken". Do you think it's fair for parents to make the decision to implant for their children?

09

Lilah feels caught in between deaf and hearing worlds, initially worried she can't claim Deaf as her own identity. Why do so many people feel caught between worlds? How can we support ourselves and others to embrace all aspects of who we are?

10

Once she's home from Camp Gray Wolf, Lilah is empowered to help others understand the accommodations she needs. In your own life, what are things you can ask your loved ones to help you with? What are ways you can offer to help them?

Author Q&A

Why did you write *Give Me a Sign*?

I wanted to write a character with hearing aids, exploring all the nuances I'd never seen in media representation before. Because there's a wide spectrum of hearing loss, I knew that I needed a full disabled cast to achieve this, and that the perfect setting would be summer camp.

Initially I was worried that people wouldn't be receptive to reading this type of book—since typically disability representation is relegated to one minor role within a story, if any—but the response to *Give Me a Sign* has blown me away. Disability is all around us, and it's time we get more comfortable embracing it.

What are you most excited for readers to discover while reading it?

That there is joy in disability! Lilah learns a lot while at Camp Gray Wolf, but primarily she is there to have fun, make friends, and maybe even fall in love.

How did you balance the “important conversations” with the fun of the summer camp experience?

For a lot of disabled people, these advocacy conversations are a natural part of our lives. Trading stories and experiences is how we can lift each other up, when many other avenues of society often let us down. It's certainly a balancing act when writing a work of fiction about a community that has been marginalized to make sure that the average reader has enough context, while simultaneously not slowing down the plot.

Who do you hope this book reaches?

I love all the hearing readers showing up for this story, whether that be a first introduction or developing a deeper appreciation for Deaf culture and ASL. At its core, this book is for anyone who has ever felt caught in between, unsure where they belong.

Which is why, in particular, I hope this book can reach as many deaf and hard-of-hearing kids as possible, especially those still trying to figure out their identity and place in this world. The majority of deaf kids are born to hearing parents, and therefore it's not always easy to find community and support. Hopefully *Give Me a Sign* can offer some guidance and let anyone who is struggling with their disabled identity know they're not alone.

What can readers look forward to next?

My second Young Adult novel, *ON THE BRIGHT SIDE*, releases summer 2024!

About the Author

Anna Sortino is a young adult author who writes stories about disabled characters living their lives and falling in love. She's Deaf and passionate about diverse representation in media.

Born and raised in the Chicagoland area, Anna has since lived in different cities from coast to coast, spending her free time exploring nature with her dog or reading on the couch with her cat. *Give Me a Sign* is her debut novel.



AnnaSortino.com