

6. Hints to help with Signs for songs – learning them and using them.

- When you look up a new sign and make it for the first time, try various strategies for learning it. Look at the illustration and imagine your hands making the sequence of movements. Speak the written directions out loud. When you have got the right handshapes and movements, speak & sign into the 4 corners of the room.
- There are lots of variations of signs, just like accents and dialects. Make sure you all choose the same sign to teach and use in school.
- Find a way of relating the shape of the sign to the meaning of the word e.g. 'tradition' – an upwardly cupped Right hand moves in 3 scoops towards the chest. It makes sense to me by seeing that the hand holds the traditions (songs, stories, sayings etc.) from far away times and more recent times, and brings them towards the heart.
- If you are learning signs with some other people, make it fun – not a drudge! (e.g. the macabre but comic song 'Rickety tickety tin' is great for learning mother, father, sister etc.)
- When you are both learning and using the signs with others, say the word slowly and clearly as you make the sign. Imagine the object, emotion or meaning.
- Use the pitch and intonation of your voice to underline the meaning.
- Use your facial expressions and your body posture and movements to express the meaning.
- If you don't know a certain sign (or have forgotten it), don't worry! Just miss it out, say the word clearly and carry on.
- Only sign the key words. One sign per line of a song is fine. Less is often more.
- Make sure you sign slowly, so learners can see and make sense of the movements.
- It will help if you wear a plain, dark top as your hands will be more easily seen. You might even go so far as wearing yellow gloves to help some learners see what you are saying.
- Learning signs that go with songs is a great way of keeping in practice. Songs have such a unifying effect on a group – everyone will want to join in.
- Think about having a 'Sign of the Week'. Talk about it and practise it with learners and staff at a specific time every day. Maybe ask one of the learners to choose which sign it will be for the following week.

Some comments from teachers about signing

Signing supports concepts like up, in front of, blue.

Signing is multi modal (visual, kinaesthetic, auditory &c.) and helps to embed learning.

It helps children, especially when they first come to school, to understand what is being said to them, especially important instructions e.g. wait, listen, follow, stop, come, sit..

It is particularly good for children who find it difficult to sit still and prefer active learning. When they are signing they have to move and therefore they concentrate better.

It makes teachers give a slower delivery of information and provides visual clues. That also gives more thinking and processing time to the pupils.