AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE · DEAF HISTORY · GRADES 3–5

Martha's Vineyard: An Island That Signed

Read about an island where deaf and hearing people both signed, then answer the questions.

Name: _____ **Date:** _____



Read

Martha's Vineyard is an island off the coast of Massachusetts. For more than 200 years, starting in the 1700s, many people there were born deaf. In the town of Chilmark, about 1 out of every 25 people was deaf.

Because deafness was so common, almost everyone on the island learned to sign, hearing people too. Deaf and hearing neighbors fished, farmed and went to town meetings together. Hearing people sometimes signed to each other even with no deaf person around, like across a field or a boat.

Their language is called Martha's Vineyard Sign Language. Deaf children from the island went to the school in Hartford, Connecticut, where their signs mixed with others. Many experts think it was one of the languages that helped form ASL.

Over time, people moved away and fewer deaf children were born on the island. The last deaf person who grew up using the island's sign language died in 1952.

Answer the questions.

Where is Martha's Vineyard?

_____

Who on the island learned to sign?

_____

What was the island's language called?

_____

How did the island's signs help ASL?

_____

How do you think signing together made life fairer for deaf islanders?

_____

Art © Kevin Coulston

ANSWER KEY · DEAF HISTORY · GRADES 3–5

Answer Key: Martha's Vineyard: An Island That Signed

Answers for grown-ups. Where kids write their own ideas, the key shows one example.



Read

Martha's Vineyard is an island off the coast of Massachusetts. For more than 200 years, starting in the 1700s, many people there were born deaf. In the town of Chilmark, about 1 out of every 25 people was deaf.

Because deafness was so common, almost everyone on the island learned to sign, hearing people too. Deaf and hearing neighbors fished, farmed and went to town meetings together. Hearing people sometimes signed to each other even with no deaf person around, like across a field or a boat.

Their language is called Martha's Vineyard Sign Language. Deaf children from the island went to the school in Hartford, Connecticut, where their signs mixed with others. Many experts think it was one of the languages that helped form ASL.

Over time, people moved away and fewer deaf children were born on the island. The last deaf person who grew up using the island's sign language died in 1952.

Answer the questions.

Where is Martha's Vineyard?

Off the coast of Massachusetts

Who on the island learned to sign?

Almost everyone, deaf and hearing

What was the island's language called?

Martha's Vineyard Sign Language

How did the island's signs help ASL?

Island children took them to school in Hartford, where they mixed into ASL.

How do you think signing together made life fairer for deaf islanders?

They could talk with everyone in town.

Art © Kevin Coulston