

**Title:**

Alexander Graham Bell: The Villain  
The suppression of American Sign Language

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Group Documentary

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## Process Paper:

Our topic is Alexander Graham Bell - The villain; The suppression of American Sign Language. We chose our topic because we know American Sign Language (ASL), and the topic sounded interesting. While we are not deaf, we know many deaf people and are involved in the deaf community in Washington D.C. and the surrounding area. We started learning ASL when we were young, ages 2 and 4, and we are now at a conversational level. In addition, we know that Bell invented the telephone. This made him a hero of communication. We wanted to show the other side of the story, and also better demonstrate the irony of his heroism and his villainy. Our topic relates to the theme because the theme is about communication, and how it helps people understand each other. Alexander Graham Bell caused changes that, to an extent, interrupted communication and made it harder for deaf people to communicate and understand each other. He believed that oralism was superior to ASL and that children should not be taught ASL. Instead, he thought that they should learn to speak and see what other people are saying.

The research was conducted using credible sources and papers from multiple doctors. There was also a paper that Bell published with his views. Called "Upon the Formation of A Deaf Variety of the Human Race", Bell used it to encourage the government and schools for the deaf to isolate the deaf. The rationale was to breed out the deafness gene, and have a deaf-free society, where everyone is more equal. We also included quotes from scientific studies proving that the oral method harmed children's brains.

Our historical argument is that Alexander Graham Bell, despite all his legendary accomplishments furthering oral communication also caused changes that stalled communication, making it harder for deaf people to communicate. His beliefs, that oralism was superior to ASL, and that children should not be taught ASL negatively impacted intercommunication among the deaf, but impacted the language itself, which is part of why ASL is not as developed as other languages and has a more limited vocabulary.

The topic is significant because it changed the course of many lives, making it much harder to communicate and grow. Bell suppressed many people just because they could not hear, and despite his noble intentions, that left many people without the choice of how to communicate and led to many people having language taken from them. We created the documentary using the Shotcut video editor. We found a place in our house to record, got a camera set up, printed out the script, and then recorded ourselves signing. Afterward, we added it together with images and used a captioning app to add open captions. We interviewed some people who were deaf as well and asked them about their experiences with oralism and ASL through Zoom. Finally, we overlaid recorded audio for some parts and added some quotes from credible sources that gave further proof to our thesis.

# Annotated Bibliography Sources List

## Primary Sources

- Alexander Graham Bell. , 1904. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2004671941/>.  
This image was a useful visual key in the documentary. It depicts Alexander Graham Bell, from 1904.
- Alexander Graham Bell 1940 Issue-10c*. 1940. By the U.S. Post Office.  
This photograph of a stamp with Alexander Graham Bell's image demonstrates Bell's fame in the United States. It was a helpful visual key and used in the documentary.
- Alexander Graham Bell and Mabel Hubbard Bell standing in front of trees in winter. , None. [Between 1910 and 1922, printed later] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/00649787/>.  
This image helps viewers better visualize what Alexander Graham Bell and Mabel Hubbard Bell were like. It was a helpful visual key and used in the documentary.
- Alexander Graham Bell and a Group of School Children. In Signing, Alexander Graham Bell, and the NAD. [https://www.pbs.org/weta/throughdeafeyes/deaflife/bell\\_nad.html](https://www.pbs.org/weta/throughdeafeyes/deaflife/bell_nad.html).  
This image emphasizes how Alexander Graham Bell taught many children. It was a helpful visual key and used in the documentary.
- Alexander Graham Bell and his Scott Circle School. , 1883. [, Printed Later] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/96501733/>.  
This image shows Bell at a school in Washington DC, with some students from the school. The school taught people orally. It was used in the documentary and was a helpful visual key.
- Alexander Graham Bell seated between his grandfather, Alexander Bell, and his father, Alexander Melville Bell. , None. [Between 1850 and 1860, printed later] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/00649936/>.  
This image shows Alexander Graham Bell with his father, Alexander Melville Bell, and his grandfather, Alexander Bell. It was a useful visual key and used in the documentary.
- Alexander Graham Bell with Helen Keller and Annie Sullivan at the meeting of the American Association to Promote the Teaching of Speech to the Deaf, July, in Chautauqua, N.Y., 1894. [, Printed Later] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/00649950/>.  
This image was used in the documentary as a visual key. It shows Bell meeting Helen Keller, and Annie Sullivan. This shows Bell's influence, and that he was actually a good person.
- Alexander Graham Bell with his family and friends at the lodge, Baddeck, Nova Scotia., ca.

1890. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/96525036/>.

This helps illustrate what Bell's life was like. It was a helpful visual key and used in the documentary. It also shows that Bell knew multiple people, some of whom were deaf.

Bell, Alexander Graham, and Frances Symonds Leplastrier. Drawing by Alexander Graham Bell. 1876. Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/magbell.27300105/>.

This shows some sketches and designs that Alexander Graham Bell created. It helped give a clearer picture of Bell and his life.

*BELL, ALEXANDER GRAHAM*. 1905-1945. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. In the Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2016856766/>.

This image shows what Alexander Graham Bell looked like. It helped viewers of the documentary visualize Alexander Graham Bell. It was a helpful visual key and used in the documentary.

Bell, Alexander Graham. Article by Alexander Graham Bell, November. November, 1920. Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/magbell.37600201/>.

This article by Alexander Graham Bell includes interesting information about eugenics. It also demonstrates Bell's interest in eugenics and what he thought about it.

Bell, Alexander Graham. Letter from Alexander Graham Bell, undated. Undated. Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/magbell.00500251/>.

This letter is from Alexander Graham Bell. It features his signature and helps give a sense of the kind of person Ale

Bell, Alexander Graham. "Memoir upon the Formation of a Deaf Variety of the Human Race." HathiTrust. Accessed February 1, 2021.

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015031059887&view=1up&seq=1>.

Bell's publication about breeding deafness out of People. This provided scientific information to back up our claim and showed for a fact that children should learn ASL.

Bell, Alexander Graham. Page of "Memoir Upon the Formation of a Deaf Variety of the Human Race". Digital image. HathiTrust.

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015031059887&view=1up&seq=1>.

This page emphasizes the importance of the book shown. It was a helpful visual key and used in the documentary.

Bell, Alexander Graham. "[Visible Speech-illustrations](#)." Digital image.

This image helps illustrate a popular method of teaching oralism. It was a helpful visual key and used in the documentary. Visible speech has different symbols that represent mouth shapes and sounds and can help teach people to speak.

*Bell Centennial Single-pole Telephone Transmitter 1876*. 1920. In *The Encyclopedia Americana*.

Vol. XXVI. 365.

This image showed the early telephone. It was a helpful visual key and used in the documentary. It also helped acknowledge Bell's other achievements and all that he did for the world.

Birkenmaier, Dieter. Alexander Graham Bell's Gravestone. June 10, 2015. In Find a Grave. Accessed May 12, 2021.

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/2125/alexander-graham-bell/photo>.

This photo shows Alexander Graham Bell's gravestone. It helps provide a clearer picture of who Bell was and

Boteler, Frank M., Approximately, photographer. Alexander Graham Bell / Frank Boteler. , 1904. [?] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2016647791/>

This image is of Alexander Graham Bell. It is in the documentary and is a useful visual key.

*CHILDREN BEING TAUGHT TO SPEAK AT A SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF.* In *Teaching Them to Speak*.

<https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2017/08/16/teaching-speak-juan-pablo-bonet-history-oralism/>.

This article shows the impracticalities of trying to force deaf-mutes to speak. It also had many illustrations to prove their point, which were helpful visual keys, and used in the documentary.

*Circular*. 1876. Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/magbell.19510205/>.

This image describes visible speech, where symbols show mouth shapes and sounds. It was a helpful visual key, and is used in the documentary.

CLARKE School for the Deaf/ Center for Oral Education. In *The Influence of Alexander Graham Bell*.

<https://www.gallaudet.edu/history-through-deaf-eyes/online-exhibition/language-and-identity/the-influence-of-alexander-graham-bell>.

This image emphasizes the influence of oralism, and how pervasive it is in our society and culture. It was a helpful visual key and used in the documentary.

Deaf Mute Learning Orally. In *FlashBACK: Oral Method in Deaf Institutes (Post-Milan 1880)*. March 25, 2015. Accessed February 10, 2021.

<http://www.deaffriendly.com/articles/flashback-oral-method-in-deaf-institutes-post-milan-1880/>.

This image helps broaden the understanding of oralism. It also had many illustrations to prove their point, which were helpful visual keys, and used in the documentary.

Deaf Vineyarders Demonstrating Martha's Vineyard Sign Language. In *The Deaf Vineyarders*

Who Talked With Their Hands. Accessed February 10, 2021.

<https://www.newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/deaf-vineyarders-talked-hands/>.

This image shows that ASL is very unique and widespread. It was a helpful visual key and used in the documentary.

Hall, Wyatte C. "What You Don't Know Can Hurt You: The Risk of Language Deprivation by Impairing Sign Language Development in Deaf Children." *Maternal and child health journal*. U.S. National Library of Medicine, May 2017.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5392137/>.

Article about language learning. It provided a scientific basis for our claim and supported ASL.

Harris & Ewing. Mabel Hubbard Bell, half-length portrait, seated, facing front. , ca. 1917.

Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/00649963/>.

This image helps viewers better visualize Mabel Hubbard Bell. It was a helpful visual key and used in the documentary.

Johnston, Frances Benjamin, photographer. Alexander Melville Bell, -1905. , ca. 1900.

Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2002697461/>.

This helps viewers see Alexander Melville Bell, and is a useful visual addition. Melville Bell is Graham Bell's father and taught him much of what he knew.

Lemay, Warren. *Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing*, Georgetown, Washington, DC. December 24, 2018.

This image was useful in the research of Alexander Graham Bell. It was a helpful visual key and used in the documentary.

Malloy, Tiara V. Sign Language Use for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Hearing Babies: The Evidence Supports It. *American Society for Deaf Children*, July 2003.

<https://www.gallaudet.edu/Images/Clerc/pdf/Full%20Document%20of%20ASDC%20Sign%20Language%20for%20All-English.pdf>.

Article with evidence for learning ASL. It provides a scientific basis for our claim.

Mulladjanov, Fayoz. "ASL and Oralism Interview." Online interview by author. March 27, 2021.

This interview added insight into the deaf view of oralism and ASL. The interviewees shared their experiences regarding ASL and oralism, and their opinion of it.

Pach, Alexander L, photographer. Fourth summer meeting of the American Association for the Promotion of Teaching Speech to the Deaf, Chautauqua, N.Y., July 3-13, Principals and superintendents // Pach. Chautauqua New York, 1894. July. Photograph.

<https://www.loc.gov/item/00649965/>.

This image shows a meeting that Bell was involved in. There, he supported oral

education, as well as taught a few children orally. This was a helpful visual key in the documentary.



Photographer setting up a photo of Alexander Graham Bell sitting with children at the American Association for the Promotion of Teaching of Speech to the Deaf, Lake George, New York. New York Lake George, 1892. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/96525110/>. This image shows Alexander Graham Bell with children that he was teaching in New York. It shows the children preparing for the picture.

Schmidt, J. R., photographer. Deaf & dumb children of St. Rita's School, Cincinnati, singing Star Spangled Banner. , 1918. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2016826637/>. This image was used in the documentary. It is an image of children signing the national anthem. It shows how useful ASL is, as well as how it is wrong to suppress it.

Scientific Papers of the Second International Congress of Eugenics. Vol. 2. Baltimore: Williams & Williams, 1923. This paper is on the second international congress of eugenics. Alexander Graham Bell supported the use of eugenics and was interested in them.

Scott, Deanna, and Eric Scott. "ASL and Oralism Interview." Online interview by author. March 25, 2021. This interview added insight into the deaf view of oralism and ASL. The interviewees shared their experiences regarding ASL and oralism, and their opinion of it.

Veditz, George William. Preservation of the Sign Language. 1913. Video. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mbrs01815816/>. Video of response to oralism movement. It was a helpful visual key and used in the documentary. It also provides solid evidence that deaf people of the time disagreed with the overuse of oralism.

Winzer, Margret A. The History of Special Education From Isolation to Integration. Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 2014. This paper is about the history of special education in the deaf community. It discusses many key points to our documentary and helped us gain a better understanding of deaf education.

## Secondary Sources

“Alexander Graham Bell and His Role in Oral Education.” Social Welfare History Project, July 18, 2017.

<https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/issues/alexander-graham-bell-role-oral-education/>.

This article details Alexander Graham Bell’s role in the oral education of deaf people. It describes how Alexander Graham Bell knew a few deaf people and had a father and grandfather who worked as elocutionists. The article illustrates how Bell in the beginning was a representative of his father but eventually developed his method of teaching the deaf, using his fame from the telephone. It also explains how Bell promoted oralism through traveling, speeches, and articles. This article assisted in the research by providing a better understanding of Alexander Graham Bell’s role in oralism.

"Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing." NORD (National Organization for Rare Disorders). August 03, 2020. Accessed March 30, 2021.

<https://rarediseases.org/organizations/alexander-graham-bell-association-for-the-deaf-and-hard-of-hearing/>.

This website describes the Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. This website details how the association was created by Alexander Graham Bell to help those who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing by teaching them through the oral method. This website helped us gain a better understanding of who Alexander Graham Bell was and what he strived to accomplish.

“American Sign Language.” National Institute of Deafness and Other Communication Disorders. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, December 14, 2020.

<https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/american-sign-language#1>.

This article describes American Sign language(ASL). It illustrates what ASL is and explains that sign language is different in every country. It also explains how sign language doesn't have any precise origins and is completely distinct from English. The article discusses how some deaf children have the opportunity to learn ASL naturally from their parents, though some learn ASL later in life, and how early exposure to ASL is beneficial for children because it lets them pick up on it more naturally. Finally, the article discusses how the National Institute on Deaf and other Communication Disorders(NIDCD) is studying ASL. This article helped in the research by providing a better understanding of American Sign Language, especially its role as a distinct language.

"American Sign Language ASL." Digital image. WPClipart.

<http://www.wpclipart.com/legal.html>.

This image shows how to spell ASL in American Sign Language. This image helped in the research by rendering a better understanding of American Sign Language, especially its relationship with English.

A Young Boy Signs "I Love You." In What Is American Sign Language(ASL)? | NIDCD. May 8, 2019. <https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/american-sign-language#1>.

This image shows a young boy using American Sign Language for "I Love You." This image assisted in the research by creating a better image of ASL and showing how widespread ASL is.

Christensen, Dusty. "Clarke School: A Brief History of Oralism." Daily Hampshire Gazette. Concord Monitor, January 11, 2019.

<https://www.gazettenet.com/The-history-of-the-Clarke-School-and-oralism-22277690>.

This article describes oralism and the role of Clarke School in it. It describes how Clarke School was the first school of oralism in the country. It also details how the school's method was encouraged and supported through the oralism movement and people such as Alexander Graham Bell. This article assisted in research by adding more details to the development of oralism and the role of oral schools in it.

"Demographics." – Gallaudet University. Accessed February 3, 2021.

<https://www.gallaudet.edu/office-of-international-affairs/demographics>.

The article details and describes the information gathered by Gallaudet University on deaf and hard of hearing teens and children between 1968 and 2014. This information assisted in research by detailing possible connections to hearing loss.

"Education: Essay." disability history museum--Education: Essay: Disability History Museum. Accessed February 3, 2021.

<https://www.disabilitymuseum.org/dhm/edu/essay.html?id=59>.

This article details Alexander Graham Bell's role in the oral education of deaf people. It describes how Alexander Graham Bell knew a few deaf people and had a father and grandfather who worked as elocutionists. The article illustrates how Bell in the beginning was a representative of his father but eventually developed his method of teaching the deaf, using his fame from the telephone. It also explains how Bell promoted oralism through traveling, speeches, and articles. This article assisted in the research by providing a better understanding of Alexander Graham Bell's role in oralism.

“Gallaudet's President Cordano Dispels the Myths of Language Acquisition.” – Gallaudet University. Accessed February 3, 2021.

<https://www.gallaudet.edu/gallaudets-president-cordano-dispels-the-myths-of-language-acquisition/>.

This article illustrates the benefits of learning American Sign Language(ASL) at a young age. The article refutes the idea that learning sign language hinders spoken language development. It also details how, when it comes to language learning, timetables for best learning and parts of the brain that are activated are identical for both English and ASL. The article supported the research by adding further depth and perception to the idea that learning ASL at a young age helps, not hinders, deaf and hard of hearing children.

History.com Editors. “Alexander Graham Bell.” History.com. A&E Television Networks, November 9, 2009. <https://www.history.com/topics/inventions/alexander-graham-bell>.

This article detailed Alexander Graham Bell's life. It described how he was intelligent as a child and homeschooled, though later he began going to school in person. It also explained how Bell's interests in the telephone had personal roots since both his wife and mother were deaf, and how he implemented visual speech in educating deaf people. The article illustrated how Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone and patented it, creating the Bell telephone company. Also, the article detailed how Alexander Graham Bell invented many things, such as the metal detector. The article ends by describing Bell's death and legacy. This article helped with the research by painting a better picture of Bell, as both inventor and man.

“How Deaf Children Are Being Locked Out of Language.” OZY, February 4, 2019.

<https://www.ozy.com/news-and-politics/how-deaf-children-are-being-locked-out-of-language/89643/>.

This article illustrates how deaf children are being locked out from American Sign Language. The article describes how many deaf children have fewer educational opportunities and develop fewer language skills because they can't hear as well as hearing children. The article also illustrates how the problem is also how people view deafness in children as a burden, something to be normalized. This article assisted in research by giving a new perspective on ASL and the education of deaf children.

Jay, Michelle. Start ASL. Michelle Jay

<https://www.startasl.com/wp-content/uploads/StartASLlogoFinal.png>, October 1, 2010.  
<https://www.startasl.com/american-sign-language/>.

This article describes American Sign Language(ASL). It describes how many, many people have hearing loss, but few know ASL. It also illustrates how ASL is a distinct language and depends heavily on facial expressions and body language. The article details ASI's flexibility that comes from being like an expression of ideas. This article helped in research by detailing ASL for a better understanding of it.

Jay, M. (2020, January 02). StartASL. Retrieved March 31, 2021, from

<https://www.startasl.com/alexander-graham-bell/>

This article was useful in retrieving information and learning about the Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf.

“Reports on the Living Situation of Deaf People.” – Gallaudet University. Accessed February 3, 2021.

<https://www.gallaudet.edu/office-of-international-affairs/international-relations/world-deaf-information-resource/deaf-information-resources/reports-on-the-living-situation-of-deaf-people>.

This article described the living situation of deaf people in comparison to hearing people. This article assisted in research by giving further perspective on the natural unequal treatment of many deaf people.

Riley, Charles, and Sen Qi. “Deaf Employment Reports.” Deaf Employment Reports – Gallaudet University. Accessed February 3, 2021.

<https://www.gallaudet.edu/office-of-international-affairs/demographics/deaf-employment-reports>.

This article describes the statistics regarding deaf and hard of hearing people, including things such as how many Americans are deaf and hard of hearing and how many became so before they turned 18. This helped in research by giving a better perspective on the inequality of people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Teenage boy having a conversation using sign language. In What Is American Sign Language(ASL)? | NIDCD. May 8, 2019.

<https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/american-sign-language#1>.

This image shows a young boy talking with someone else using American Sign Language(ASL). This image assisted in the research by creating a better image of ASL and showing how widespread ASL is.

“The Influence of Alexander Graham Bell.” Accessed February 1, 2021.

<https://www.gallaudet.edu/history-through-deaf-eyes/online-exhibition/language-and-identity/the-influence-of-alexander-graham-bell>.

This article illustrates Alexander Graham Bell's influence in oralism. The article details how Bell's mother was hard of hearing. It also details how Bell changed the way deaf people were taught through his speeches, articles, and papers. This article assisted in the research by further developing the image of Alexander Graham Bell.

“Through Deaf Eyes. Deaf Life. Signing, Alexander Graham Bell and the NAD.” PBS. Public Broadcasting Service. Accessed February 1, 2021.

[https://www.pbs.org/weta/throughdeafeyes/deaflife/bell\\_nad.html](https://www.pbs.org/weta/throughdeafeyes/deaflife/bell_nad.html).

This article details how Alexander Graham Bell treated sign language and furthered oralism. It gives details on not only Bell's actions but the oralism movement that was happening at the time. The article also illustrates how Bell did not seek what he viewed as impractical solutions but did seek to remove sign language and schools that taught. Also, the article describes how the NAD, the National Association of the Deaf, responded to the oralism movement through films that were meant to preserve ASL. This article assisted in research by giving a summary of the opposition to sign language and the allies to ASL. The article also led to many other sources that assisted in the research.

Vise, Daniel de. “Gallaudet University Adjusts to a Culture That Includes More Hearing Students.” The Washington Post. WP Company, September 24, 2011.

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/gallaudet-university-adjusts-to-a-culture-that-includes-more-hearing-students/2011/09/23/gIQC3W9tK\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/gallaudet-university-adjusts-to-a-culture-that-includes-more-hearing-students/2011/09/23/gIQC3W9tK_story.html).

This article describes how Gallaudet has begun accepting more people who don't know sign language. The article illustrates the debate between those who feel that it is ruining the deaf culture of Gallaudet and those who feel that the others are painting them as “not deaf enough.” This article assisted in research by giving a more in-depth perspective on the deaf society.

Waterfield, Sophia. “Today Is #ASLDay, but How Is It Used In Today's Society?” Newsweek. Newsweek, April 15, 2019.

<https://www.newsweek.com/asl-day-2019-american-sign-language-1394695>.

This article detailed American Sign Language as a whole. It described how there are major barriers to ASL, but more is being done to include the deaf community and ASL. The article also included a video with a guide to some basic everyday signs, stating that ASL was for everyone. This article assisted in research by providing some helpful background information and numbers, helping develop a more in-depth understanding.

Winefield, Richard. *Never the Twain Shall Meet: Bell, Gallaudet, and the Communications Debate*. United States: Gallaudet University Press, 1987.

This book describes the fight over deaf education by looking at Alexander Graham Bell and Edward Miner Gallaudet, the two leading advocates for oralism and sign language, respectively.

