

Joann signs age-appropriate stories in American Sign Language while projecting the storybook pages on a large monitor so that the book is visible to all of the students. Students view the storybook at the same time that Joann is signing, reinforcing bi-literacy in ASL and English. Joann adapts her signing style to fit the age of the children in the audience. For example with a younger audience, she might bend forward so that she is closer to their level.

Storysigning sessions utilize a bookmobile concept, with racks of books set up behind where the students are sitting. After the students watch Joann sign the story, they are inspired to select a book to read with a classmate.

Each week, Joann selects six different books to match the students' grade level. The books follow a theme based on current events, such as The First Day of School or Latinx Heritage Month. Sometimes Joann will pick a book just for fun. One of the 'fun' books that Joann selected was called "I Like Me". It was a story about a pig feeling good about herself. Joann was able to get very animated when showing how the pig liked her own tail, and the kids just loved it! Afterwards, Joann found out that the teacher had already read that book to the students, but it was such a popular and fun story that the students were very happy to see it signed to them again.

Most of the time, Joann selects the stories she will sign, but some teachers have books that match the curriculum they are teaching to reinforce language learning. For those classes, Joann supports the class by following the teachers' lesson plan for storysigning. With the infant class, Joann reads the same preselected book for three weeks, so that those younger students develop an increased understanding each week of both the signs as well as the storyline.

Joann was particularly touched when she received an email from the parents of a student asking the name of the dinosaur book she had read during storysigning time. That student loved the story so much that he couldn't stop talking about it to his parents. Joann replied that the story was called "We Don't Eat Our Classmates". The parents instantly went out and bought that book for their child!

Both Joann and the students in her audience are truly grateful to be back to in-person learning and the magical connection between storyteller and students. The students are enjoying the outdoor storytelling experience so much that Joann is strongly considering making it an ongoing tradition for years to come. Joann is actually grateful to the COVID restrictions for encouraging her to think outside the box because it has turned out to be such a positive win/win experience.

During the winter months or on days when it is wet or cold, Joann plans to visit individual classrooms so that she will be able to safely continue in-person storysigning, but on warm days, everyone is enjoying this popular new way of presenting storysigning out-of-doors.