

CARTERA  
DE LA  
CONVERSACIÓN  
EN  
ESPAÑOL





# INTRODUCTION

To be understood, we need to communicate. And communicating isn't always easy.

Sign is a game for 4 to 7 players that runs in about two hours. It's based on the true story of a language born in modern times from the hands of children. The history of Nicaraguan Sign Language is profound and powerful and human. We need stories like that; we should hold them close.

In Sign, you'll play as kids on their first day of school. Together you'll make new language through play. Before gathering the players, read through the Preparation section to get ready.

# PREPARATION

Preparing for Sign is short and sweet. You'll need to gather a few items and make some quiet space. Follow the guide below.

## THE SCHOOL

In this game, you'll move around. You'll embody a character and move and feel as they would. You'll internalize their story and take it to new and unexpected places. Your internal journey is a core part of the game, so it's important to have the right space to play. An excellent environment for playing Sign is:

- Quiet and free from passing crowds
- Complete with chairs for all players
- Ample in open space

You will divide this quiet open room into two spaces: one area for class and one for recess. For the classroom, arrange the chairs in a circle. A

table is nice to have but not required. This is where players will sit while class is in session. An open area for recess is where the Students will play and interact while class is out.

## MATERIALS

Before gathering to play, you'll need a few things. For each player, have ready:

- A marker or thick pen
- A note card

Optionally, get some play materials for your schoolyard. Balls, blocks, and simple toys are our favorites. These aren't required, but help to encourage fun interaction at recess. Be mindful that these toys aren't noisy.

If any players have accessibility concerns, take that into consideration prior to starting. The people you're playing with are more important than the game, so adjust it to suit their needs.

## THE STUDENTS AND THE TEACHER

Sign is a live-action game for 4 to 7 people. One person will play as the Teacher and the rest will be Students on their first day of school. The Teacher helps guide the game by following the instructions in this book. If you've gathered people to play and have read through this section, chances are you'll be the Teacher.

The Teacher is a facilitator role, which means you'll ensure the game runs smoothly. The Teacher doesn't directly take part in creating new language, but you'll still get to interact with the Students and play a character. Most importantly, you'll help guide the other players through their experience and make sure it's a good one. Thank you for taking that on.

Sign plays best with 5 to 7 players, but in a pinch (if you only have 4), one person can fulfill the roles of both Teacher and Student.

To play as both Teacher and Student, read the appropriate section in this book before each class and recess. Make sure the rules are followed, but otherwise play as a Student. Don't forget to keep time during recess.

## **ON SILENCE**

This is a silent game where you invent new language together. Make sure your players are aware of this before you start. Silence may seem challenging on first read, but people adapt and thrive quickly.

## **READY TO GO**

Once all the preparations above are complete, you're ready to play. You'll do this by having the Teacher follow the instructions beginning on the next page. There are no secrets here; the Teacher is welcome to read through the rest of the game material before beginning play to get a feel for what's ahead, but this is not required.

# START HERE

When all players are gathered and the space prepared, you're ready to begin. Have all the players sit in the circle of chairs that will make up the classroom. You'll start with a few instructions and warm-ups.

## WELCOME

Hi there, Teacher! In this book, you'll find directions for leading your class. Most of these instructions are just for you, but you should read certain text aloud (in *italics* as below). Begin by welcoming the players and sharing some background:

*Sign is a game about being understood. To be understood, we need to communicate, and that isn't always easy. This is a game about power from unlikely places and a language born in play.*

*Nicaragua in the 1970s had no form of sign language. If you were deaf, you had to start from scratch. You likely had simple gestures that you shared with a trusted few, not much more than a form of pantomime to cover your basic needs. Even among close friends, you had little for deep expression. In a very real sense, you were alone.*

*In 1977, something changed. Deaf children from across the country were brought together at an experimental school in Managua. They were expected to learn lip reading, but by and large they did not. Instead, something far more remarkable happened.*

*For the first time, these children were among their true peers: kids who could understand them and be their friends. Without a language to communicate, the children did the only thing they could—they created one together. In no exaggeration, these kids built the foundation of modern Nicaraguan Sign Language, giving voice to the deaf across an entire country.*

*In Sign, we follow a small piece of their journey.*

## BE SAFE AND PLAY BRAVELY

As the Teacher, keeping things safe and fun for all players is your most important charge. Together with your group, discuss:

- **Touch boundaries.** It's natural to tap someone on the shoulder to get their attention or to roughhouse a little during recess. Decide ahead of time what's comfortable for your players.
- **A way to pause play.** In case something happens in-game that makes a player uneasy or that needs attention, everyone should have a way to unambiguously stop play. Use a word like "*cut*" to signal a way to pause and discuss.

Shape these suggestions to your group and look after one another.

# WARM-UPS

You'll now complete two short warm-ups to get in the right frame of mind before play. Sit together in the circle of chairs. For both exercises, read the text in *italics* below. Students and Teacher all take part in the warm-ups.

## WARM-UP: LANGUAGE

*In this first exercise, we'll focus on our tools for expression—how we can say so much with so little.*

*Sitting in a circle, take turns saying “Hello” in whatever form is most natural to you. Tell an implied story with each hello. Think of a hello said in an interview, a hello said on a first date, or a hello between old friends. But keep it at hello.*

Repeat until everyone has shared several hellos. As Teacher, you decide when the exercise ends.

## WARM-UP: GESTURES

When you're ready for the second warm-up, read the text below.

*Close your eyes for a moment and be still.*

*In this game, you will speak through your hands. Take a moment to touch your hands and acknowledge them.*

*Open your eyes.*

*Now replay the same exercise as before, but by waving instead. Tell small stories like you did with "hello". Think of a wave to an old friend, a wave from across a crowded room, a wave goodbye.*

*Note what is harder or easier to say with gestures. Practice with your new interface to the world.*

Repeat until everyone has shared several waves and perhaps go farther still.

## A WORD ABOUT LANGUAGE

Making language is a core part of this game. Read the following passage aloud to the players as an anchor point in creating new signs:

*During this game, you'll be defining new language. At the start, everything you do will be improvised pantomime. That's fine! Pantomimed gesture is exactly what many of these children were limited to in their home lives. Own the pantomime since it's all you have. All the same, this isn't charades. While speaking with your hands, keep your feet planted and limit movements from the waist up.*

*As you create new signs, here are a few simple guidelines:*

- *Draw from your character*
- *Draw from the setting*
- *Draw from each other*

*If your “happiness” is climbing trees, sign it. If “pain” is the dog your character lost two summers ago, let that guide your sign. If “beauty” is the way another character made you feel, sign the design on their shirt or what they did to make you laugh.*

*Ground your sign in the real world.*

## COMPROMISES

Hand out a marker to each player and read the following:

*When communicating in this new way, you will need to make Compromises between what you want to say and what you can make understood. This is important. Every time this happens, be honest with yourself and acknowledge the compromise. Accept the frustration of being unheard and face what you needed to give up.*

*Whenever you feel you have not been understood or you have failed to understand someone else, make a mark on one of your hands—the size and location are up to you. This is a mark of Compromise. It will act as a reminder throughout the game that you have struggled in communication.*

If a player prefers not to mark up their hands, they can use an extra note card to keep track.



## CHARACTERS

Separate out the cards with the image of children on the back. These are Character cards. Pass out two to each Student and ask them to pick one. This will be the character they bring to life in the game. After everyone has chosen, read the following:

*Close your eyes for a moment and picture the child whose story you've just read. Create a new memory for them. Make the character your own.*

After a minute, ask them to open their eyes and continue reading aloud:

*The game will be played over three pairs of class and recess, followed by a final class. I will guide you between class and recess, letting you know when it is time to move from one to the other. In each phase, you will get a card with instructions. If there is any confusion over rules, make the best*

*decision you can in the moment. If you need help, you can always step outside with me for clarification.*

## SILENCE

Ask the Students if they have any remaining questions. If not, remind them that they're about to go into silence. Now would be a good time for a short break if anyone needs one. This will also be the last time the Teacher speaks in the game.

When everyone is ready, read the following:

*From now on, no speech or established forms of sign language. No writing except when specifically instructed. Let's begin.*

# PLAY

Play begins. At the start of each class or recess, pass out the corresponding card to each of the Students. Read the notes for that section in this booklet to yourself while the Students read their cards.

To begin the game, have all the Students sit in the circle of chairs that make up the classroom and pass out the **FIRST CLASS** cards.

# FIRST CLASS

The **FIRST CLASS** cards instruct the Students to introduce themselves one at a time in sign. After a Student has given their new name, the rest of the Students will repeat it one by one around the circle. Both in this class and in those following, when Students repeat a sign, make sure it's done one at a time rather than all at once. After the class has repeated the Student's new name, the original Student is instructed to give a brief introduction.

The class ends once every Student has had a chance to give their name and introduce themselves.

As the Teacher, you have a decision to make while interacting with the Students. How strict will you be? Will you allow back and forth during class? Make it your own, and feel free to evolve the Teacher as you play. If it comes

up, the character of the Teacher is hearing. Throughout this game, you as the Teacher, are also entirely silent and only communicate through limited gesture.

This class should take around 10 to 15 minutes. When it's over, hand out the **FIRST RECESS** card. When the Students are done reading, move them to the recess area.

# FIRST RECESS

During recess Students have free, unstructured play. Guide them to the recess area and, for the most part, let them be. These first moments of interaction will naturally be difficult. If a Student seems alone, or to be having a hard time, lend a comforting hand. If they seem out of control and disruptive, maybe they need to be sent to a corner. Let your inner teacher guide you. Keep in mind that most of the focus and interaction should be among the Students themselves, so make sure to give them space.

Separate out the Word cards (which each have a single word on the front) and have them ready for class.

After about 10 to 15 minutes, instruct the Students to return to their seats and pass out the **SECOND CLASS** cards.

# SECOND CLASS

The **SECOND CLASS** cards instruct the Students to start the day by signing their names and repeating after one another. Prompt them to do so if they don't on their own.

Take the Word cards and lay them out so that Students will be able to choose among them.

In this class, Students will pick a word to define from the ones provided. They will introduce a new sign for the word and all the other Students will repeat that sign one by one. Have them practice and repeat until they learn it. Keep all the chosen words in a visible location for the rest of the game. Put the ones that weren't chosen back in the box. Make a show of it.

This class should take around 10 to 15 minutes. When finished, pass out the **SECOND RECESS** cards and shoo the Students to recess.

## SECOND RECESS

In the second recess, Students should start to open up. See if you can spot any budding cliques or brewing rebellions. If it feels natural, involve yourself, but not too much. This is their free time to play and explore.

Before the third class begins, gather the blank note cards you prepared at the beginning of the game.

Once 10 to 15 minutes have passed, corral the Students back to class and pass out the **THIRD CLASS** cards.

# THIRD CLASS

As always, remind the Students to sign their names at the start of class.

In this class, the Students will follow the same activity from the previous class, but now they'll craft their own words. Hand each Student a note card (and marker if they lost theirs) and give them time to write down a word of their choice. On each Student's turn, they will introduce a new sign for their chosen word and the class will repeat that sign one by one. Have them practice until they learn their new signs.

Keep the note cards the Students used to define their words visible for the rest of the game.

This class should take 10 to 15 minutes. When finished, pass out the **THIRD RECESS** cards.

# THIRD RECESS

For the final recess, the Students should have plenty to share with each other.

Maintain the relationship you've had so far, and feel free to engage with the Students a little.

After 10 to 15 minutes, gather the Students back for class and pass out the **FINAL CLASS** cards.

# FINAL CLASS

You will now have a moment of reflection on how far the Students have come. After the Students sign their names at the start of class, each one will take a turn being in the spotlight. When a Student is in the spotlight, the others will each do two tasks: they will describe the spotlighted Student and how that Student makes them feel.

As the Teacher, guide this process by indicating which Student is in the spotlight. Continue until all Students have had a turn.

After each Student has been in the spotlight, the class should turn to face you. Read aloud the passage below to conclude the game:

*And this ends our final class. It is now time for us to leave these children with their new friends, a little less afraid than when we first joined them.*

# DEBRIEF

The debrief is a stage after the game has finished that helps to transition everyone out of play. Sign's debrief has two parts. The first is to check in on your players and provide a moment of shared reflection. To shepherd the discussion, consider some of the questions below:

- What emotions are you feeling?
- What was your truth? Did you get it across?
- What was the hardest thing to communicate? What was the easiest?
- Did you create signs outside of class?
- Did any signs change in meaning?
- Did the physical shape of signs change over time?

The second part of the debrief is in the form of notes we'd like to share with the players. Please read these aloud.

## ON PRIVILEGE

Read the below passage aloud to help ground the players' experience:

*The students described in this game are more privileged than their real-world counterparts were. We mean this both materially and emotionally. This was a conscious decision and compromise we made to make the play experience more approachable. Please keep this in mind as you internalize these stories.*

## SIGN LANGUAGE

This passage is meant to help folks who might not have significant exposure to sign languages:

*What we developed in this game are small, humble steps toward language. However, fully formed sign languages are immensely expressive and beautiful, every bit as complex as spoken language.*

*We're grateful for the input from members of the Deaf community while making this game. Based on their feedback, we would like to stress one thing: this game is not about the modern Deaf experience. It's about a language born in modern times from the hands of children and the universal desire to be understood.*

## NICARAGUAN SIGN LANGUAGE

Finally, we hope this game sparks further interest in Nicaraguan Sign Language:

*If this game moved you, please visit the Nicaraguan Sign Language Projects to learn more and help improve access to sign language education throughout the country.*

Thorny Games donates all profits from this game to sign language efforts in Nicaragua. Teacher, thank you for guiding your Students through this journey. Finish off with:

*Play is important. It can be a hard thing to do in the normal rhythm of life, especially as adults. Thank you for making time for it.*

# CREDITS

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For more resources, including an interview with native speakers organized by the Nicaraguan Sign Language Projects, visit [www.thornygames.com/sign](http://www.thornygames.com/sign) .

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*Hisssssssssssss.*





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