

## VL2 STORYBOOK APPS: HELPING DEAF AND HEARING FAMILIES COMMUNICATE

I was thrilled when I learned that Candor, a 3-year-old deaf girl from China, would be joining my family. I am fluent in American Sign Language, or ASL, and felt my family could support Candor in learning to communicate.

Before she joined our family, Candor lacked formal language and fundamental building blocks for language, such as eye contact. Delayed language exposure has lifelong consequences—cognitive delays, struggles in literacy, and poorer overall health and social life. It was crucial that we could provide the language exposure she desperately needed to thrive. Candor’s new siblings, my children Moxie and Keen, had only basic knowledge of ASL and they needed help learning to communicate with Candor.



PHOTO CREDIT: VL2 GALLAUDET 1

That’s when I learned from a colleague about the VL2 Storybook Apps, children’s digital books for tablets that are shown with ASL and optional English translation. Getting to watch something on a screen is a perk. It feels like a treat to kids and helps to make ASL a positive experience, something that is just fun, normal, and interesting for them.

The classic fable, *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*, and a new story, *The Baobab*, are among my kids’ favorites. *The Baobab* tells the story of a young girl with bright pink hair, who tastes fruit from a forbidden baobab tree and goes on the search for more trees, encountering many misadventures and mischievous animals along the way. The kids love the stories.



The apps are designed to help Candor focus on and understand the meaning of the stories. Moxie and Keen have also become expressive and confident in using ASL from watching the books. With the help of the apps, Candor can play with her siblings—they watch the stories in ASL and can set off in search of the baobab trees together.

- Jessica Lee  
Washington, D.C.

The VL2 Storybook Apps that help families like Jessica's were made possible with awards for the Visual Language and Visual Learning (VL2) Science of Learning Center at Gallaudet University ([#SBE-1041725](#) and [#SBE-0541953](#)) from the Directorate for Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences at the National Science Foundation.

VL2 aims to understand how people, particularly deaf individuals, acquire and use language visually. The resource hubs at VL2 help determine the optimal approach to teach children to read bilingually and develop methods to assess children's visual language development. The VL2 Motion Light Lab at the Learning Center, led by Melissa Malzkuhn, developed the apps based on the latest research done at VL2.

More information can be found at <http://vl2.gallaudet.edu/>.

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