Author: XXXXX
This week I had the pleasure of experiencing Patrick Graybill, the author of lovely but thought-provoking poems such as “Dandelions” and “Liberation,” and my new favorite: “Reflections.” Patrick Graybill, who I will now and for the rest of this entry refer to as “PG,” had such a delightful demeanor and was an absolute joy to “listen” to. He lectured about ASL Poetry but also about Deaf culture and his experiences and struggles with it, he spoke about the difference between older Deaf people like himself and younger Deaf people, using the example of how they don’t “fully” sign words but rather utilize some type of “half-hearted” hand-sign slang. Examples like that however can be seen in “hearing” people also, we use new words and new phrases all the time and we certainly do not speak “proper” english all the time, especially when speaking to peers or friends. What stood out most, aside from PG’s jovial character and his absolute pride in being deaf, but his views on Deaf education past, present and future. PG expressed his growing concern for the future of Deaf education as well as talking about the inequalities that exist in schools against deaf students. Personally, I don't understand why it would be such a hassle to accommodate a deaf student. Why would teachers or administration force deaf students to “speak” and/or not sign in the classroom or at home? I find that very insensitive and ignorant, essentially they are taking away the sole means of communication for a certain population, which to me is unethical. These instances reminded me of my own family, when my older sister first started school, my parents had just moved to America from Haiti, and spoke really bad english. The primary language in the house was Haitian creole, and so that is the language my older sister spoke, her english was mediocre at best. When she entered school, they placed here in ESL(english as a second language) and discouraged my parents from speaking Creole to her. While I understand that my sister needed to improve her english, it is quite intrusive to tell a family to stop speaking their native language to their child. Within Haitian Creole is an exuberant and rich culture, that should be engrained in all people of that culture, this should never be taken away from anybody. And so I was able to sympathize with PG on his points of discrimination, inequality and exclusiveness in my own way, completely understanding where he was coming from and his frustrations. Switching gears for my last point, I absolutely loved the poem “Reflections.” It was simple and complex at the same time, I loved the hand signing, using two hands that mean different but same things, the simple connection of two events via reflection, and just the overall performance was intriguing and entertaining. I am positive that the remainder or the guest speakers will further my appreciation for ASL poetry but Patrick Graybill himself has definitely piqued my interest and appreciation of this fine art/culture.
Patrick Graybill, a renowned scholar and poet of American Sign Language (ASL), lectured for the class over a course of a week. I felt delighted to grace his presence and learn more about the Deaf community from an inter-generational perspective.

We began our discussion on Tuesday by defining the word "poetry". The class collectively defined a poem as prose that "incorporates emotion and synthesizes imagined thought". Contrary to conventional poetry, Deaf poetry is broken down into five elements: hand-shape, orientation, location, palm, and movement. Such visual features express a dialogue's intensity and emotion. In ASL poetry, spatial and kinetic movements help convey a message. Performers are not limited to pencil and paper as they express repetition or personification. I immediately thought of my first-year research project with Mary Flanagan. I investigated digital language and how technology influences word choice. As digital art becomes more prevalent, I believe, the Deaf community will be able to translate their poetry to pedestrians with less of loose interpretations.

I felt somewhat disenfranchised as Patrick Graybill revealed his disconnect with Deaf youth. He stated that he does not always understand the younger generation. His disdain for short-hand signing can be likened to that of George Veditz, a former president of the National Association for the Deaf. In Deaf in America, Veditz longed to "preserve the purity of sign language [and believed] the language's survival depended on continuing the direct line of transmission from Gallaudet himself" (pg. 57). The elders of ASL may mistake short-hand signing in a manner similar to scholars of the English language. New forms of communication propagate new modes of expressing language in ways our elders cannot fathom. In other words, texting can enhance dialogue in ways that in-person communication inhibits.

I learned a lot about Deaf children and their collective academic experience from Mr. Graybill. Unfortunately, many residential schools have become a dumping ground for students with disabilities. Those who are deaf are often placed into standardized school systems, where they may become isolated and unable to access other Deaf children. One option is to sponsor state-wide summer programs for Deaf students, where they can interact and network with another. A voucher in which parents can transfer a Deaf child to more accepting districts should be mandated, as well. I was appalled to learn that many doctors refer to deaf-hood as a problem to be fixed. It is a form of discrimination that is widely accepted in the academic community. Until Deafness is accepted as an ethnicity, the problem will only exacerbate.
This week I was given the wonderful opportunity to interact with Patrick Greybill as both a student in his classroom and as an audience member at his performance. Mr. Greybill provided us with an introduction to ASL poetry as a genre and also with performances of his own poetry including “Liberation” and “Fireflies.” Mr. Greybill’s lessons and performances were inspiring and thought-provoking. While the initial readings for this course provided me with a better understanding of Deaf Culture, the ASL poetry tradition was still very confusing to me, especially given the fact that I do not know ASL. However, although I am still learning to fingerspell, I feel like I have a new appreciation for ASL poetry and I am beginning to see why it can be valued by both the Deaf and hearing communities.

Patrick Greybill began the class by introducing poetry as a genre, in any language. He remarked that in his own experience as a poet, his work originated from a curiosity to “play” or experiment with ASL. In order to play effectively with the language, one must first master that language. I was concerned that this fact would also make ASL poetry largely inaccessible to me as someone who does not know ASL. Furthermore, it seemed as though Mr. Greybill was curious and unsure of how receptive we would to his poetry be as a non-fluent, hearing audience. Given that so much of what makes poetry meaningful depends on the use of the language itself, these are valid concerns.

I was very pleasantly surprised to find myself experiencing emotional reactions to Mr. Greybill’s performances. Although the course reading materials had provided me with enough information to appreciate Mr. Greybill’s and other poets’ contributions to ASL literature, I was not sure of how I myself would feel about ASL poetry. I was nervous about whether I would find it meaningful at all, and concerned that I would feel guilty for not appreciating as much as it deserves to be appreciated. Thus, I will repeat that I was truly surprised by my response. The visual features of the performance, even without interpretation, conveyed strong messages to the audience. I will mention that I appreciated the interpretations as well. Although some hearing individuals probably prefer the poems without interpretation, I enjoyed hearing the words accompanying the visual performance even if the glosses were not perfect translations.

I was particularly touched by Mr. Greybill’s performance of “Liberation.” Although during class I was initially concerned that Mr. Greybill had not intended for our class to direct the discussion away from poetry and to Deaf education and his own experience in school, I realized after class that our questions and curiosity about his upbringing really help us get a better sense of from where Deaf Culture emerges. Furthermore, this discussion in class gave me a much greater appreciation for “Liberation.” Although it makes me sad to think about the conflict between ASL and English, I am also so inspired to see Mr. Greybill’s passion for his life and his work, and I feel as though “Liberation” allows us to see how he is at peace with both the good and bad memories from his past, which have all contributed to his identity.

It was a great week and I feel lucky to be in this class where we are meeting so many artists. When I enrolled, I had no idea what to expect, and I look forward to learning more about ASL poetry and Deaf Culture. Patrick Greybill’s visit was a great starting place from which I hope to further learn and enjoy ASL poetry.
Last week, our class had the great privilege of learning from Patrick Graybill, an esteemed member of the Deaf community, and one of the foremost individuals in the ASL performed poetry movement as well as Dennis Cokely, a leading scholar on the linguistics of ASL, who served as Mr. Graybill’s interpreter. Though I was not at all sure what to expect from Mr. Graybill’s teaching and performances, never having any prior exposure to this medium of art, suffice it to say that he surpassed both my personal expectations as well as those of my classmates.

To begin, prior to actually performing any of his poetry for the class, Mr. Graybill offered an informative brief synopsis of the illustrious history of the modern signed poetry movement, allowing Mr. Cokely to wear a “second-hat” as needed to properly explain the technical linguistic attributes of ASL poetry. By identifying characteristics to observe in his poetry, such as hand shape, palm orientation, the location of the signs, the movement of the signer’s hands, and non-manual behaviors, such as facial features, and comparing them to analogues of the various facets of written poetry, such as rhythm and rhyme scheme, Mr. Graybill was able to effectively convey the idea that ASL poetry is as intricate and symbolic (and in many cases, much more so) a means of expression as written English poetry. Though I am still far too inexperienced with ASL to fully comprehend the meaning of the subtler aspects of Mr. Graybill’s poetry such as hand shape and palm orientation (not understanding the basic signs themselves), I was nevertheless able to observe the emotional contributions of the poet’s facial features to his performances, as well as the adverbial component of Mr. Graybill’s hand movement.
and the establishment of tense based upon the relation of his hands to his body. Additionally, points made by Mr. Cokely regarding the notion of the importance of the classifier, a linguistic tool completely foreign to one approaching ASL from the perspective of spoken English, in ASL, as well as the different registers in ASL, further added to the already stellar teaching of Mr. Graybill.

Having laid the groundwork during Tuesday’s class, Mr. Graybill then proceeded to showcase a wide array of his original poetry at Wednesday evening’s performance at the Hood Museum as well as during Thursday’s class. Following fully comprehending the superficial meaning of the poems via Mr. Cokely’s interpretation, I remember my initial thoughts regarding Mr. Graybill’s poetry pertained to the diverse subject matter from which he drew influence for his poems. Unlike most of the written poets with whom I am acquainted, Mr. Graybill did not seem to harp on one single idea or motif in the majority of his poetry. Rather, topics as varied as childhood memories, light-hearted tales involving his lack of fashion sense, and deeply personal introspections regarding frustration and the quest for an identity, comprised the subjects of his poetry. As a result of Tuesday’s lecture, I also marveled at how much emotional content and symbolism Mr. Graybill was able to convey to me as a member of the hearing community, even prior to the spoken word translation offered by Mr. Cokely. One emotional moment which truly stood out for me was during his “Liberation” performance when all of a sudden, Mr. Graybill dramatically brought his hand down swiftly upon his head, very effectively conveying the notion of oppression and subjugation.

While this and the other poems were all of high quality, my personal favorite was the one entitled “Reflection”, which used multiple levels of symbolism and all five of the
characteristics of ASL poetry previously described by Mr. Graybill to draw deeply personal parallels between the assassination of JFK and the 1986 Challenger disaster.

Specific attributes of the poetry that I noticed were: the gradual upward hand movement to simulate the flight of the spacecraft, the drastic motions, intended to convey the shooting of President Kennedy and the explosion of the Challenger, the mirrored orientation of Mr. Graybill’s hands when spelling out the title of the poem, and the use of a large signing space to indicate both tense and position.

To conclude, having Mr. Graybill as a special guest for week two of the course proved to be an invaluable asset to my understanding of and appreciation for ASL poetry and Deaf culture in general. Though it’s all well and good to read about this form of art and deaf issues in a textbook, witnessing it first-hand is just unmatched. I anticipate that my knowledge of this unique craft will only deepen as the course progresses and more guest lecturers are brought in.

Patrick Graybill’s method to first sign poems in ASL without interpretation, and then to sign with English, was great—I felt that I could try to deduce what the poem was about, but if I failed (which I usually did) I would shortly be rewarded with the answer. There was once when I was correct in guessing what a poem was about, but did not speak up. I thought that what Pat’s poem was about someone shooting himself in the head, and a rocket, but I thought that must not be what it’s about—his poems are about the deaf culture and experience, and what does that have to do with anything? Of course, his poems turned out to cover a much wider range of topics, from childhood and schooling to growing into an adult and learning to accept himself, to anything that inspired him to write a poem at the time. This reinforced for me that ASL poetry is primarily poetry—the communication of an experience to an audience—and secondarily in ASL. While an ASL
The poem is fundamentally different from one in English (it’s spatial, kinetic, etc.) the most important thing about it is that it is a poem, and it has a message of universal application and understanding for an audience. This is an idea that was also enforced in the film “The Heart of the Hydrogen Jukebox,” but I needed to experience it firsthand to take it in.

I also simply enjoyed Pat’s company and watching him sign. He is very emotive as a person—you can tell he was an amazing actor. It is possible to watch his face and gather an incredible amount of information about what he is explaining or describing or performing, even if it’s in a different language. He was a very pleasant person to spend time with and his stories were alternately funny and depressing, though always intriguing. The fact that he was so personable meant he brought himself to the audience’s level, in a way, which made his stories and poems more relatable and interesting. In general, Patrick visit taught me a lot about ASL language and poetry, as well as deaf culture.

It was very useful to have Dennis Cokely to interpret and also to speak about deaf culture. I realized how much skill is involved in being a successful interpreter, not just to learn both languages very well, but during the time of the interpretation. There was one point at the 13EW dinner, when Pat was telling his name-sign story again and LeAnn was interpreting, when she was left out certain things that Dennis had included. She did excellently overall, from what I can tell with regards to stories I had already heard, but I learned how an interpreter should really put themselves in the minds of both parties who are communicating. Patrick would put up a “P” on his chest when he was explaining about his name-sign, and Dennis would just know to explain to the audience that it was a P on the heart, rather than to say, “My name-sign is this.” Dennis had to think both in terms of what Pat wanted to convey and what the audience understood of ASL language and deaf culture. It made sense, but was rather discouraging to learn that it would take many, many years to achieve the same level of skill as these interpreters.

Author: XXXXX
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COCO 02
Patrick Graybill Journal

Before coming to class on Tuesday, I was a little bit nervous about how the whole classroom experience would go. I had never met a deaf person before, let alone been taught poetry by one. But meeting Patrick Graybill turned out to be an amazing experience and a chance to learn so much more than just ASL poetry. Graybill’s storytelling about his life, and the lives and culture of many people in the Deaf
community really inspired me and changed many of my ideas about what life was like for someone who is Deaf.

The format of the class was very intriguing to me because some of the time it felt like a normal English class, discussing the different aspects of poetry, but then other times we would break into talking about Deaf culture or other important topics that PG felt were appropriate. I do not really consider myself an “English” person and have never intensely studied poetry (especially not at a college level) so it was a very interesting experience for me trying to understand and interpret poetry in a completely different language than the one I am used to. ASL poetry is not just English poetry translated into ASL (which is what I very incorrectly assumed at the beginning of this class). Instead, ASL poetry has its own rules to break and guidelines to follow and ways of expressing ideas and images. TO me, ASL poetry was almost more interesting and captivating than normal English poetry. There is so much emotion that can be seen and felt with ASL poetry, even to someone who doesn’t speak ASL. This is something that I felt during the poetry performance on Wednesday night and in class. I thought it was really interesting to first be able to see the poems performed without translation first. This allowed me to just watch Patrick’s motions and bodily expressions without being distracted by the “words” of the poem. I was surprised by how much of the poem I could understand even without knowing the language. Patrick made the tone of the poem very clear through different movements and especially through his facial expressions. In addition to the emotional content of ASL poetry, I thought some of the grammatical components we talked about in class were very interesting, especially classifiers. I found it fascinating that you could do a classifier sign and then make that classifier perform whatever action you want. The movement of the classifiers is really adverbial and that was so interesting to watch and begin to understand.

In addition to being amazed at Patrick Graybill’s ASL poems, I was also very interested in his opinions about Deaf culture, especially children growing up in the Deaf world. Over the summer I babysat for 19 month old twins, one of which was born hearing impaired. Her mother was telling me about how she had been fitted with cochlear implants very young and they were raising her very mainstreamed, with neither of the parents speaking ASL. At the time, I thought it was great that the little girl would be able
to be raised in a way that I considered “normal” but after listening to Patrick talk about the different options Deaf children have, I began to wonder if it was really the right decision to make. Maybe she would benefit from learning ASL and interacting with other children who are also like her. I thought Patrick’s opinion about cochlear implants was very interesting, especially as I am a pre-med student who eventually would love to work with children. He mentioned that most doctors see being born Deaf as a disability that needs to be “fixed” and push parents to get implants and mainstream their children. I wonder how this class could eventually affect the decisions I end up making later on in life. Overall, getting to meet Patrick Graybill and see him perform and discuss his poetry was an absolutely incredible experience that I am sure I will remember and appreciate for a very long time.
As I sat waiting in class for my peers to arrive on Tuesday afternoon, I wondered how different class was going to be. Patrick Greybill, a prominent and highly revered speaker, performer and advocate of the deaf community, was going teach our class and I wondered how we “hearing” students were going to understand him especially after only one lab experience. I wondered to myself if this was a test or a means for us to really force ourselves to truly understand and pick up the American Sign Language. Would we be able to truly grasp and appreciate his performance and everything else he has to offer?

I must say that the past week with Patrick Greybill was a very rewarding and truly remarkable experience than I expected and imagined. With the exception of Dennis’s presence and interpreting, I felt like I was in a class with a talented scholar who exceptionally illustrated and defined what ASL poetry is. Greybill explained to the class the composition of ASL poetry and what makes it different with the poetry we are accustomed to. As a member of the deaf community, Greybill was able to infuse into his discussions his experience growing up and the concerns and problems that today’s deaf community faces. Greybill expressed his concerns about the changes in the educational, which seem to have irrevocably destroyed the once rich and encouraging signing environment in deaf schools. Deaf children are not placed or “dumped” in public schools where they are restrained from signing and hardly interact with other deaf children. Though there was a concerned tone as he expressed the worries of the deaf community, Greybill’s discussions were also light hearted when he spoke of jokes and interesting aspects such as young deaf children/teens signing differently and how all deaf people are good people.

During his performance both at the Hood Museum and class, I have never felt so disconnected yet connected at the same time to by poetry than I did this past week with Patrick Greybill. I was disconnected in the sense that every time Greybill performed a poem for the first time (without Dennis interpretation), I had no clue exactly what he was illustrating. My mind raced around to understand his interpretation but no connection was made. My eyes deceived me as I followed his hand signs and though sometimes I thought could pick out some clues/themes, they turned out in the end to be very far from what he was describing. Yet at the same time, I felt very connected to the emotions being conveyed. Words were not needed to express these emotions. I somehow was able to feel the joy, frustration, anger, curiosity, anxiousness, sadness and pure admiration Grey expressed in his poems. “Liberation” is particular had a huge effect on me and led me to question why deaf students are forbidden in schools to practice signing. I also enjoyed “reflections” and thought Greybill did a beautiful and touching job on signing it.

Overall I truly enjoyed Patrick Greybill’s appearance in class and look forward to other deaf speakers we have in this class. I believe these speakers, as Greybill’s time has
shown, enrich our understanding and offer lot insights into the deaf community and their experiences than books/readings can tell us about.

Author: XXXX
ASL Poetry Journal, Week 1 – Patrick Graybill

Although I don’t know anything about the Deaf world, getting a couple lectures from Pat Graybill was an amazing experience. Both Dennis and him explained ASL poetry and Deaf culture to me in a way that I never expected.

One point of the lectures that I picked up on most was the experience of communicating through an interpreter. I don’t think that was a topic Patrick wanted to point out much, but I couldn’t help but think about it often. I wondered how much Pat was saying that was subtly different from what Dennis was interpreting. I know that he is a good interpreter, but the subtle difference between two words, such as “difficulty” and “adversity,” must be difficult to translate. The lag between Pat’s signing and Dennis’s translation also must be really hard to deal with. I noticed sometimes when Dennis would have trouble finding the right semantic sign for a word that he’d fall behind by a sentence or so, assuming that I caught his signing well enough. I wondered if he just glossed over some to catch up or if he could listen, think, and sign at the same time. I know he is really good, but it made me think about a mediocre translator, and how much worse that must be. I don’t think that most Deaf people would know if the translator just glossed over everything or not. But the defining moment in this 2-day train of thought for me was when we were shouting out words to describe his poetry. For every single word we shouted out, he would write down the exact word. Not a synonym, not a different part of speech, the same word. That was when I really saw how good Dennis was. I unfortunately didn’t look to see if he was spelling everything out to make sure that Pat got the words right, but I assume he didn’t.

Although class time was enjoyable, the performance on Wednesday night was the best part of the week. I really enjoyed every poem. Liberation was really good since I knew the meaning already and could just watch and understand. But for the rest, it was hard to figure out what he was trying to say, although I really liked the format. I have to admit that after a couple minutes of each poem without interpretation, I gave up trying to decipher meaning from his gestures, because they were only gestures to me, not signs. At that point, I just watched his face mostly to get what I could. Although the translation took away from the performance aspect, it was really nice to know what he was talking about. I say that it took away from the performance because I couldn’t listen and look at the same time as well as I could just look. That’s why Liberation was so great; I didn’t have to listen and look to get the meaning. I could just look and remember the meaning, which enabled me to get a lot more out of his face and the way he used the language.

By far my favorite poem was the one about the balloon. I don’t remember the name, but I really liked it. I could get most of the story without the interpretation, and I felt that I
understood some themes that he was trying to portray, mainly lost childhood. I think that was the only time that I spoke up during the presentation when he asked for volunteers. I understood it, and I could relate.

Another poem I really like was Reflections. Obviously the way he signed the name of the poem was really cool, but the way he played with the number signs was cool too. And more than anything, it was really cool that I could relate to it. I saw the Columbia crash when I was a kid, and I’m sure it was just like the Challenger crash. Also, the idea of Kennedy’s death appearing in deaf poems made me think about why it did. I think Pat wrote about Kennedy for the same reason that everyone else does. Kennedy’s death is itself an interesting theme. It’s a story about a young prosperous man that gets cut down in his prime, and almost a loss of innocence story for the nation. Pat said that when Kennedy died, his culture was growing and then they didn’t know anymore. That’s exactly what happened across the country. He seemed to have the exact same feeling about it as I’ve heard other people talk about.

Really, I liked the poems that weren’t explicitly about being deaf. I didn’t like the idea that most Deaf poetry was about being deaf, which was something I was starting to believe. It’s no different than if a black poet only wrote about being black, or poet who is a parent wrote about being a parent. It gets boring and isn’t relatable to everyone, even though there is so much in common between each of these people. I really like to relate to the art, and seeing many poems about being deaf made me more conscious of Deafness as a disability. Seeing the way Patrick could present concepts that I could relate to in his language made his Deafness less of a disability and more of a tool. I could see his emotion more than any speaker could show in a speech.
Last week, Patrick Graybill mystified me with his eloquent ASL poetry and his opinions about Deaf education and other issues within Deaf culture. Upon first arrival, I felt like I was meeting a famous football player. This requires a bit of explanation. I can probably only name two or three teams within the NFL and that’s only because of years of being forced to play Madden. It was like I was mentally telling myself “He’s important. He’s significant. It’s an honor to meet him” which on a conscious level I could believe. I simply had no concept of Patrick Graybill’s major role within Deaf culture just as I wouldn’t fully appreciate meeting the starting quarterback of the Steelers. Fast forward to today and I’m still sort of dumbstruck. After being taught by Mr.Graybill, seeing him perform, and hearing other people’s opinions of him my mindset has completely changed. I fully appreciate his presence in class and am thankful that you were able to get him to come teach us for a week.

I think my favorite poem that Mr.Graybill performed was Liberation. I felt as though the way that it captured the struggle between ASL and English was superb. I really enjoyed watching it after I understood what the poem meant because it helped me to fully enjoy Graybill’s use of non manual signs and exaggeration. Through this poem, for me, I was able to appreciate the breadth of ASL poetry and start becoming jealous that we can’t do similar things in English.

On the topic of cochlear implants, it was eye-opening to hear Graybill’s opinions on it. I considered my own opinions about the use of these devices on little children and was conflicted. I understood Graybill’s argument about the child not have a choice and the inability to experience Deaf culture but I still was hesitant to fully submit. After that class I went to fencing practice and asked a couple of the fencers if they too would have their child get a cochlear implant if they were Deaf. They all said yes. I was partially stunned and highly disappointed. In a way I felt a sort of connection with this idea. I drew a parallel to LGBT culture in America. I considered that if there was ever a way to know if a child was LGBT at birth and a means to “fix” said “difference” parents would toppling each other over to get it. Like Graybill said it’s this idea of hope that a child will be “normal”. Although I understand that these two scenarios are different I think that I was able to empathize more strongly because of this mental connection that I made.

Last week taught me a lot ASL poetry and its fascinating ability to manipulate its language and “say” things that are nearly impossible to get across in English poetry. I highly look forward to learning more about this form of art and expanding my knowledge about Deaf culture.
Patrick Graybill’s visit last week provided me with a wonderful glance into the many possible applications of ASL in performance and general use. Through both our time with Mr. Graybill in the classroom, as well as our opportunity to watch his performance at the Hood Museum, I feel that I have a greater understanding of Graybill’s experience as a deaf artist and scholar over the past decades. At the start of the week, I questioned how much the students, the majority of whom have had very little exposure to sign language in any form, would receive Mr. Graybill’s presentation; I was curious to see if the use of an interpreter would take away from the value that Graybill would have to offer as a deaf performer. Ultimately, I was glad to realize that Dennis’ interpretation seemed to accurately represent Mr. Graybill’s energetic and eclectic character. I was actually struck by how Dennis’ patterns of behavior and expression so closely mirrored changes in Graybill’s own mood and intended meaning. I am looking forward to hearing more from Dennis in the future weeks of the course, and his experience as an interpreter!

Personally, I found the discussion about how ASL poetry functions independently of English literary forms to be the most compelling aspect of Mr. Graybill’s presentation. In his performance of the frog haiku, Graybill was careful to premise his performance with a description of the typical 5-7-5 syllable structure of the traditional Japanese form. However, his rendition of a haiku really did not resemble traditional haiku in a structural sense. Instead, he used the themes and messages of haiku to frame his own work. Similarly, I enjoyed hearing Graybill describe his creative process, both in our class and in his performance. In one of the poems he performed at the Hood Museum, he illustrates this process- his use of ASL, specifically the rhythm and spatial dimensions of the language, was particularly demonstrative in conveying the suddenness with which inspiration comes upon him. Furthermore, Graybill was able to express how in forming new concepts for his poems, he is always conscious of how the poem will be viewed by an audience. Since expression through performance is the primary goal, it is only later that Graybill considers writing down the glosses for the poem. When considered within the context of English poetry, these uniquely illustrative elements of ASL poems in performance are quite easily lost in the written form.

I am looking forward to further opportunities to increase my understanding of Deaf culture and experience through marvelous individuals like Patrick Graybill. I believe that Mr. Graybill has provided me with a comprehensive framework upon which I will be able to build this understanding- he has truly demonstrated how ASL is an art, and how members of the Deaf community comprise an impressive community of artists.
Towards the end of Patrick Graybill’s lecture he looked to the class and asked a simple yet perplexing question, “If you had to describe the past few days in one word…what would it be?” I found myself a little jittery in my sit as Graybill made his way around the class selecting one student after another to share his or her word of summation. As he reached me my mental capacity seemed to diminish and I gave him the blank stare and smile one musters when he is utterly speechless. He smiled back and began to move on, but just as his sight left me I found my voice. Out came the one word that described and continues to describe my experience being taught by Patrick Graybill, “Consciousness.”

This consciousness is multi-layered. The first layer is composed of my new knowledge of ASL poetry. Graybill’s description of the five aspects of ASL poetry—visual, spatial, kinetic and patterns helped me to understand what techniques I ought to be cognizant of when viewing future class recitations. Furthermore, his identification of exaggeration as a pattern that frequently occurs in ASL poetry served as a good example of voice in sign language. For me, voice is perhaps the hardest aspect of ASL to interpret. Beyond learning the signs for various words one is expected to understand feelings of emotion and sarcasm conveyed as well. Graybill’s explicit use of areas beyond the normal signing space to convey exaggeration helped me to began to understand voice.

The recognition of voice began my understanding of the second layer of the emerging consciousness. The second layer is composed of a better knowledge of ASL itself. For example, our introduction to the different registers used when communicating in sign—formal, casual, consultative, intimate and frozen—marked a moment when I began to focus on things such as distance between two individuals when signing to better give voice to their tone. This introduction to voice and tone in ASL is invaluable since it allows me to attempt to put a hearing voice with Deaf sign. By doing this I can better attempt to translate not just words but the context in which the words exist. For instance, during Patrick Graybill’s in-class performances he used the formal register in which he signed slower and took longer pauses to ensure we understood him. By knowing these specific qualities of the formal register I could walk into our class and know that he is teaching a group of students (assuming I could not identify the lecture simply by the presence of desks and blackboards).

Beyond a new consciousness of ASL Poetry and ASL, Graybill’s lectures and performances offered me what is perhaps the most important layer to this developing awareness, a greater consciousness of the culture and community from which ASL originates. His assertion that the Deaf community constitutes an ethnic group because of its nationalistic characteristics offered me a glimpse into how he perceives the Deaf community. From this point of view I can better understand why he is troubled by the attempts of medical professionals to “save” deaf individuals through the use of devices.
like the Cochlear implant. Aside from offering minimal help to people born deaf, the implant attempts to change a natural state that ought to be embraced. More importantly, it is damaging to Deaf culture by taking away an acceptance of Deafness and its naturalness from individuals and replacing that state of happiness with a desire to be like the others.

Thanks to Graybill I am more aware than I have ever been of Deaf America.
When I decided to take this class I was very skeptical about the concept of Deaf poetry. I have always loved the sound of poetry, especially the way the rhythms and rhymes contribute to the music of words to create art. I could not really comprehend how it would be possible to create poetry in the absence of sounds. What would be considered a rhyme or a rhythm or alliteration? How can there be flow and life in hand gestures? I knew ASL was a language, I just could not comprehend how one could make art out of it.

That question was certainly answered for me last week in our interactions with Patrick Graybill. When we analyzed his poetry (for example his poem REFLECTIONS) in class I could see how he masterfully used the different building blocks of his language (hand shape, movement, location, palm orientation and non-models) to create poetry, often in ways unimaginable for English. Signs flowed effortlessly from one to another. They had a pattern. If hope was rising, so would his hands, when his hopes were sinking so too did his signing. He could create a sort of ASL rhyme by setting up parallel hand shapes, and show emotion in his face. His hands became paintbrushes that showed us scenery and emotion, so much so that most of his poetry could be understood without translation.

His week with us truly solidified in my mind what I suspected from our readings and watching films, but I had not yet explained and committed to yet: that ASL poetry is just as communicative as English poetry, and perhaps more so. Its nuanced meanings and
creation carry with it its own expression and forms, and its own way to show parallels and rhythms. I am really looking forward to what else ASL poetry has to teach me.

**Author:** XXXXX  
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Patrick Graybill is a phenomenal ASL poet and through his time with the class I gained a better understanding of the depth and multi-dimensional nature of ASL poetry. Graybill created poetry that was as meaningful to those who understand ASL as to those who do not. During his performance viewers without any knowledge of ASL were mesmerized by the aesthetic and visual capacity of his poetry. If some could not understand the meaning of the poems without English translation, this served as a meaningful role reversal. The non-Deaf members of the audience were placed in a position where they were forced to think critically about their position in the dominant (hearing) culture and how this position translated to unearned (and perhaps hitherto unacknowledged) privilege.

Although I found his performances fascinating, what I enjoyed most from Graybill was his insight into the realities and struggles of the Deaf community. His relationship with his parents seems to follow a fairly common trajectory: his mother learned ASL while his father did not. I think it might be pertinent to examine the ways in which hearing masculinities are constructed in order to better understand why so many men seem to be opposed to learning sign in order to communicate with their children. Are these men afraid of using their hands in a way they read as effeminate gesturing? Do they wrongly view their child(ren) as having a “disability” and therefore feel less masculine? How does
this gendered pattern of learning or not learning ASL vary by class, race, education and location?

Another topic I found extraordinarily interesting is the view in some Deaf communities on cochlear implants. Graybill asserted that these surgical interventions are conducted when children are too young to consent to the procedure and are agreed to by (usually hearing) parents who do not fully understand the sense of culture and community they are stripping from the child. Cochlear implants are often placed into children under a rhetoric of assimilation (“We want the child to be just like us: hearing”) as well as an inaccurate rhetoric of medical necessity. I am curious as to whether or not Deaf activists and Intersex activists have allied themselves for purposes of social organizing. Intersex activists also protest operating on children when not medically necessary. In both situations medical institutions feel that they need to “help” the child through a medical intervention (i.e. cochlear implants for deaf and hard of hearing children and surgical reconstruction of ambiguous genitalia in intersex children), that in reality, only helps the parents and the dominant society feel more comfortable and ignores the long term repercussions for the child (e.g. a loss of community, medical & emotional complications).
After only a brief week of being exposed to the world of American Sign Language, I was fortunate enough to learn from the preeminent deaf poet, Patrick Graybill, as both a teacher, and as a performer. I purposely distinguish between and emphasize both of these roles that he filled, because for me, these two roles were inextricably linked to what ultimately formed my experience with, and better understanding of the deaf world and of ASL poetry. Although going into our first lesson with Mr. Graybill I had some basic background and understanding of ASL poetry, solely from our first class meeting and from the week’s assigned readings, I was unsure what to expect from the experience, and whether or not I would even be able to fully appreciate Mr. Graybill’s works—after all, I did not speak the language of his poetry. After this week, however, I can truly say that I gained a completely new, and far deeper understanding and appreciation of ASL poetry, one that transcends both any written explanations a book could give me, as well as any language barriers.

Before Mr. Graybill came to our class, I do not think I actually understood the fact that ASL poetry is really its own form of poetry and art, truly distinct from poetry of the English language, or of any other language for that matter—it is not simply written poetry translated into American Sign Language, it is a work and a creative process all its own. While this statement may initially sound obvious, for me it was not something I was able to actually comprehend until watching Mr. Graybill’s performance, as well as learning more about his personal experiences as a deaf individual. I found his performance of the two versions of the pledge of allegiance, the English translation version and the ASL version, to be among the most powerful examples of this. After Tuesday’s class, in which we spent a significant amount of time learning about Mr. Graybill’s childhood and asking about his personal life experiences, I was a little concerned that perhaps we had gotten him off-track from his ASL poetry lesson. However, after Wednesday’s performance, any and all concerns completely disappeared because I realized how crucial my knowledge of Mr. Graybill’s experiences as a deaf individual were to my understanding of his poetry. His poem, “Liberation,” for example,
took on an entirely new and deeper meaning for me after learning of his rather shocking classroom experiences at the Kansas School for the Deaf, where a world of “ENGLISH, ENGLISH!” was forced upon him. Graybill described how the far more natural ASL with which he and his peers would communicate with one another outside the classroom was always the natural and constantly evolving alternative to English, it allowed him to express himself and be creative, in his own language, in stark contrast to his experience with English. Seeing “Liberation” with this knowledge of his personal experiences changed the way I experienced the poem, because it took it from the realm of the general and unknown, to that of the deeply personal and specific.

The poems which Graybill performed in class on Thursday, specifically "1963" and “Fireflies,” really impressed upon me the ways in which ASL poetry’s unique spatial and kinetic form separates it from English poetry, and allows it to transcend many of written poetry’s limitations. In “1963,” for example, I was struck by Graybill’s ability to use ASL to convey two meanings simultaneously, and by this I am both referring to the ability to sign two things simultaneously, as well as ASL poetry’s unique capacity to convey an emotional meaning which is linked to the functional meaning of the sign. A wonderful example of the first could be seen when Graybill signed with one hand that the rocket takes off, while with the other that he is inspired—two hands, two signs, two meanings. Even more powerful however is the emotional connection between the two signs, and between the similar hand shapes, functioning separately but undoubtedly connected to one another, like when he signs that the rocket is going down…and he’s depressed, or when Graybill used the same hand shape for the gunshot to the skull as for the tear coming off his face at the end of the poem. These fluid connections in the function and form of the ASL poem added immensely to the emotional impact of the poems, and to my ability to better understand the emotions and meaning behind them.

I was very surprised by the extent to which my understanding and appreciation of not only ASL poetry, but also of the deaf community and culture as a whole, grew over the course of this past week. I feel deeply grateful that I was able to be introduced into this new and exciting world by one its most distinguished and fascinating individuals, Patrick
Graybill, and I am now only more eager to delve into ASL poetry and learn more about deaf culture in the weeks to come.

**Author XXXXX**  
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Patrick Graybill was more lucid and comical than I had expected. On Tuesday I thought everything I would pick up was going to be from Dennis Cokely, but that was not the case. I was able to follow Patrick to some small degree with a few of his signs, and I was able to follow all of his emotions. I think that in a way, not knowing sign language helps me see the emotion in each sign, because it gets sort of emphasized. I was also struck by how funny Patrick was. I remember when Dennis was talking about the Miranda laws for Deaf people, and saying if a Deaf person were to rob a bank—and Patrick smacked the table hard and shook his head “no, Deaf people don’t do that!” I learned a lot this week; it was my first week spending a decent amount of time with a Deaf person. The two things that I thought would be first to go—clear communication and comedy—were not lost in the slightest. It was so incredibly easy for me to know when Patrick was laughing and having a good time. He would make a certain noise that was obvious to associate with his laugh. This week was really fun, and I learned a lot.

I went to lunch with Patrick and Dennis at Yama on Thursday. Patrick asked us what we were studying, what we wanted to do with our lives, and why we were interested in ASL. When I told him that I was worried that after college I may not ever use ASL again, he told me that there was a Deaf program near my home, at Fresno State, so perhaps I could take a class or two there. I will definitely look into it. Overall we had a pleasant conversation during lunch, and I enjoyed it, but the things that struck me the most at lunch were not our conversation. When the waiter asked us for our orders, the waiter asked Patrick for his, assuming that he could speak, and not knowing that he was Deaf. Second, I noticed that later on when the buss boy was clearing away our plates, he got in the way of Patrick and Dennis communicating with each other, completely oblivious to what they were doing. We had to halt our conversation for ten seconds. And lastly, I noticed that we had to stop our conversation at one point because Dennis was on his phone and Patrick couldn’t get his attention. These three things really stood out in my mind, that the larger community has no idea about the Deaf, and that if we did not have intermediaries like Dennis, we would have little chance of getting to know the Deaf community.

This week I learned a lot about deaf and Deaf, and how ASL is its own
language. I had no idea before the class the immense difference between deaf and Deaf and how insistent some are that ASL is its own language, and not some translation to English. It makes sense, now that I have gotten a glimpse into the heart of the matter. It makes me want to learn more of ASL, and quickly. I read *Deaf In America*, and it has illuminated certain aspects of the culture to me. I am still new to the grammar of ASL, but my vocabulary is slowly improving.

Patrick Graybill was a great guy, and I will likely always remember him as the first Deaf person I got to know. I liked his poetry, mainly because most of his poetry was based off of a simple hand configuration or simple idea, but I think this week I learned more about Deaf culture and Deaf people than about poetry. A lot of my opinions about ASL I had before the course have changed, and I look forward to the coming weeks to learn more poetry and ASL.

Author: XXXXX

After reading so much about Patrick Graybill and seeing “Liberation” in class, I was really looking forward to meeting Patrick Graybill in class and during the performance. I admit, I was a bit nervous about meeting Mr. Graybill at first. Here was an incredibly famous performer and teacher, and I was going to be able to talk to him and ask questions. I thought that this sort of opportunity would come only once in a lifetime. So I wanted to make the most of it.

Then when Tuesday came, I was so excited for the class to start. I was amazed as Dennis Cokely began translating *while* Patrick Graybill was speaking. Whenever I had seen interpreters before, they always waited for a person to finish a phrase before translating. Dennis Cokely had the ability to translate in real-time, which was a unique experience for me.

Then Patrick Graybill began signing. Even when he was not performing, Graybill’s ASL looked so rhythmic and expressive; even though I couldn’t attach each sign to a word that Dennis Cokely was signing, I felt I could really understand him. It was only when Graybill signed that this was the first time he was teaching a class of hearing students with little to no knowledge of ASL that I realized what an odd situation we were *both* in. Normally, when dealing with a foreign topic, students would feel that the teacher would be more comfortable and accustomed to the topic to explain to the class. Here, both the teacher and the student were put into a situation where both were not familiar with the situation. I can honestly say this is the first time I have ever been taught by a deaf teacher, let alone in another language.
But as Graybill continued signing, I began to realize even more that the Deaf community is not a disabled population, but a real and true ethnicity. Its ethos is as rich and diverse as any other, a culture that is starting to fade under the constant pressure to assimilate into another culture. We never think of hearing as a part of our culture; it is simply a sense by which sound is perceived, an ability we feel all people should possess in full measure, hence the emphasis of cochlear implants on deaf babies. But, in reality, each of our senses is just another way to perceive or not perceive our culture, one not being better than the other.

After class that day, and talking to my parents about the great time I had in class with Graybill and Cokely, it made me realize a huge and visible part of human existence. We are geared to think even more than usual in this Information Age that the more ways we can gather information, the better it is. So I guess, the more information we can gather from our senses, the better it surely is. I think that is why so many people may put emphasis on the fact that we need to use all of our senses, and the failing or absence of any one of these senses must be worse to the extent that it affects gathering of information. Never has anyone seen this as different rather than as bad.

Because the truth is, I found that Patrick Graybill was an incredibly more perceptive individual than I can ever hope to be because of his Deaf culture. I was especially impressed with the poem “Fireflies.” We use so many words to tell a story…Graybill used one sign: one sign to tell a story, to act the part of friends, to show a tty machine, to make a situation come alive right before our eyes. And with this performance, I realized finally the difference between mime and ASL poetry. ASL poetry is playing with the language of ASL itself; it is an intense personal feeling expressed through a signing language, whereas mime just tries to recreate a situation with body movement. I didn’t realize that signing also gave such importance to things I take for granted: palm orientation, location, hand shape, movement, and non-manual behaviors.

I also thought it was interesting how much more efficient ASL seems to be compared to written or spoken English. Look at this journal entry for example; I had to use all these words to express an idea, whereas ASL seems to really get to the point. Things like articles and added “filler” words are not necessary.

Even so, I thought it was interesting to learn from Graybill that today’s generation of signers tend to use a smaller space and make their own abbreviations for things; it was funny for me. Still not being accustomed to the abbreviations of today, I think it is interesting that in any language, new ideas and new signs and words are brought in a new generation, rebelling against what is “right,” which actually may have been new and radical to the generations before that.

At the performance, I was also surprised to learn that residential schools would, rather than encourage the use of ASL, force students to learn English. That revelation was indeed a astonishment for me. I felt I could understand some of the frustration that Graybill must have felt as a student, forced to use a language other than his own. This really helped me gain a new perspective on the poetry performed.
Finally, the most eye-opening (literally) moment for me was during two specific poems. One was reflections, where I found the historical meaning and significance of the Challenger and JFK’s assassination in a new light. I was amazed at the “silent music” performed by Graybill during a poem where he performed a Diana Ross song. It really made me think about music and performance in a new and novel way.

I know that on the first day, Graybill told the class that he was an actor, not a linguist; he had not studied ASL or Deaf culture but was a part of it. This made the experience, though, all the more enriching. By living it, by seeing the progression of Deaf culture, and most importantly, by being able to express that emotion and frustration through beautiful poetry, Graybill’s presence this past week has really made me aware of myself in a new light, and aware of the Deaf community in a way I was not before. A teacher would be able to convey the material and the history, but not the raw emotion; this added element was what made the experience much more informative and moving.

Reaction Paper: Patrick Graybill

Patrick Graybill is truly an inspirational figure as a teacher and a poet. From his teachings in class, my knowledge about Deaf culture, poetry, and ASL has broadened dramatically. There are a number of lessons I’ve taken away from his time here at Dartmouth. First, it was fascinating learning about the technical aspects of ASL and watching a live individual perform ASL poems. As my knowledge about ASL has increased, the performances also gave me insight into the world of Deaf culture, as it was humbling to hear and learn about the struggles Graybill faced. Consequently, perhaps the most important impression I’ve taken away is his strong pride and hope in the Deaf community as a cultural and ethnic group. The passion he exudes in his performances and the outlook he takes on life is both enlightening and inspiring.

I learned much in terms of signing and ASL. The distinguishing feature that Graybill emphasized in class was that an ASL poem is not the same as an English poem. As a spatial language, ASL poems are more evocative and expressive in terms of using signs that include five important features: handshape, palm orientation, location, movement, and nonmanual behaviors. It was helpful realizing the importance of these in ASL poetry when Graybill performed a number of poems and we analyzed them in class. Perhaps the most impressionable feature to me was the use of nonmanual behaviors, which included facial
expressions and mood. While I understand that the hands and movement are integral in communicating, I found that for poetry, my eyes were constantly drawn to Graybill’s face. Perhaps this is because he is a particularly exuberant poet, but as I didn’t have the signing knowledge necessary to understand the poem itself, the facial emotions he displayed were helpful in conveying the general feel of the poem.

The poems he performed thus evoked a number of different emotions. From the comical stories about his experiences in school to the more thought provoking and reflecting ones regarding his struggles as a Deaf individual, it was a great experience learning through poetry. My favorite poem from his performance Wednesday night was “Liberation” as it showed me how important the atmosphere and mood are when performing. To me, there was a noticeable difference between seeing the poem being performed in person and on video. When Graybill performed in person, it was helpful having seen “Liberation,” as I was able to notice the more subtle details and focus on the mood and space around him. Similarly, I especially enjoyed “Reflection,” as I never would have known the poem was about the Challenger and Kennedy if it wasn’t translated. It was a novel experience seeing two such important events in history being melded together to embody the powerful feelings experienced during those events in such a succinct way.

ASL poetry is certainly efficient in expressing complicated emotions in seemingly simple ways. Yet, upon further observation, I realized that the movements and subtle details are much more intricate. For “Reflection,” Graybill emphasized the importance of using two hands to make two signs at the same time. This was a distinguishing aspect from English in that in ASL poetry, one is able to express two feelings at the same time by utilizing both hands, while in English one can only express one thing at a time since we only have one mouth. The register of ASL was also an aspect I felt important in the lesson, as there are certain registers that are used in certain situations. Graybill indicated he was using a more formal and consultative register, which was useful knowing, as while he was taking on a more authoritative position in class, he was also extremely open and friendly.

My final and most significant impression of Graybill is the energy and passion he exuded in his time here. It was awe-inspiring hearing about the struggles he faced and overcame in his lifetime. When he spoke about Deaf individuals as a cultural group, the pride he exuded evoked in me emotions of awe and sympathy. It was interesting hearing his opinion about the advances in technology regarding cochlear implants and how the medical community sees deafness as a defect as opposed to something that should be embraced and
accepted. His active involvement in the Deaf community throughout the years as a poet and a teacher truly shows his passion and pride as a Deaf individual.

Graybill was a wonderful introduction to the class as the first guest teacher. His performances and the knowledge he imparted has been an eye-opening experience in terms of introducing me to the intertwining world of ASL poetry, Deaf culture, and history. I look forward to the next presenters and learning even more from them in our future classes.

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Professor Larry Polansky
College Course 002: Patrick Graybill Lecture Week
April 12, 2011

PATRICK GRAYBILL WEEK

This week’s lectures were presented by one of the most renowned scholars, translator, poet, and educator of Deaf culture, Patrick Graybill. Both lectures and his presentation at the Hood Museum provided me with insight about what Deaf culture genuinely is, but most importantly what it means to be a proud Deaf scholar of ASL. Mr. Graybill’s identity is not simply rooted in his works, but in his past and the indelible experiences it encompasses. This figure’s biography is not only critical to his identity, but to the understanding of his poetry as well. As one among five deaf siblings and hearing parents, I was intrigued by the fact that his parents had acquiesced to allowing their children to remain deaf and become the individuals they aspired to be. This week was Mr. Graybill’s first time teaching an entirely hearing class, but his demonstrative and emotive presentations, despite my lack of knowledge of ASL, did not in any way impede the delivery of his message: that to be a Deaf scholar you must rupture from within the bubble of simply being a deaf man and embrace being who you are rather than whom you ought to be. Mr. Graybill’s presentation and explanation of ASL poetry was truly expository in every way. I had seen his poem “Liberation” on tape on the first day of class, but it is remarkable to experience the dramatic performance of this poem. In
presenting this famous poem, Mr. Graybill clearly outlined the fundamental aspects of ASL poetry, and placed particular emphasis on its visual features. It was interesting to learn that changing a single visual feature of an ASL poem, such as palm orientation, can in fact alter the meaning of the entire sign. When Mr. Graybill performed a Japanese Haiku, his demonstrative performance not only facilitated its understanding, but also illustrated the use of space and kinetic movements in ASL poetry. Understanding a basic poem like the Haiku he presented made me realize that unlike any other foreign Romance language, in ASL it is the signs and the expressive performance which suffices in delivering the message or story. You do not need to know many signs, patterns, or even the rules of ASL poetry; all you simply need is your vision.

This idea of the significance of eye contact and the visual features of ASL poetry were resonate in Mr. Graybill’s performance of his poem “Reflection”. This poem was absolutely incredible in the sense that MR. Graybill was able to demonstrate how in ASL you can use both hands to show two different signs with entirely different meanings. It was fascinating to see how Mr. Graybill was able to play with the “R” sign and the up and down movement to connect two events together. The two historical events presented were distant in time but it was amazing to see how they can be related in signs in this ASL poem. The exaggeration of space was also another notable feature that enabled me to understand how ASL is in fact a spatial language in comparison to English, which is a linear language.

Overall, Mr. Graybill’s lectures were truly inspirational and didactic. Perhaps I do not have any knowledge of ASL poetry, but through his performances the imagery and message of each poem was simply articulated through his demonstrative approach. I now understand that ASL poetry is not only rich,
but surprisingly engaging and revealing of Deaf culture experiences. It is true that poetry in general discusses abstract ideas, but when seeing an ASL poem performed I myself became a participant. The stories related expressed the universal themes of repression, childhood, pride, and identity; themes which allow anyone to become part of the poem if not by understanding what is being signed, then simply through the emotional effusion of the performance. I enjoyed each and every presentation and I look forward to the creative performances that will soon follow.

**Author**: XXXXX
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Last week, Deaf poet and scholar Patrick Graybill visited Dartmouth and gave a performance of his original poems, as well as teaching two class sessions on the topic of Deaf Culture.

Just as I was about to walk into class on Tuesday, I heard a voice coming from the room. Later, I would find out, this was the voice of Dennis Cokely, Graybill's interpreter. Although I would never get to hear Graybill's own personal voice, I was able to experience everything that Graybill had to offer, including his feelings, emotions, and experiences.

The class with Graybill and Cokely was the first time I had "heard" a Deaf person speak through an interpreter. My first thought during the class was doubt of how much we could accomplish during the class with such a language barrier. But from Graybill and Cokely working together, I learned ASL poetry by example. Both during the lectures and his presentation, I began to realize exactly how many nuances there were in the presentation and even in the poem itself. Aside from the signs themselves and the clever "word plays" associated with them, there were the expressions, the breathing patterns, the timing of the signs, etc. Not much different from spoken poetry at all.

Regarding the Wednesday night presentation, my favorite of Graybill's poems was the one about his black shoes. I appreciated the metaphorical link between the old shoes and the way a Deaf person might feel in a world full of people different from themselves.
In the class and also during his presentation, Graybill was asked several times about the
situation of Deaf culture and education. His position was clear: Graybill believed that
the changing landscape of Deaf education was having a negative effect on the culture
of Deaf people. According to Graybill, Deaf people have a unique identity that can only
be nurtured in a separate environment, among layers of inter-personal interactions
among Deaf children, and not something that can be artificially fostered. As a specific
element of an attempted shift towards the hearing by doctors encouraging cochlear
implants in Deaf children and infants.

I fully respect and admire the works of Graybill and the uniqueness of Deaf culture.
But that doesn't mean that I necessarily agree that it is wrong for doctors, parents, or
anyone else, to lead babies and children towards lives that would be considered
"normal" by most people. Wouldn't a child, given the choice, want to be hearing?
Would he not want to be considered normal by the vast majority of the world? I'm not
very clear on how effective these implants are, but if they give even some possibility of
maintaining hearing, I would be in favor of them. I actually wanted to ask this
particular question to Graybill, but I thought it may come off as inconsiderate and rude,
so I did not: If he had a choice, would he choose to be deaf or hearing? Although I
wouldn't be surprised if he answered Deaf (since that is how he has been his entire life),
not everybody would. Deafness isn't a world one enters by choice, and it is a world that
the vast majority of the world sees as lacking. Although it would be best for people to
embrace the Deaf culture if they were indeed Deaf, there is no reason to do so if there
is still a chance to be hearing.

This is not to say that the Deaf culture is something to be critical of. Graybill managed
to convince me that Deafness is indeed an ethnicity, albeit unrecognized by the
majority. I think the presentation was a big step towards that recognition.

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ASL Poetry, Literature and Performance in Translation
Professor Polansky
Week 2 Journal: Patrick Graybill

It seems to me that poetry, performance, and storytelling become nearly
synonymous when individuals use American Sign Language as a vehicle for artistic
expression. Prominent ASL poets such as Patrick Graybill have indeed established ASL
poetry as a literary form in and of itself. Last Wednesday night, Mr. Graybill
incorporated all three of the aforementioned elements during his presentation,
demonstrating the power of ASL to everyone in the audience. During the three days in
which our class interacted with him, I was most struck by his conviction in his signs and his pride for himself and the Deaf community.

Mr. Graybill was, in one word, captivating at his appearance at the Hood Museum. His optimism and charismatic personality were evident even without the translation by his interpreter, Dennis Cokely. That evening, he was able to switch easily and fluidly between his two roles, or “hats”- one as a teacher, one as a performer. In the moments in which he paused before beginning to sign a poem, we could see his transformation from a spirit of gaiety and light-heartedness to one of concentration and sincerity. Through his performances, Mr. Graybill proved to even the skeptics among us that ASL could really pack an emotional punch. We empathized with him and his old black shoes, we laughed when he poked fun at his former schoolteachers, and we even felt shame when he described his feelings of oppression as a Deaf individual in a mostly hearing world.

Perhaps his greatest skill was allowing our class (i.e. the hearing individuals in the audience) to understand his identity and circumstances, so that our sympathy was converted into empathy. Through the English words spoken by Dennis Cokely, we came to learn about Mr. Graybill’s childhood, family life, and experiences well into late adulthood. Of course, these words evoked compassion and made us more sensitive to issues of Deaf awareness and education of Deaf youth. However, when Mr. Graybill began performing his poetry, he provided us with a rare, private window into his own world. Due to the language barrier, our inability to understand the vast majority of his precise signs and meanings did hamper our comprehension at times. Nonetheless, we could still see and grasp the animated expressions on his face and the vigor in his body movements. For instance, I distinctly remember hearing an audience member gasp aloud when he hit himself in the head while performing his poem “Liberation.” The expressiveness of his performance was on par with that of acting or dance, simply due to the visual nature of ASL. As a result, it felt almost as though we were experiencing his personal thoughts and emotions, and I was floored.

I am grateful to have met such a funny and interesting man in Patrick Graybill and to have watched him perform his poetry in person. I feel that his personal story has
given me new insight into Deaf culture and provided a good foundation to (what I hope will become) a deeper understanding of the issues facing the Deaf community at large.

Author: XXXXX
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Reflections on Our Week With Patrick Graybill.docx (108.194 Kb)
Reflections on Our Week With Patrick Graybill - Madolyn M Mertz

Spending time with Patrick Graybill has allowed our class to gain the empathy necessary to respectfully understand and interpret the life experiences of a member of the Deaf culture. I could spend an inordinate amount of time delving into the interpretation of his poetry, which I found incredibly moving, but what I was struck by the most and would like to reflect on this week is Patrick Graybill himself. Meeting with Patrick Graybill put a face and a remarkable personality to the Deaf community that we have been reading about. He did not shirk away from controversial or heavy issues like education methods for deaf children, cochlear implants for infants, or expectations of government to provide special services for the deaf. Coming from his perspective, these issues became much more poignant and powerful, and I could gain a greater appreciation for the struggles – and everyday achievements of – a Deaf person living in a world biased towards hearing individuals. His confidence in the delivery of his point of view was truly remarkable to me.

His demeanor is one of someone who constantly holds his head high and refuses to let the world dictate his state of mind. After experiencing all of the adversity that he describes in his poems, he at 70+ years old, maintains unwavering confidence and optimism. I do not think that his personality and tenacious spirit are a product of adversity. Many individuals could go through the same experiences and become downtrodden and develop the mindset of a victim, but Graybill has moved past this. Ultimately, his personality and spirit is outweighs his identity as a Deaf individual. While I know that he is proud to be Deaf and has not tried to minimize this part of his identity, I think that he has outpaced this label and cannot be summed up so simply. His is much more than just a Deaf advocate and poet. He, as well as his poetry, advocate for more equitable treatment of all members of society. He has shown that he can rise above adversity and be an example to us all. That is something to be truly admired, and I am thankful to have been in the presence of such an individual.