

## Signing Time Videos to be aired on Nick Jr: Interview with creator Rachel Coleman

January 4, 4:53 PM · Heather Sedlock - Special Needs Kids Examiner

Nick Jr., a children's cable television channel, announced in early December, that it will be airing interstitial music videos, from Signing Time! "Three videos, starring Emmy-nominated Rachel Coleman, will be in regular rotation on Nick Jr. airing 1-2 times per day. Two additional videos will air exclusively on Nickelodeon's award-winning [website](#)."

Signing Time was created by [Rachel](#) and her sister Emilie in an effort to teach sign language to children who can hear. This was because Rachel saw that her daughter's communication world was limited by the fact that other children did not know sign language unless they, too, were deaf. Rachel wanted her daughter to be able to communicate with her cousins and other family members.

When Emilie's son, Alex, was 10 months old, he signed the word "milk" to his mom and she saw the benefit of hearing children learning sign language. Volume 1 was created starring Rachel, Alex and Rachel's daughter, Leah. It was meant to show family and close friends sign language to communicate with Leah; however, word of mouth spread and they had a hit on their hands!

The products offered by Two Little Hands Production include the 26 DVD set, series one and two of Signing Time; 4 DVD set of Baby Signing Time series; 2 DVD set of Practice Time series; Signing Time music CDs, and Signing Time board books and flashcards. To purchase any of these items (and more), readers can visit the Signing Time [website shop](#).

The Signing Time Foundation originally started when Lucy, Leah's younger sister who has spina bifida and cerebral palsy, could not play with other children at a playground. It is quite difficult to push a wheelchair through wood chips! The Foundation works on many projects, all of which focus on education and inclusion. Organizations across the country partner with The Foundation to bring live Signing Time events into their communities.

Parents who have non-verbal autistic children may find delight in these videos. There is growing anecdotal evidence that sign language builds a bridge between the language of autism and the verbal, spoken language of neurotypical people. Parents of non-verbal autistic children know the way his or her child communicates and can use that to teach the child sign language. Since effective verbal communication is a core deficit for those with autism, teaching them sign language makes sense. You can use it simultaneously while teaching a child to speak as moms have noted in the testimonials on the Signing Time [website](#).

Rachel answered some questions via email about her, Signing Time and her family:

**Q:** Readers can read about your wonderful daughters, Leah and Lucy, on your blog, and how sign language contributed to the communication learning process for both of them. Parents across the globe are using sign language to teach their children to communicate because the child has [autism](#) or some other impairment. It is being used as a bridge until the children become verbal, if they can. Is that why you and your sister created the videos called "Signing Time?" To help parents educate themselves?

**A:** *We did not realize the impact that Signing Time would have on so many children who have disabilities or speech delays. I didn't even realize that Signing Time would allow my youngest daughter, Lucy to communicate with us. Signing Time was made so that "The Alexs" could communicate with "The Leahs."*

*There were a handful of events that contributed to the genesis of Signing Time. By the time my daughter Leah was 4, I was really frustrated with how few people could communicate with her. Not just people in our community and neighborhood but even our family members were struggling. As Leah's signing abilities continually improved, she inevitably left those in the hearing community, those that were not completely committed to learning this new language, in the dust.*

*I also saw that my daughter was being left out. At the playground, children would play with her until they saw her sign something to me, at that point they would back off and just stare at her like she had leprosy. I couldn't imagine that these things would simply improve as she got older, in fact I could only imagine them becoming worse and worse, potentially leaving Leah very isolated simply because she "spoke" a different language.*

*I couldn't stop thinking about these issues. I keenly observed these interactions, hoping to find a solution. And then I saw part of the solution one afternoon while Leah was at soccer practice. I was there to interpret for her. Leah, age 4, was the only deaf child on the team. The coach paired up the kids for a drill and told a little boy that he would be Leah's partner, to which he responded, "I don't want to be with Leah," he said, "because, she can't even talk and she can't understand me." I wasn't mad. I wasn't hurt. I saw the opportunity to make a difference. This little boy had put it into words, "She can't talk. She can't understand me." The following week I called his preschool and volunteered to do a weekly sign language story time. The school was thrilled at my offer. I came in and read them simple stories and taught them the signs.*

*The next week at soccer practice, this same little boy rushed up to Leah signing, "FRIEND-PLAY-BALL!" He wasn't fluent in ASL. He hadn't taken an ASL course. He only remembered three signs. Three signs changed their world!*

*Armed with that little experiment, I became excited. I would lie in bed at night thinking of what was next... maybe I could volunteer at EVERY preschool in the area! And if we moved, I would start over with that area. As Leah got older, I would just change grades with her. Though I was pretty sure it would work, it sounded exhausting, especially since we were working so hard with Lucy, Leah's little sister, who was born with spina bifida and had just been diagnosed with cerebral palsy.*

*A few days later, my sister, Emilie called. She asked me if I would like to make a video for kids, teaching them all about music. This was it! "Yes! I want to make a video... No! It is not going to teach music. We are going to teach sign language! We are going to teach sign language with my daughter Leah and your son Alex!" We brainstormed the idea over the next few weeks. I was pretty sure this would make a difference for The Leahs (deaf children) of the world. Now, The Alexs (hearing children) would have a fun, entertaining and easy way to learn Leah's language! This would be the bridge, the bridge to communication.*

*The bottom line is this- Signing Time was created because, just like every parent out there, I wanted my child to have friends. I didn't want Leah to be left out... and that is exactly what was happening. I hoped I could do something to change that and create a community that could communicate with her. I also hoped to erase the fear that so many people seemed to have when they realized that, this child couldn't talk and she couldn't hear. It just seemed to freak people out. They didn't know how to cross the language barrier.*

*We had no idea the impact that Signing Time would have on so many families. I believed it would open Leah's world. I even said that I would be happy to just make 100 copies and give them to people who know and love Leah, because that would meet my mission. The feedback that we have received over the past 9 years is simply... mind blowing. I don't believe that I can really grasp the impact that we've had. It's too much. We receive emails, letters and calls daily. Every day parents share the miracles of communication that they have experienced with their children because of what we've made. We don't just offer families "hope" we deliver a solution.*

Q: PBS used to air these shows. Why did they stop?

*A: The opportunity to be on public television and have Signing Time reach countless households and families who really need us, for free- well we could see no better way of achieving our mission of delivering communication for all children of all abilities. We offered a total of 26 episodes on public television. But, how long can a station keep airing the same 26 shows? We pulled the show from public television because we could not continue producing the number of shows necessary to maintain a fresh presence on television. The financial burden would have been too much for our little company without a corporate sponsor or a grant or some sort of financial support above and beyond DVD sales. Many people saw us on television and assumed we were paid to make and air those shows. That is not the case.*

Q: Readers of your blog were quite outraged about the removal of the show from the airwaves. It's been announced recently that Nick Jr TV channel for kids will be airing select Signing Times videos soon. Is that true? How did that come about?

*A: We are thrilled that Nick Jr. is currently airing Signing Time interstitials in the form of music videos. It came about by word of mouth. When your kid starts signing, you talk about it. A woman who had previously worked at Nick became aware of*

*Signing Time and was using it at home, she contacted us and said she was going to put us in touch with the right people and that she would send a strong recommendation to them. It took over a year to actually get the details ironed out, the songs delivered, and the pieces to air. It was really hard not to talk about it! Such exciting news, but we kept quiet until Nick Jr. sent out their press release in early December 2009.*

Q: Having two special needs kids myself, I can understand a lot of what you go through, on a day-to-day basis. And many of the readers on your blog also relate. But it takes a lot out of a parent to deal and cope.. how do you recharge? How do you stay so positive and keep a humorous tone through it all and not go into that negative snowball so many of us go through?

*A: Oh, I have my days. Just like everyone. I have my days. Believe me. My husband and my kids, they will attest to that. I realized early on in Lucy's life that, things are not always what they seem. A stranger's comments may not mean what you think they mean. If you look for the funny, and look for the opportunity to laugh, you will find it. If you are looking for criticism and judgment you will find it. I try not to take myself, or my circumstances too seriously, it could've happened to anyone. It doesn't make me special. It doesn't even mean I'm equipped to handle it, I just do. And it doesn't even mean that I do it very well. I do my best and try to give my kids a healthy perspective of themselves. They are not their disabilities. They are much more than what someone might label them. We could let the disabilities and labels stop us and scare us and limit our choices, but why? How about challenging it all and playing big and going for the adventures, especially when most people think we should let all of it limit us. For me, that's the fun part. I also think that's what inspires others. I'm not reckless, but when it comes to my kids, I like to think of myself as unstoppable.*

Q: The "Story Time Volume 1" series received an award from iParenting and you were nominated for an Emmy (Outstanding Performer in Children's Series). How does receiving these honors make you feel as a performer, a mom, an advocate?

*A: Each award is an amazing acknowledgment. It's sort of that pat on the back saying, "Yep, you are doing the right thing and you're doing it well!" The Emmy nomination really left my head spinning. See, I experience myself as a "mom," more than I experience myself as a "performer." It's the "mom" that created Signing Time. Every day I wake up and I'm making breakfast and getting the kids on the bus, and then... every once in a while I get to put on my orange outfit and put colored tape on my fingers and transform into a "rock star" for preschoolers... for an hour or so. It's great! Then, I go back to running forgotten lunches to school, figuring out what to make for dinner, and cleaning the bathrooms.*

*While we are in production, the mom in me thinks, "sure I could just teach the signs for plates, forks, and spoons etc., but while I'm at it, let's teach these kids how to set the table correctly! That's what I would want someone to teach my kids."*

*I've had a lot of families say that after they watch Signing Time, they really feel like they know me, and they do. I'm not acting. I've never even had a lesson. I just pretend that I'm talking and singing to my kids. What you see is what you get. We've been making Signing Time for almost 9 years now, and I am still surprised when people recognize me. I don't expect it, but it happens frequently enough that I prepare for it by carrying Signing Time tattoos in my purse and Signing Time autograph cards to give to kids. A lot of times fans apologize for coming up to me, or asking for a picture, but from my perspective there is nothing cooler than getting to hear first hand that someone loves what we've made and that my little family is making a difference.*

*That's what I care about. Making a difference.*

**For more information:** Read [Rachel's interview](#) by Leslie O'Donnell, the NY Special Needs Kids Examiner. Leslie interviewed Rachel about the nuts and bolts of deciding what benefits a child may discover using ASL and what reasons parents may have for teaching their children. This is a much more in-depth article into the use of sign language in general and ASL in particular.



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