

## **Deaf Culture Question of the Week – October 4 - 8, 2010**

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Last week in DCQW we explored how signs are created. In that issue we learned that signers use the productive processes of ASL and other natural sign languages to create new signs as they need them to represent new concepts, meanings etc.

This week's DCQW highlights an example from the past of this productive process at work.

Hopefully readers of DCQW know the sign for [PRESIDENT](#). If not, click on the word [PRESIDENT](#) and use the ASL Pro Dictionary to look it up. (Note: Bookmark the ASL Pro website for future reference.

This sign was created by students at the American School for the Deaf when a President of the United States visited the school in 1817. Who was this President?

- a. George Washington
- b. Alexander Hamilton
- c. James Monroe
- d. John Quincy Adams

Scroll down for the answer.

Answer: “c” – President James Monroe visited the newly established American School for the Deaf in the summer of 1817. The legend has it that students climbed trees to get a better look at their famous visitor. They didn’t have a way to identify who this person was. They immediately began referring to the visitor by the shape of his tricorn hat. This sign has remained a part of ASL to refer to the presidents of countries, schools, boards etc. (Check out more fun historical facts about Deaf culture here: <http://www.deafis.org/history/nuggets/#>)

If this story is true students were using the classifier system of ASL to create this new sign. One category of classifiers in ASL show the shape of objects with specific handshapes and movements. In this case students were using these Size and Shape Specifiers (SASSes) to indicate the shape of President Monroe’s hat. New sign creation at work.