

Who was George Veditz?

Name _____

Class · period _____

Date _____

THE SHORT VERSION

George Veditz (1861–1937) became Deaf at eight and spent his life defending sign language. In 1913 he filmed *Preservation of Sign Language* so it could never be lost, and he led the fight that opened the civil service exam to Deaf applicants.

EARLY LIFE

Baltimore, scarlet fever at eight, and a language that became his life's work

01 CHILDHOOD

01 George Veditz was an exceptional student, revered teacher, sign language advocate, employment activist, writer, filmmaker, and chess player.

02 He was the son of German-speaking immigrants and started out in Baltimore, Maryland. He spent the first years of his life just like any other hearing boy might.

George became Deaf following a bout with scarlet fever at age 8.

03 Although fluent in both English and German, it is sign language that would eventually become a lifelong passion for George.

02 HIS EDUCATION

01 George's deafness did not delay or impede his education. Learning with a private tutor from age 8 to 12, he eventually ended up attending the Maryland School for the Deaf (MSD), an institution that would play a significant role in his life.

In the late 1800s MSD was more of a training site for future shoemakers than an educational institution, but George gained additional experience as the principal's private secretary and bookkeeper.

02 This did not completely quench George's thirst for education, and upon graduation he desired to attend Gallaudet University. Unfortunately, he could not afford college and temporarily ended up working in the MSD printing office.

03 George was able to enroll at Gallaudet a few years later, and within four years he graduated as valedictorian of his class. He later went on to earn a master's degree at Gallaudet as well.

TEACHING, COLORADO, AND CHESS

Two hats at one school, seventeen years, and an opponent he married

03 GEORGE'S TIME AS A TEACHER

- 01 George taught at the Maryland School for the Deaf for four years, but spent most of his time as an educator in Colorado.
- 02 After moving to Colorado Springs, George wore two hats at the Colorado School for the Deaf — teacher and accountant — and remained there for seventeen years. The school is now CSDB, the Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind.
- 03 During that time, George founded the Colorado Association of the Deaf.

04 GEORGE'S LOVE FOR CHESS

- 01 Meanwhile, George enjoyed the game of chess. In fact, one of his adversaries, a woman named Mary Bigler, became his wife.
- 02 The two continued to challenge each other in chess throughout their lifetimes and even competed against top world players.

HIS WORK FOR THE DEAF COMMUNITY

A film, a repealed ban, and a shelf of publications

05 GEORGE'S FILM

- 01 One of the things George Veditz is most known for is a historically significant film he created called *Preservation of Sign Language* in 1913. This film later became part of the National Film Registry of the Library of Congress.
- 02 As the title suggests, George cared deeply about preserving sign language and worked with the National Association of the Deaf Motion Picture Fund Committee to capture it on film.

There was a push for oralism at the time, which George opposed, and his subsequent quest to record sign language resulted in a vital contribution to Deaf history.

06 JUSTICE FOR DEAF WORKERS

- 01 George also committed his energies to justice for Deaf workers after observing examples of job discrimination. In addition to the right to use sign language, George felt strongly about a Deaf individual having fair employment opportunities.
- 02 George tackled this issue by lobbying to change the rule that Deaf people could not take the civil service exam.
 - After a two-year push, including pleas to President Theodore Roosevelt, the ban was repealed.
- 03 When Taft became president he followed suit by lifting restrictions on positions and requiring departments to provide a list of openings for Deaf applicants. This was a positive and unifying event for the Deaf community.

07 GEORGE'S OTHER ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- 01 He founded both the Maryland and Colorado School for the Deaf Alumni Associations, served as President of the National Association of the Deaf, and was involved in the World Congress of the Deaf, held in conjunction with the World's Fair.
- 02 George was also a busy writer, contributing articles to *Deaf American*, *Deaf Mute's Journal* and other publications. He served on the other side of the writer's life as well, doing stints as editor-in-chief for one magazine in Atlanta, and another in Chicago.

It is my hope that we all will love and guard our beautiful sign language.

GEORGE VEDITZ

08 NAMES AND TERMS TO KNOW

NAME OR TERM	WHY IT MATTERS IN THIS STORY
Scarlet fever	The illness that left Veditz Deaf at age 8.
Maryland School for the Deaf (MSD)	Where Veditz studied, worked in the printing office, and later taught for four years.
Oralism	The movement Veditz opposed, and the reason he raced to record sign language on film.
<i>Preservation of Sign Language</i>	His 1913 film, now part of the National Film Registry of the Library of Congress.
Civil service exam	The test Deaf people were barred from taking, until Veditz's two-year push got the ban repealed.
National Association of the Deaf (NAD)	The organization Veditz served as President, and whose Motion Picture Fund Committee backed his film.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Answer in complete sentences using what you read

09 WRITTEN RESPONSE

01 How did Veditz become Deaf, and how old was he?

02 What kept Veditz from going to Gallaudet right after he graduated from MSD, and what did he do instead?

03 Why did Veditz want sign language recorded on film in 1913?

04 Describe the rule Veditz fought to change and what finally happened.

05 Name three roles Veditz held besides teacher.

06 Veditz hoped people would “love and guard” sign language. Using two things he did, explain what guarding it looked like in his lifetime.

10 WHERE THIS INFORMATION COMES FROM

Deaf People	deafpeople.com
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Gallaudet University	gallaudet.edu
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National Association of the Deaf	nad.org
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