

Who is Linda Bove?

Name _____ Class · period _____ Date _____

THE SHORT VERSION

Linda Bove (1945–present) played Linda the Librarian on *Sesame Street* for more than thirty years, introducing sign language to a generation of children. She also co-founded Deaf West Theatre and shaped how Deaf characters are written for television.

CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION

A Library Science degree, and a summer program that changed her plans

01 GARFIELD, NEW JERSEY TO GALLAUDET

01 Bove was born to Deaf parents in Garfield, New Jersey.

She learned sign language at home and was supported in her education as a non-hearing child through attendance at two different schools for the Deaf: *St. Joseph School for the Deaf* in the Bronx and *Marie Katzenbach School for the Deaf* in Trenton, New Jersey.

02 Linda completed her formal education at Gallaudet University and pursued a Library Science degree, but she developed an interest in theatre and participated in plays during her college years.

Bove was a part of a summer school program at the National Theater of the Deaf (NTD) during her senior year.

Linda met her husband, Ed Waterstreet, at this time, and later in life went on tour with NTD.

ON SCREEN

Thirty years on Sesame Street, and a Deaf character who wasn't defined by deafness

02 SESAME STREET

- 01 Linda played *Linda the Librarian* on *Sesame Street* for over thirty years (1971–2002). It is said that the character was created for her.

Linda was the first Deaf performer on the show, and her part holds the title of the “longest-running role on American television for a person with a different ability.”

Through this role, Linda introduced the public to sign language while also exposing them to issues of importance to the Deaf community.

In order to do this, she worked with the writers to ensure that Linda the Librarian be portrayed as a complex human being who shared the same hopes, challenges, relationships, setbacks and all the rest that other people deal with. She made sure her character wasn't defined by her deafness.

03 BOVE'S OTHER ROLES

- 01 Linda was also on the sitcom *Happy Days*.

She played the character Allison, who had the distinction of dating The Fonz, giving Bove another opportunity to introduce the public to sign language while portraying a Deaf individual as a part of every society, not someone to keep separate or treat differently.

- 02 Bove also was the first Deaf actress to be a soap opera regular, on a show entitled *Search for Tomorrow*.

- 03 She can also be seen on some other contemporary shows, with roles in two different *Law & Order* spin-offs and Showtime's *Weeds*.

THEATRE AND BEYOND

Two companies, two books, and a case for Deaf children learning sign language

04 THEATRE

- 01 The *Little Theatre of the Deaf* was started by Linda and some colleagues in the 1970s.

This organization focuses on communication and promoting the importance of Deaf children learning sign language.

- 02** Bove and her husband later launched the *Deaf West Theater Company* in Los Angeles in the early 1990s.

This is considered the premier sign language theatre in the United States. Deaf West has produced more than 40 plays and 4 musicals, winning more than 80 awards.

- 03** Linda has also been associated with the famous play *Children of a Lesser God*.

She starred in several productions of this well-known piece, including playing the lead on stage and appearing in the film version.

05 BEYOND THE ENTERTAINMENT FIELD

- 01** Linda wrote two books, *Sign Language Fun* and *Sesame Street Sign Language ABC with Linda Bove*, a collaboration between Sesame Street and NTD.

- 02** She has won several honors as well: an award from **AMITA**, the Italian-American women's organization, for television work; an Honorary Degree from Gallaudet; the **Bernard Bragg Artistic Achievement Award**; and a **Media Advocacy Award**.

Success in advancing the civil, human and linguistic rights of the American Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community through the use of the media and social networking.

MEDIA ADVOCACY AWARD CITATION FOR LINDA BOVE

06 NAMES AND TERMS TO KNOW

NAME OR TERM	WHY IT MATTERS IN THIS STORY
Linda the Librarian	Her <i>Sesame Street</i> character, said to have been created for her, and the longest-running such role on American television.
Ed Waterstreet	Her husband, whom she met at the NTD summer program, and her co-founder at Deaf West.
Little Theatre of the Deaf	The company Linda and colleagues started in the 1970s, focused on Deaf children learning sign language.
Deaf West Theater Company	The Los Angeles company launched in the early 1990s, considered the premier sign language theatre in the United States.
AMITA	The Italian-American women's organization that gave Linda an award for her television work.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Answer in complete sentences using what you read

07 WRITTEN RESPONSE

01 What degree did Linda pursue at Gallaudet, and what pulled her toward theatre instead?

02 Linda worked with the *Sesame Street* writers on how her character was written. What did she insist on, and why does that matter?

03 Name two firsts Linda achieved as a Deaf performer on television.

04 What is Deaf West, and what has it accomplished since the early 1990s?

05 Millions of hearing children saw sign language on *Sesame Street* because of Linda. What effect do you think that had on how they understood Deaf people?

08 WHERE THIS INFORMATION COMES FROM

Great Deaf Americans (2nd ed.) Matthew Scott Moore and Robert F. Panara · Deaf Life Press, 1996

“Linda Bove: One woman’s impact on public awareness” Debbie Clason · Healthy Hearing, March 16, 2016

Linda Bove Wikipedia · en.wikipedia.org