Native American/American Indian Sign Language Guide

Black & white sign drawings and the text comes from Universal Indian Sign Language, by William Tokins (published in 1926)

The Indian Sign Language may be the first universal language produced by any people. It is a genuine Indian language of great antiquity. It has a beauty and imagery possessed by few, if any, other languages. It is the foremost gesture language that the world has ever produced.

Owing to the idiomatic form of the language, there are certain fundamental differences which must be remembered. Every interrogation is made either wholly or in part by the question sign. Instead of saying "Where are you going?" the signs would be, QUESTION, YOU, GOING. Instead of "What do you want?" the signs would be QUESTION, YOU, WANT. The sign for "question" covers the words WHAT, WHERE, WHY and WHEN. It is made to attract attention, to ask, to inquire, to examine.

In sign language it is not customary to ask "What is your name?" because it has a different way of asking this question: "What are you called?' the signs for which are QUESTION, YOU, CALLED.

Time is reckoned by the Indians as follows: Days, by nights or sleeps; months, by moons; and years, by winters. In speaking of the age of a person, or of past or future time, the general custom is to say, "So many winters."

For time of day, make sign for SUN, holding hand toward the point in the heavens where the sun is at the time indicated. To specify a certain length of time during the day, indicate space on sky over which the sun passes. Present time is expressed by Indians by the sign NOW, and also by the sign TODAY, while occasionally, for emphasis, both signs are used.

What is understood to be the first person singular, is indicated by pointing to one's- self. The plural WE is made by the signs ME and ALL. YOU, ALL, means YE; while HE, ALL means THEY. Gender is shown by adding the signs MAN or WOMAN. Past tense is shown by adding LONG TIME.

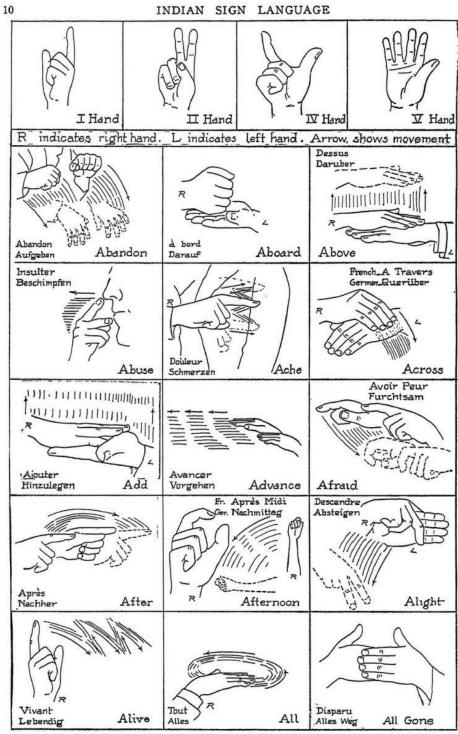
Such words or articles, as A, THE, AN, IT, etc., are not used in sign language. The syntax or sentence construction is naturally elemental and simple. The verb is not placed as with us, but generally between the subject and the object.

Sign language may be used to advantage at a distance, which the eye can reach but not the ear, and still more frequently when silence or secrecy is desired.

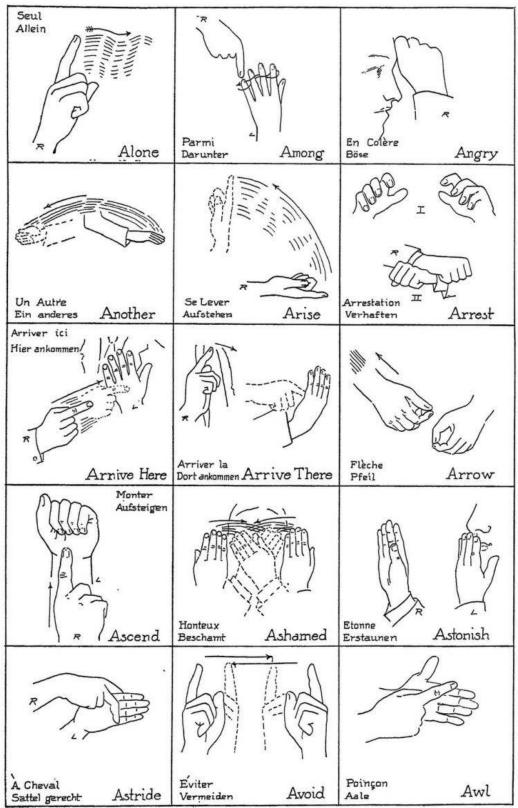
Every sign in this work is a true Indian sign. Nothing has been borrowed from the deaf or from other sources, the compiler having adhered strictly to Indian origins.

Native American Sign Language: Illustrated Guides to 400 Gestures

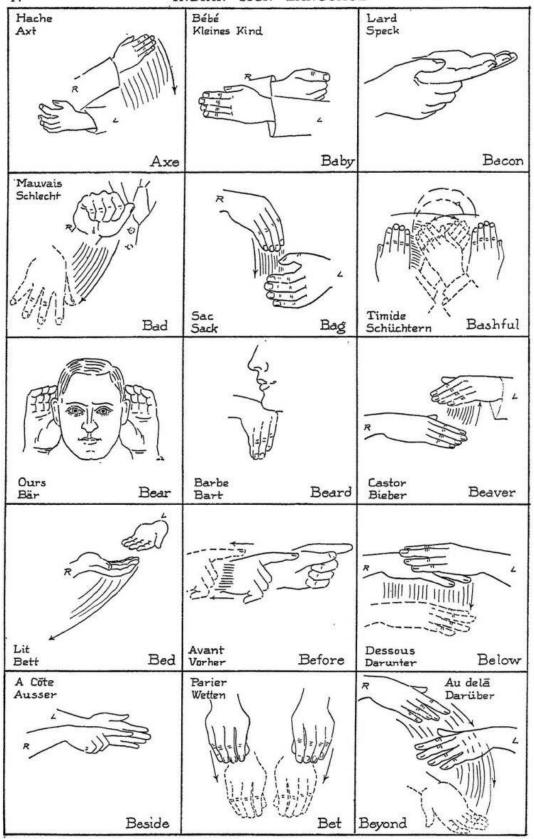
Drawing key/guide to hand gestures & words starting with English letter A R indicates right hand. L indicates left hand. Arrow shows movement.

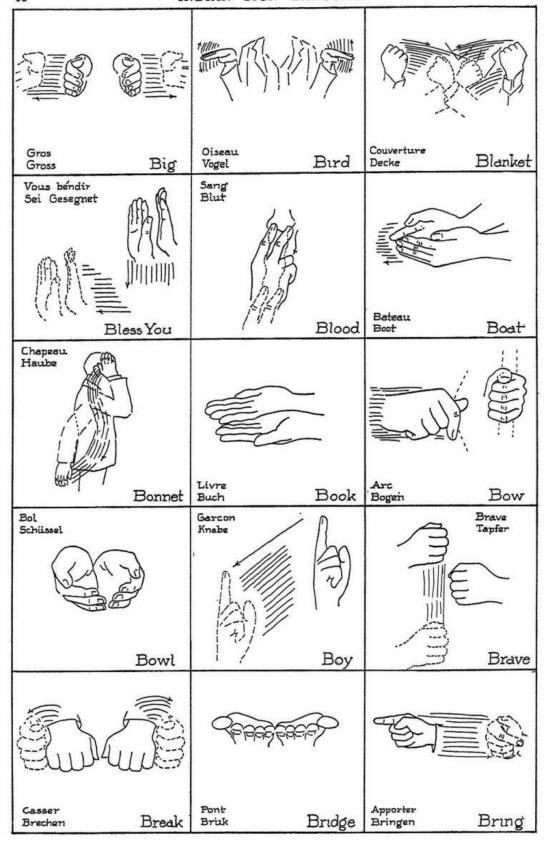


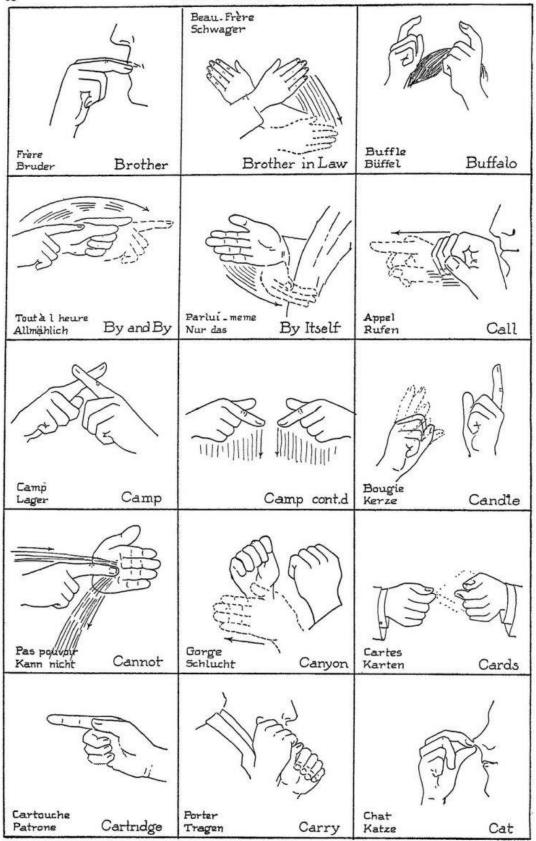
FRENCH AND GERMAN EQUIVALENTS ARE SHOWN WITH EACH ILLUSTRATION

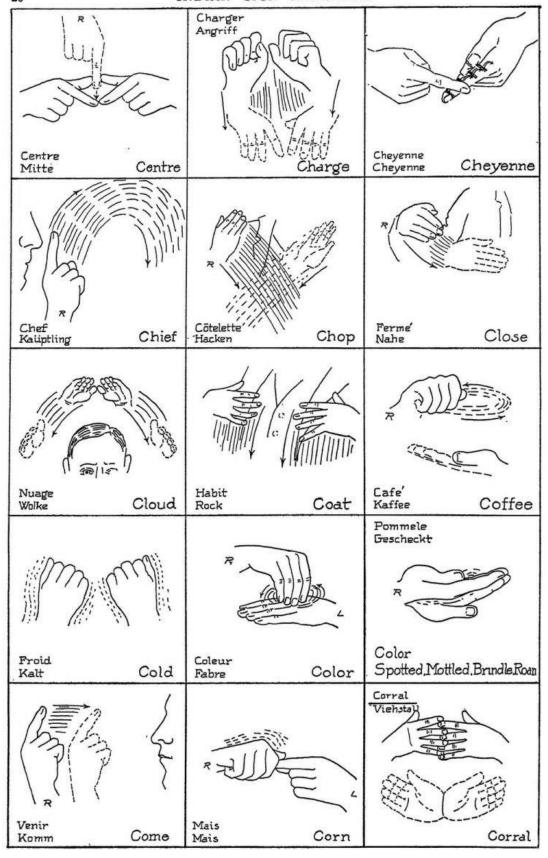


Line drawing shows beginning and dotted outline shows end of movement of hands. Students must Compare Each Diagram with Explanation Found on Opposite Page.









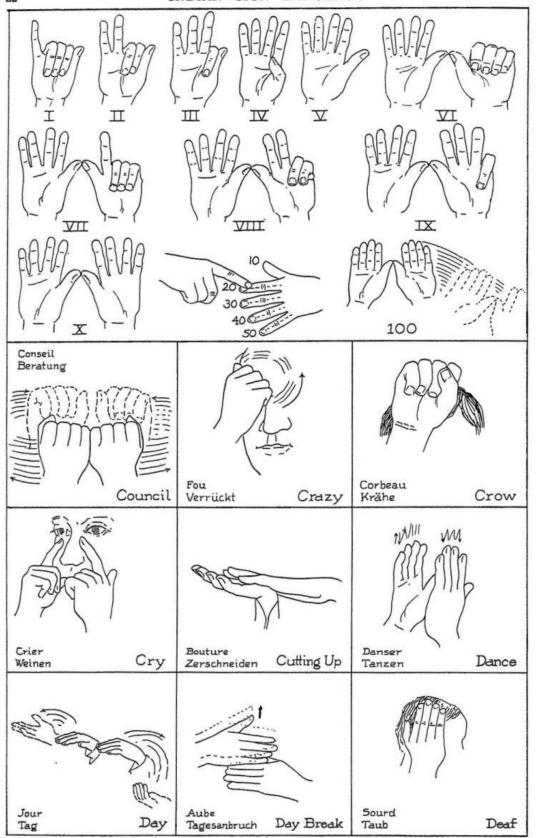
Numbers and counting in American Indian sign language

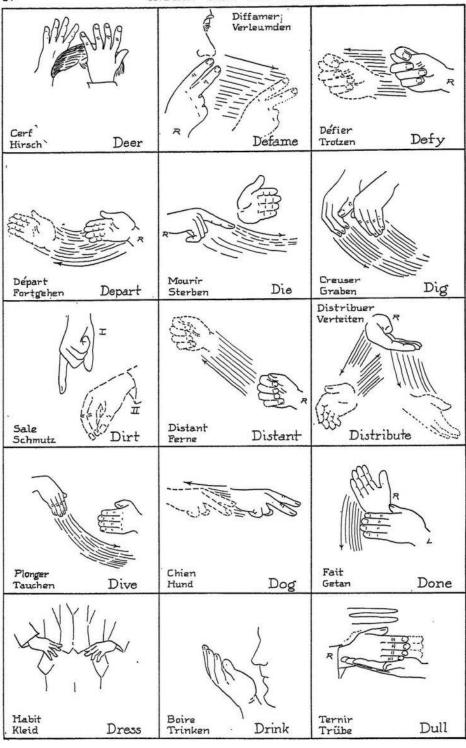
COUNTING. The system of tens is universally used by our Indians in enumeration.

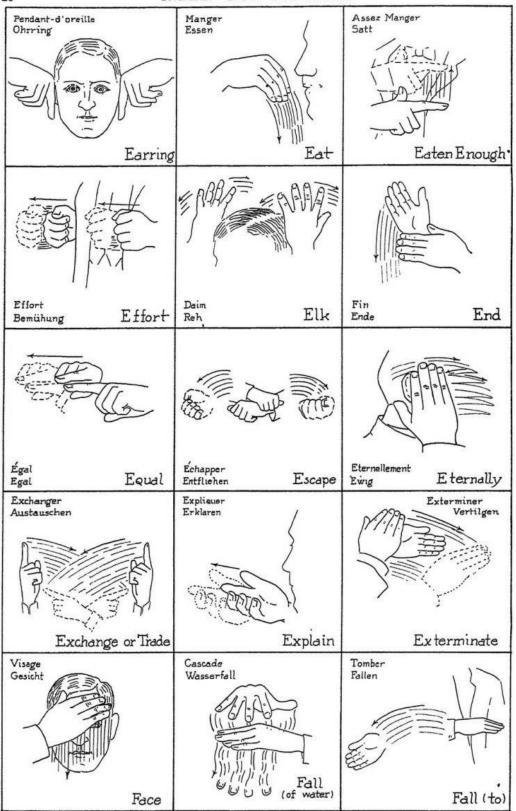
In counting from one to ten, the usual way is to hold the closed right hand in front, the back towards and about height of shoulder, edges of hand pointing up; for one, the little finger is extended; two, the third; three, second; four, index; five, thumb; keeping fingers extended, separated, and pointing upwards; six, bring the closed left hand at same height, equally advanced, and near right, and extend the thumb; seven, extend left index; eight, second finger; nine, third finger; ten, little finger.

For twenty, open and close both hands twice. Many tribes indicate a number of tens by first making the sign for ten, then hold extended left hand horizontally in front of body, and draw the tip of extended right index from base over the back of each finger to its tip, each motion of this kind representing ten and going as far as fifty; then holding the right hand in similar manner, mark the backs of its thumb and fingers with tip of left index to indicate from sixty to one hundred.

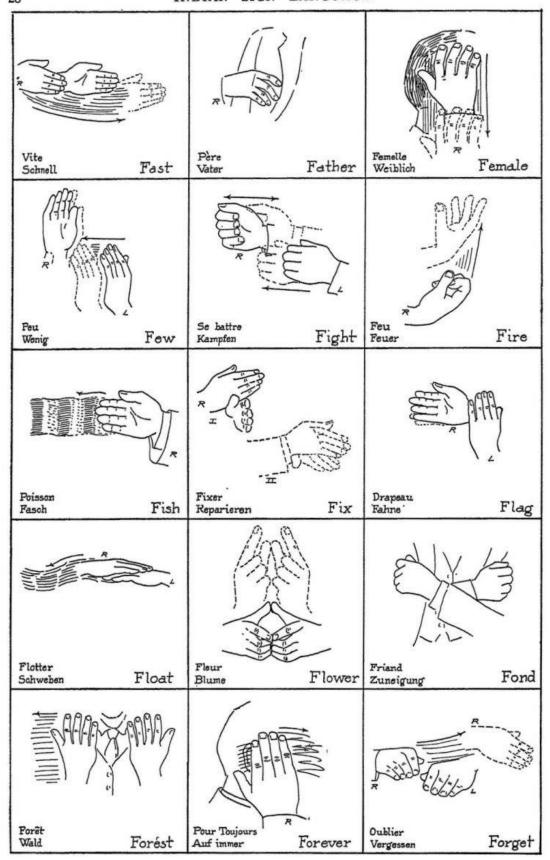
For counting hundreds, hold up both 5 hands with both thumbs touching, hands held near right shoulder; then swing in a circle across to left and downwards. A number of hundreds are counted on backs of hands same as in counting tens, first indicating that you are now dealing with hundreds.

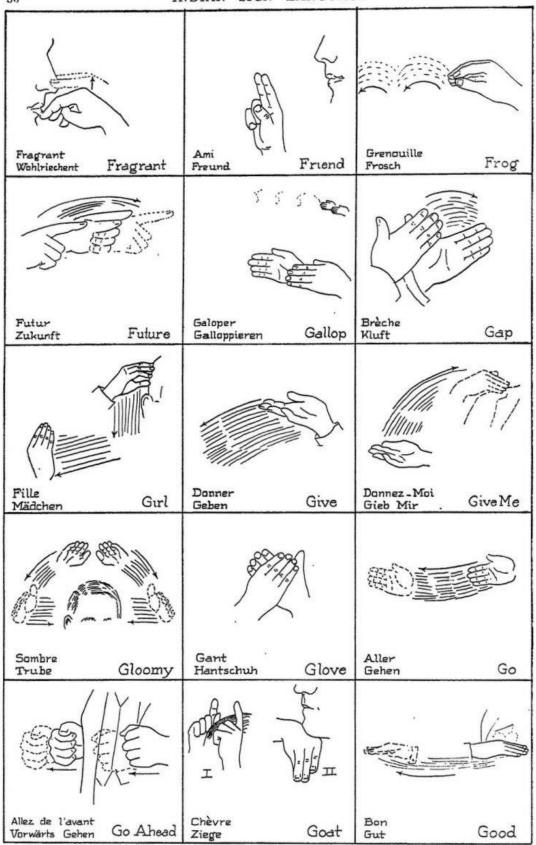


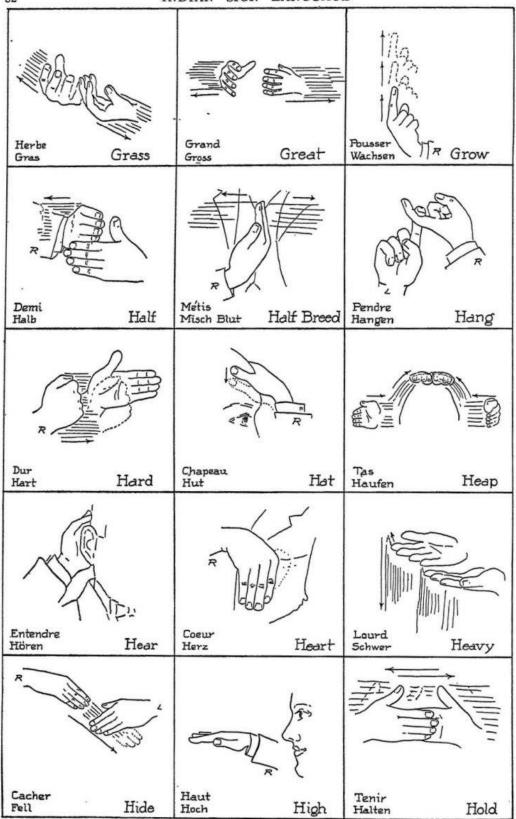




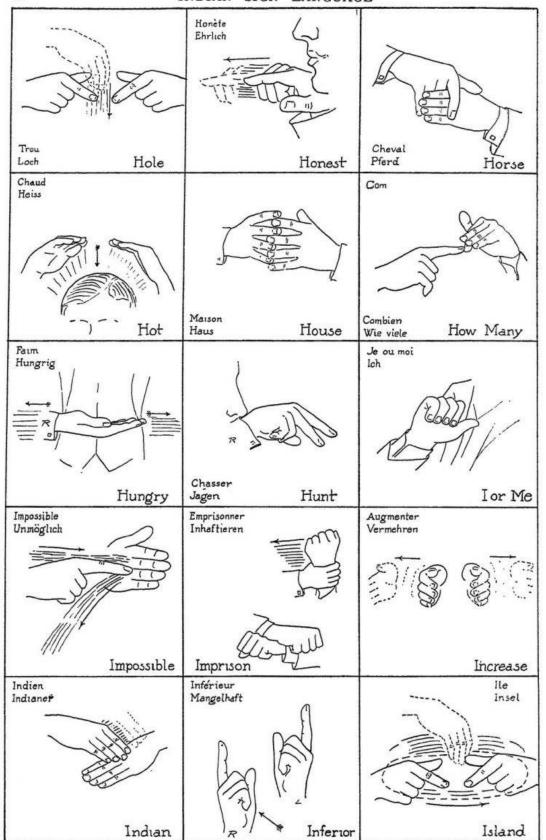
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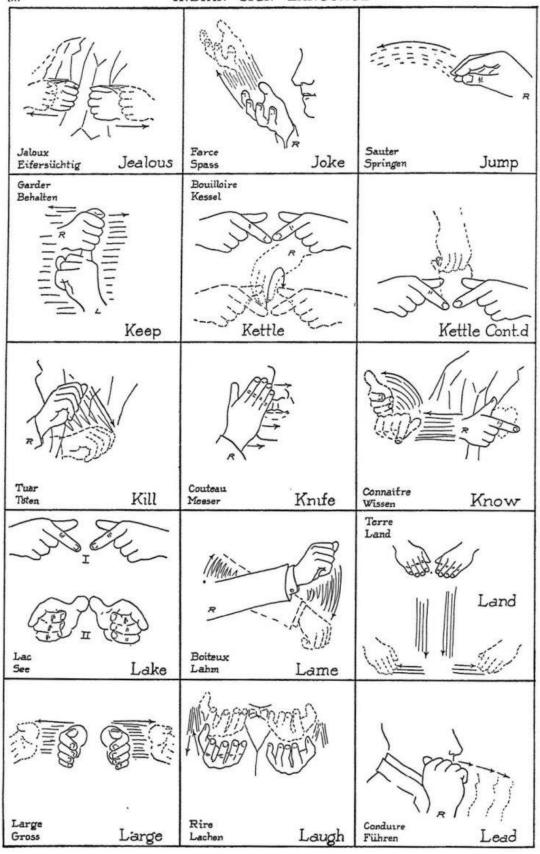


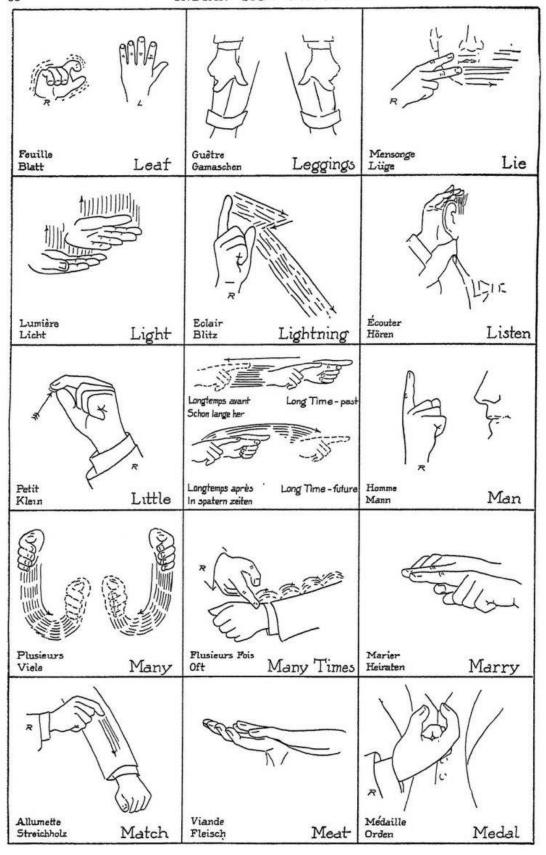




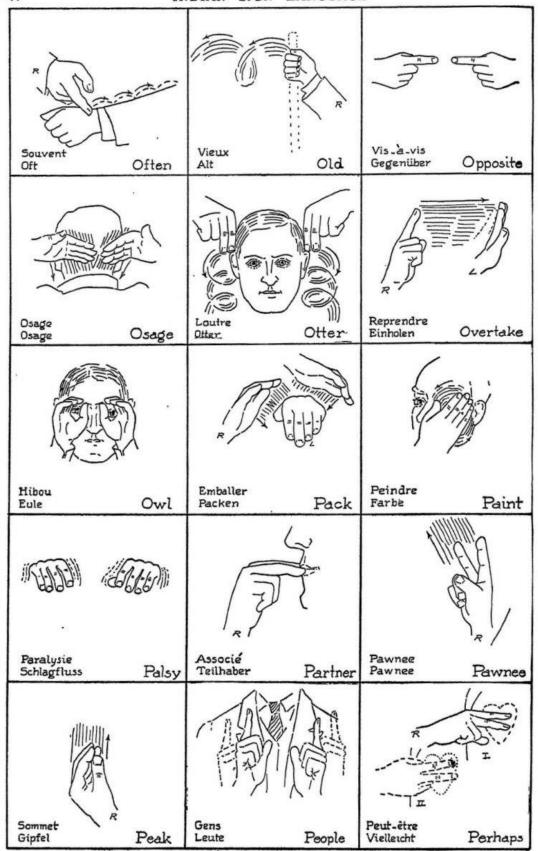
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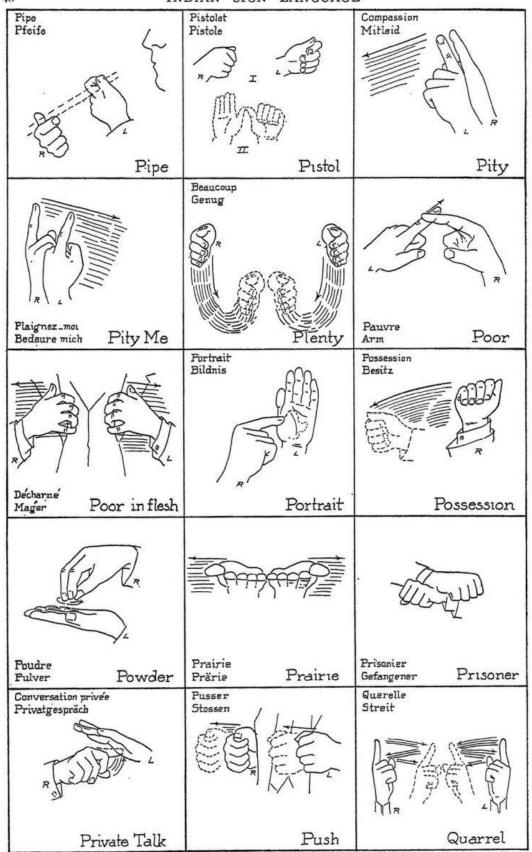


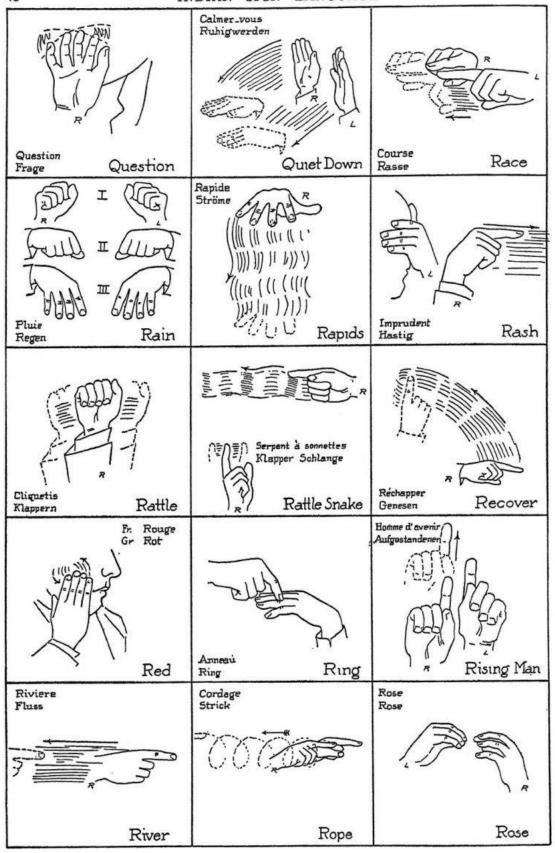


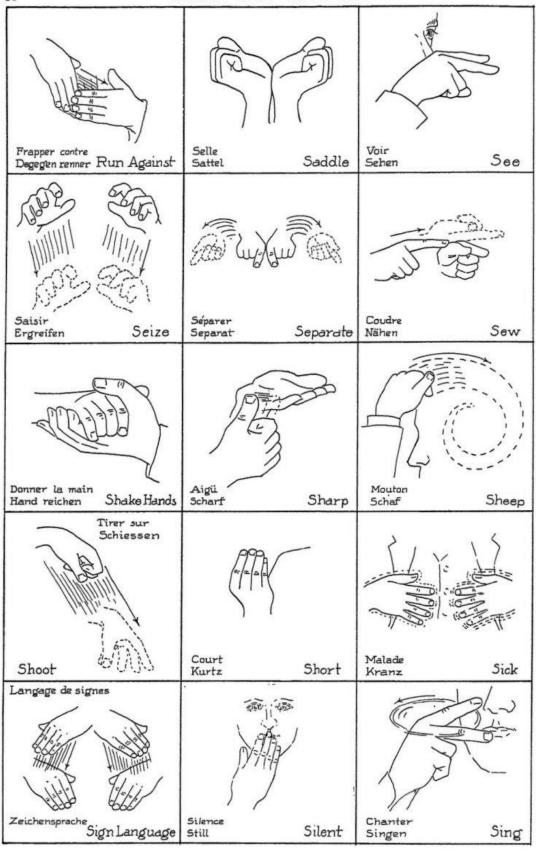


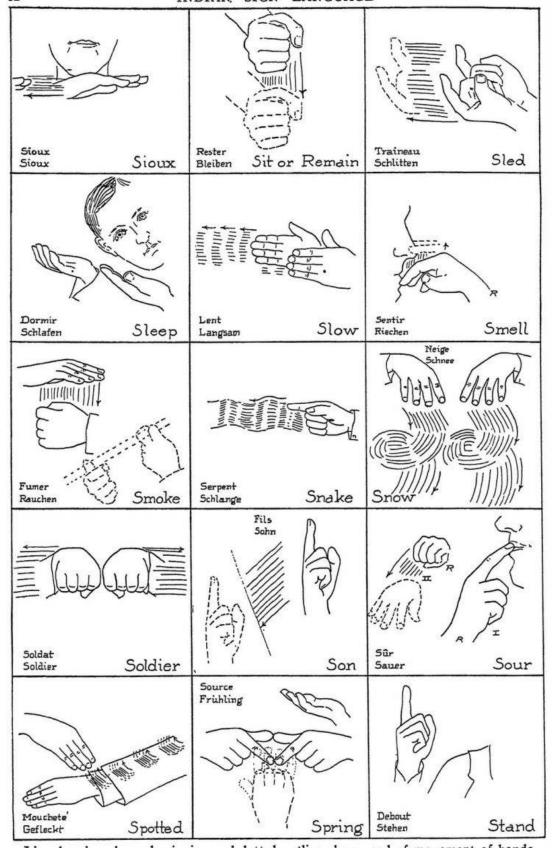


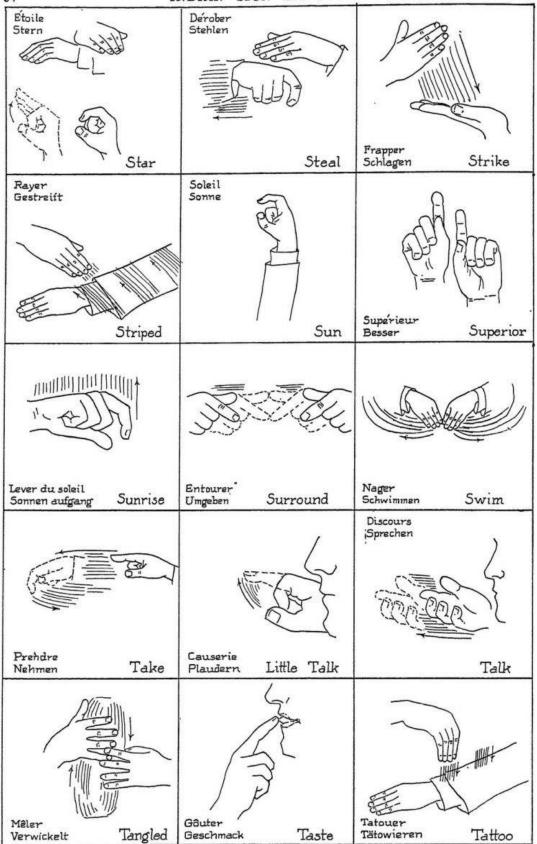


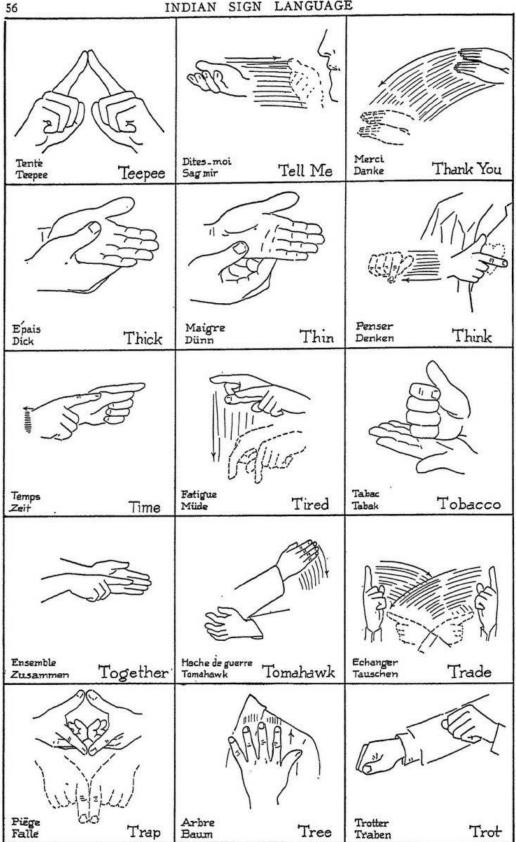












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