



DEAF  
CULTURE,  
HERITAGE AND  
DIVERSITY

Deaf Studies workshop

# Deaf Cinema

Deaf arts and literature



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- What do we know about Deaf Cinema?
- What's Deaf Cinema and its history
- Create a storyboard for a Deaf film



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## History of Deaf Cinema

# What do we know about Deaf Cinema?



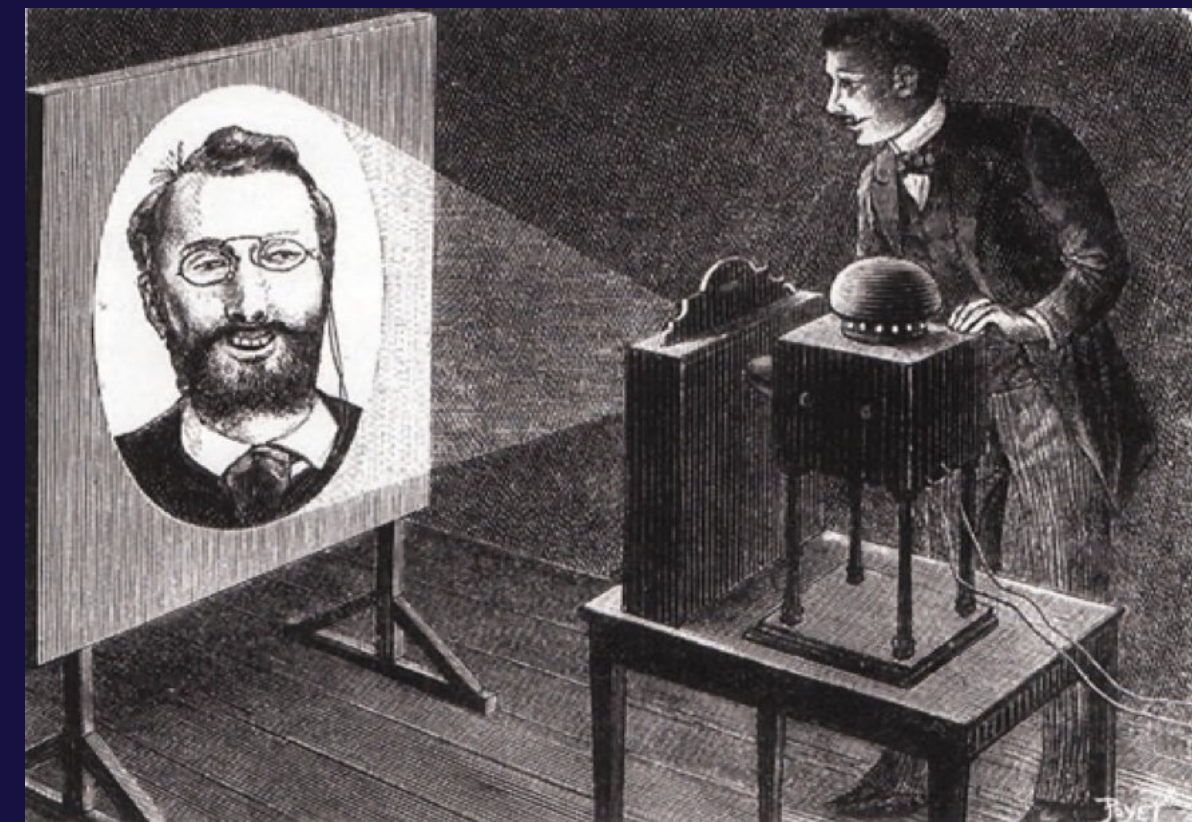
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# Before Cinema:

In 1891, Georges Demenÿ (1850–1917) created both the first-ever close-up and the first

# Phonoscope

Using his phonoscope, a device that displayed up to 24 chronophotographs, he produced a one-second sequence on a rotating glass disc.



<http://precinemahistory.net/1890.htm>

## *Talking Photographs*



The goal was to use moving images as a tool for teaching Deaf students to lipread and speak.

An early use of visual technology in Deaf education.

"Je vous aime" ("I love you")



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They used a device of their own making, the Cinématographe, which was a camera, a projector and a film printer all in one.

## December 1895

# Lumière brothers

The first to present projected moving pictures to a paying audience in Paris, France.



[La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon \(1895\), Institut Lumière,](#)  
only 45 seconds long.



1902

the **first recorded appearance of sign language** (ASL) in film:

“A Deaf girl recites the national anthem '*The Star-Spangled Banner*'”



**GEORGE W. VEDITZ**  
President of NAD  
(1904-1910)

1910-1921

The **National Association of the Deaf (NAD)** in the United States of America launched the **Motion Picture Project**, producing several short films from 1910 through 1921.

These films included **lectures, performances, and sermons**, aimed at **preserving and promoting American Sign Language (ASL)** and advocating for Deaf rights.





*The  
Preservation  
of the Sign  
Language  
(1913)*



Full video

This film aimed to defend the sign language in response to the rise of oralism following the Milan Congress.

**Film as an ideal and powerful tool for Deaf people to celebrate and preserve the heritage of sign language.**



# Silent Cinema (1910s–1920s)

During the silent film era, new job opportunities opened up for Deaf performers, thanks to their expressive visual abilities.

They often acted in films, even portraying hearing characters, and sometimes worked alongside world-renowned directors.



"Chaplin Talking on His Hand to Redmond"  
on *The Silent Worker*, 1918, Vol 30, No. 9, P. 154

## Granville Redmond (1871-1935)

He was a Deaf landscape painter, worked with Charlie Chaplin, and appeared in some of his films between 1918 and 1931.

# The advent of sound technology

## Rise of 'Talkies'

A radical change  
in the very concept  
of cinema.



Don Juan opening at Warners' Theatre © Wikipedia

Between 1927 and 1930, **sound** was introduced to cinema marking a groundbreaking shift that fundamentally changed the way films were made and experienced.

**Deaf people no longer considered suitable.**

## History of Deaf Cinema

Some Deaf individuals began using personal movie cameras to document everyday life in the Deaf community and to experiment with narrative filmmaking.



Excerpt from "Charles Krauel: Profile of a Deaf Filmmaker", by Dr. Ted Supalla. [The HeART of Deaf Culture](#)

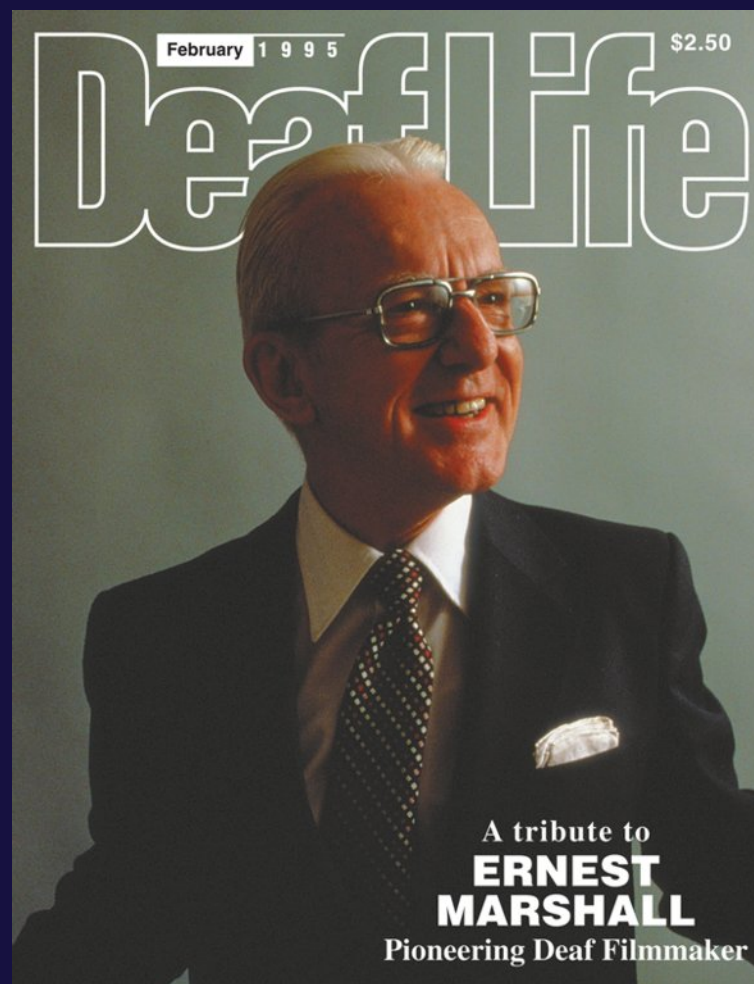
From the 1920s, development of the first Deaf film crews in Europe.

### Charles Krauel (1982-1990)

- Recording the social life of deaf people since 1925, for over 50 years.
- **Objective:** To create a portrait of the Deaf community and to preserve its culture, language, and social life.
- **Other Deaf clubs in the United States followed his example.**



*Charles Krauel: A Profile of a Deaf Filmmaker*, Dawn Sign Press <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/charleskrauel>



*Moving Pictures, Moving Hands: The Story of Ernest Marshall*, Gallaudet Archives

### Ernest Marshall (1910-1999)

- **First Deaf director** to have a crew made up of Deaf individuals and actors.
- **Showcased talented Deaf performers** using ASL, before it was even officially recognized as a language.
- **Between 1937 and 1962**, he produced 7 feature films and 4 short films, all at his own expense, directing most of them.
- **Achieved success within the Deaf community**, but remained **invisible to the hearing world.**



# Did you know?

In **1947**, **Emerson Romero** (1900–1972), a Cuban-American Deaf actor who had worked during the silent film era, developed a **pioneering technique** to make sound films **accessible to the Deaf community**.



<https://deafhistory.eu/index.php/component/zoo/item/emerson-romero>

By cutting the film and inserting **strips of text** between frames, he created the **first versions of subtitles**.

He later made these captioned films available for rental to schools and Deaf clubs in New York.

His experimental and handcrafted technique was crucial in inspiring the development of modern film subtitles. In fact, his work paved the way for the creation of the ***Captioned Films for the Deaf*** organization, founded in the United States and dedicated to producing and distributing captioned films for schools and Deaf communities.

## History of Deaf Cinema

# Deaf Cinema

- Main goals: to showcase cinematic skills, preserve sign languages, and accurately represent the Deaf community.
- Many films have been lost over time:
  - due to lack of awareness of their value,
  - or because they were recorded in outdated formats.
- Mainstream cinema (e.g., Hollywood) has often portrayed Deaf characters as objects of pity, wonder, or mysticism.
- Rarely have Deaf people been shown as ordinary, desirable, and fully realized individuals.

# Cinema Revisited through a Deaf Lens

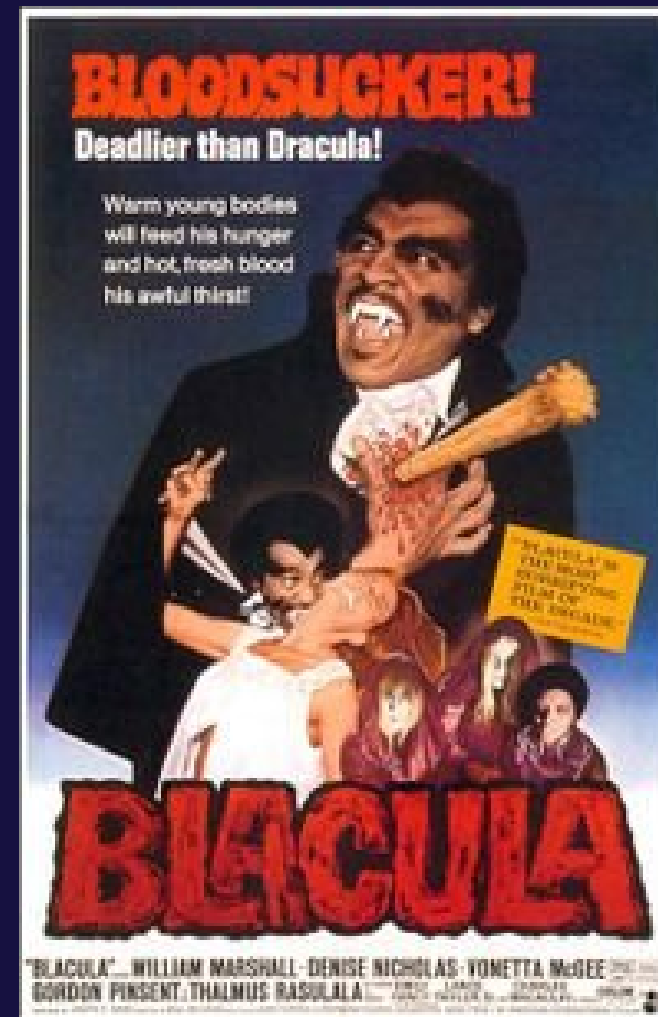
Retellings of the classic story shaped by the **cultural identities** of their creators.

The film presents a **world without hearing people**, where **communication** takes place through American Sign Language (ASL), **teletypewriters**, and visual cues like **flashing doorbells**.

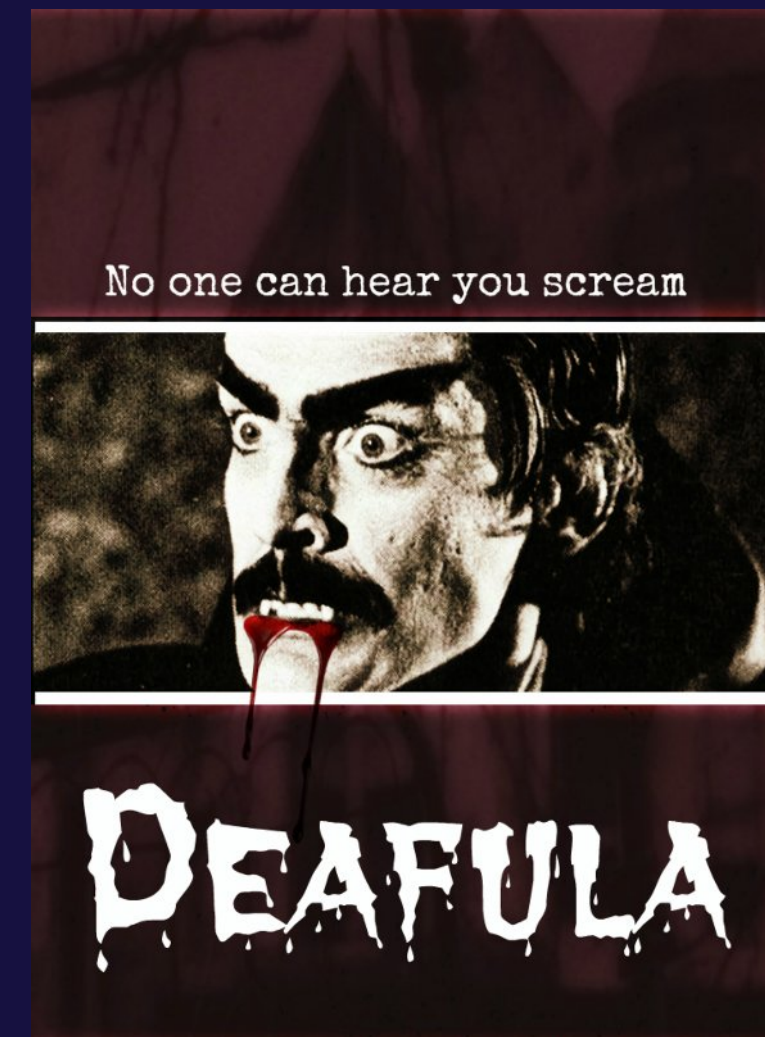
Original film



DRACULA (1931)  
TOD BROWNING



BLACULA (1972)  
WILLIAM CRAIN



DEAFULA (1975)  
PETER WOLF

Deaf filmmaking companies and festivals established and many short and full-length Deaf-made films created.

## International Deaf Film/Arts Festival



Wolverhampton, UK



Reims, France



Rochester, USA



India



Tokyo, Japan



Seattle, USA



Moscow, Russia



Los Angeles, USA

# Deaf Cinema

## Examples



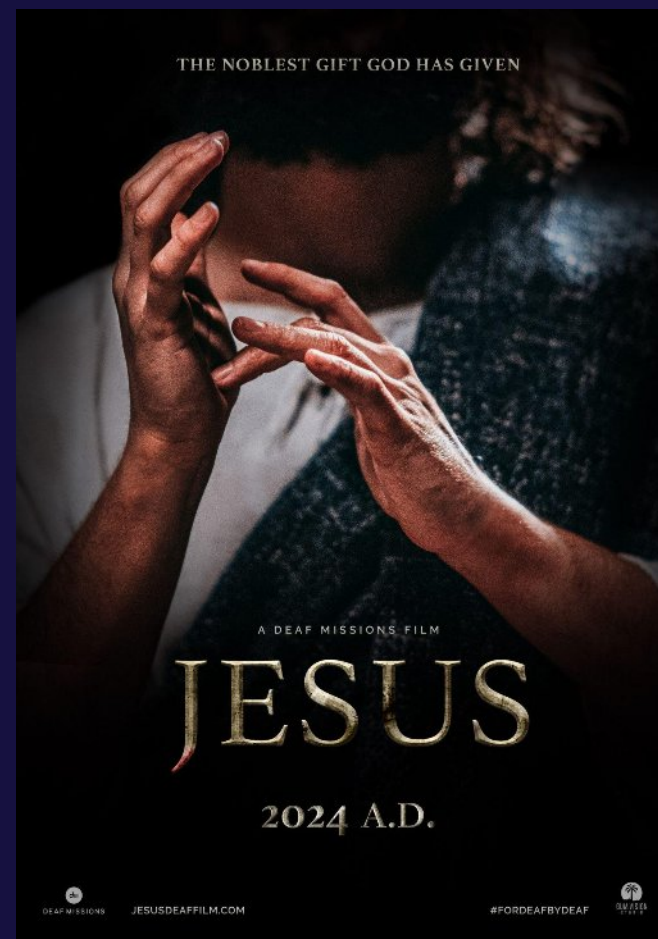
**The End**  
(T. Evans, 2011)



**Small World**  
(L. Neethling, 2016)



**Sign Gene**  
(E. Insolera, 2017)



**JESUS: a Deaf Missions film**  
(J. D. Josselyn, 2024)



**Deaf Funny**  
(C. Swinbourne, 2017)



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You can also  
screen the video  
"Deaf Filmmakers  
and Their Works."



# Challenges Facing Deaf Cinema

- Limited funding for film production
- Lack of financial and institutional support for distribution
- Inaccessibility of mainstream film schools and academies



# Create a storyboard for a Deaf film

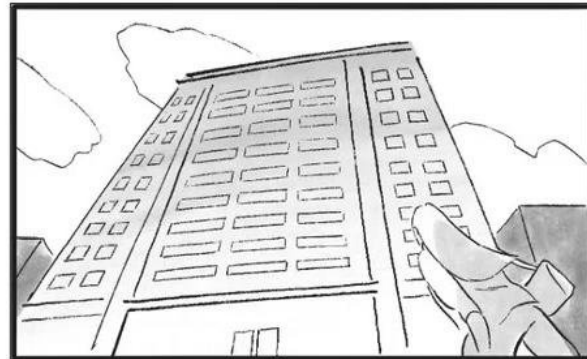
TITLE \_\_\_\_\_

PAGE \_\_\_\_ OF \_\_\_\_

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ YEAR & SUBJECT \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

EXPOSITION



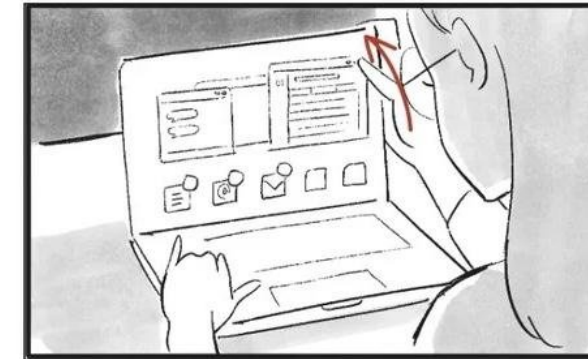
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CONFLICT



\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

RISING ACTION



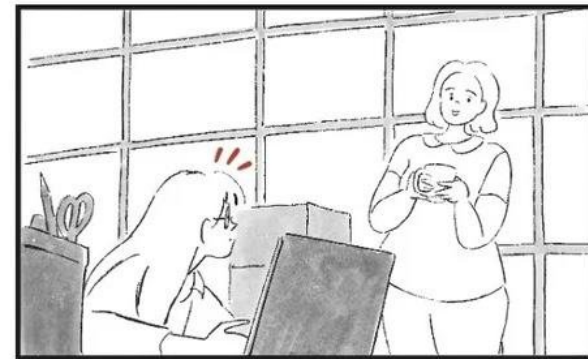
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CLIMAX



\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

FALLING ACTION



\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

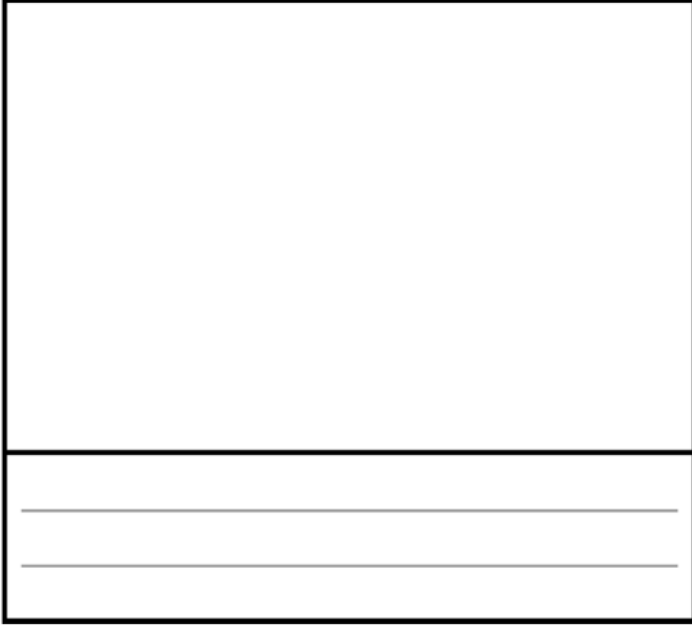
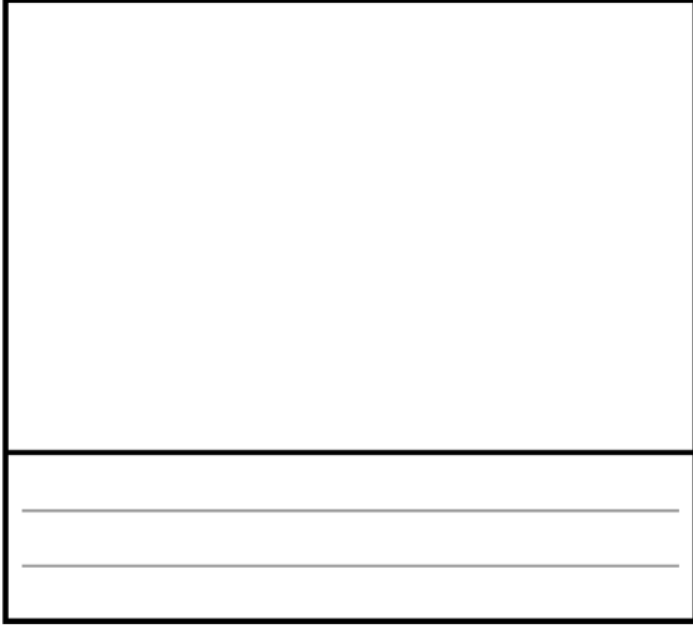
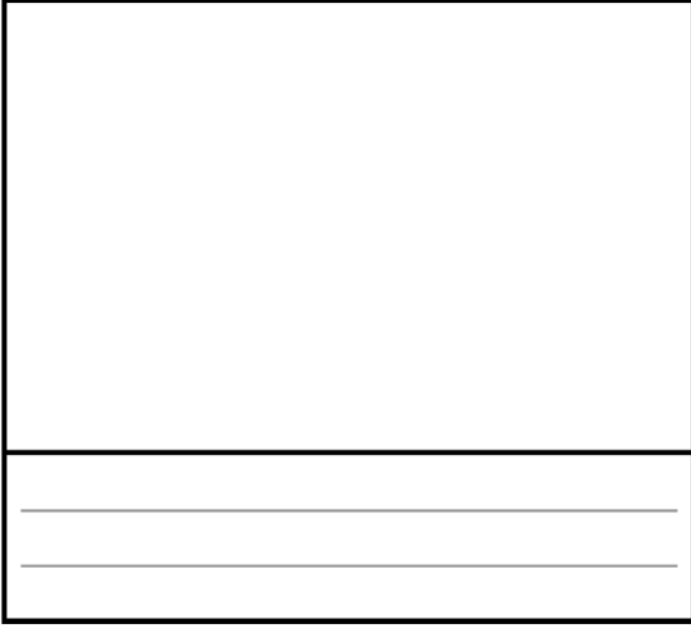
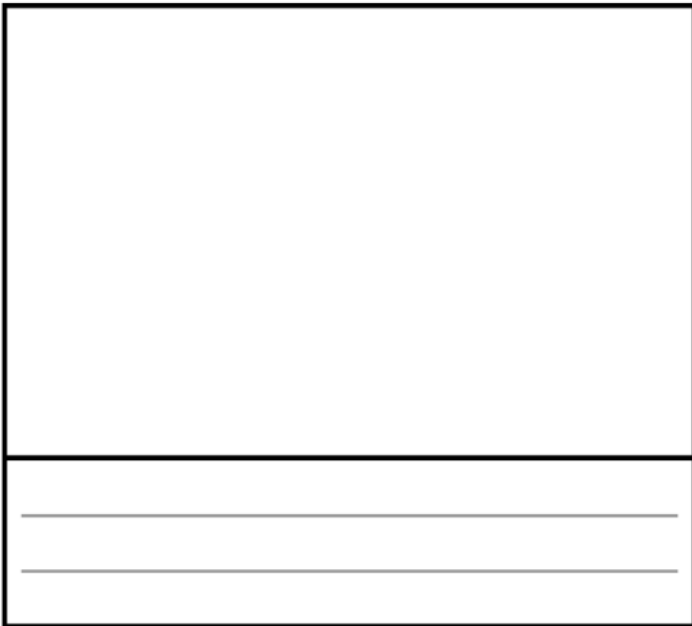
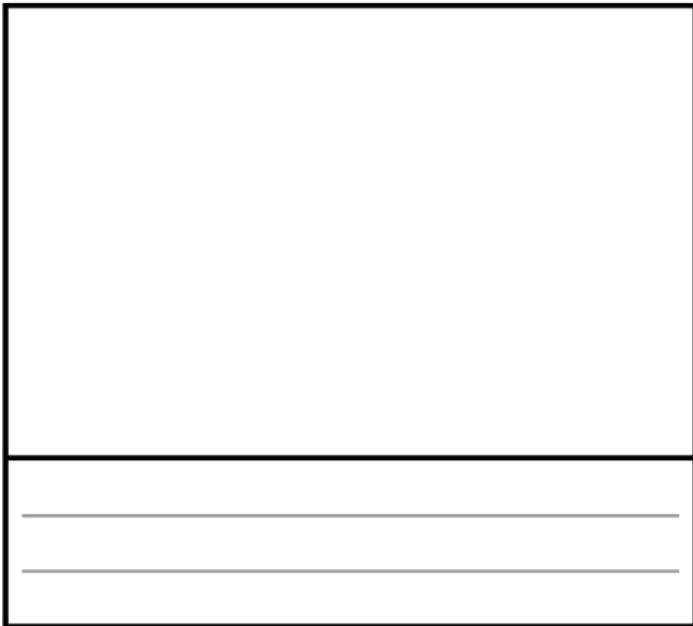
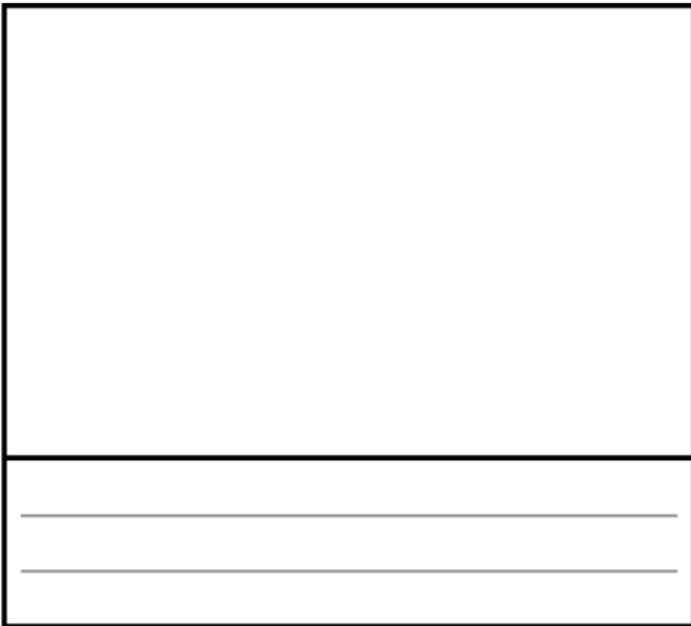
RESOLUTION



\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Create a storyboard for a Deaf film

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Name of Shot:** \_\_\_\_\_

Leading role



Antagonism



Obstacles



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# Contact

 <https://deafstudies.eu/>

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**TURKOOIS**



**Innosign**

**Witaf**  
Seit 1865 im Dienste der Gehörlosen

  
equalizent



ISTITUTO DEI SORDI  
DI TORINO