>> Tatiana Lee: Welcome to our series, examining best practices in deaf and ASL representation in children's animation. I am Tatiana Lee, RespectAbility's Hollywood inclusion associate, as an individual with spinal bifida, I've had my privilege along with my colleague Lauren Applebaum and our board member, Delbert Whetter consulting on a variety of projects. Helping executives ensure that their representation of us is authentic and avoids any pitfalls in the process. Today we'll take a look at Disney Channel's Emmy Award nominated series "Big City Greens" tomorrow at 6:00 p.m. Eastern, 3:00 p.m. Pacific Standard Time, we'll be back with round two with the team of DreamWorks' "Madagascar A Little Wild", both of these shows ensured authenticity by hiring a deaf-lead team of ASL consultants. This conversation will include a clip from the episode. It lasts one hour and we have time for participants Q&A at the end, if you would like to view ASL interpreter in a large screen, we invite you to pin his video, which will spotlight the video throughout the entire panel. In addition, we have live captioning that is available in this Zoom app by clicking on the CC button or via web, we have posted that link in the chat box. We will be taking questions from you during the second half of the panel. So please hold your questions to the Q&A box to do so. For today's webinar, we are highlighting the quiet place, the "Quiet Please" episode of "Big City Greens", the Green family visits the city library, hoping to find a book that will spark Cricket's interest in reading, but they quickly run a foul of a strict eerie librarian, determined to keep the library a quiet place, she threatens to throw them out if they make any sound. So they must communicate through gestures and sign language. RespectAbility's board member, Delbert Whetter, who is a deaf film producer and consultant, along with deaf actor and filmmaker and ASL dialogue coach Jevon Whetter, and Justin Maurer as ASL interpreter, who is a CODA or a child of a deaf adult, consulted on this episode, learn from these ASL consultants as well as "Big City Greens" creator and executive producers, Chris and Shane Houghton, and how these teams work together to bring about authentic representation of ASL. Before we show a clip, let's pose a question to Chris and Shane Houghton. Chris and Shane, welcome.

>> Shane Houghton: Hey, thank you. Thanks for having us.

>> Tatiana Lee: No problem. Thank you so much for being here. So can you preview this episode for us? Why did you decide to incorporate ASL into this episode and in these characters?

>> Shane Houghton: Yeah, definitely. So "Big City Greens" is about this country family that moves from their farm into the city, and they're constantly learning things and kind of fish out of water. So in every episode we kind of go somewhere new and where the Greens can learn something new. And this episode, we took them to a library and the tone of the show, it's very humorous, but we like to push the kind of reality level to a heightened reality. So we have this episode where they go to the library. They're trying to find Cricket a book to read, and Cricket is a bit of a hyperactive kid who has a hard time reading. And so he's looking for the perfect book, and in it, we pay homage to the movie, "A Quiet Place", which is a favorite horror movie of ours. And in it there's monsters who are attracted to sound. We kind of do the same thing, but with librarians in a library. Because of that, we needed a way to communicate silently and to have our characters be able to figure things out and move the story forward, but communicating without sound and only through a visual medium. So obviously we turned to some ASL consultants to help us out figure out the best way to use American Sign Language in animation. There was a couple of challenges, like a lot of the characters, all the characters have only four fingers instead of five. And so that was a little tricky, but we worked with these wonderful ASL consultants to help us figure out this episode.

>> Tatiana Lee: Thank you so much. That is so awesome. So without further ado, roll the clip.

[CLIP]

>> Tatiana Lee: That was so awesome. I love that. That was so cool. I really enjoyed that. So Chris and Shane, you both before the clip talked about a little bit about your inspiration and how it was inspired by one of your favorite films, "The Quiet Place". So, and you brought a team of ASL consultants for this episode. Why was it important for you to do so?

>> Shane Houghton: Chris, would you like to take this one?

>> Chris Houghton: Sure. Yeah. That was something that Disney was a really great about. They even, I think as we were talking about this, they were like, oh great. We'll get you ESL consultants. We'd worked with other types of consultants through Disney, but never so involved. It's usually we've done it takes place in a big city. So we've had instances where, a character might speak Korean or a different language or something. And we'll use a consultant just to like verify that the translation is correct, but this required a deeper dive. And so the execs that we work with at Disney were really great and connected to Del and Jevon who we'll meet in just a minute, but they came in and we had like a four hour period of going over everything in detail. And I'm so glad we did it, I think because it was the first time we were all going through this as a crew and everything. I'm glad that Disney had the infrastructure and the connections set up already to just say, you're gonna want these guys in the room to just talk to. So it was great. I'm glad it was set up that way, because I think the alternative would have been us like going on YouTube and like searching for random videos on ASL and probably getting it horribly wrong. So it was great to be able to do it right.

>> Shane Houghton: Yeah. Like Chris mentioned in the past, any consultants that we've worked with, we don't even know them. It's like, we'll send out an email. Disney will route it to the person who is consulting, tell us like, oh, this is how you would pronounce that in Japanese or whichever language we're trying to use, but we never meet them. We don't know them. And for something like this, we really needed to figure out ways to interpret the intention that we wanted to get across. And so we needed a lot more of a dialogue, a lot more of like a working relationship back and forth, which is why it was so nice to have all three of these guys come in and work with us physically in a room together.

>> Tatiana Lee: Nice. Thank you so much. That's so exciting just to hear about all the different things that goes behind the scenes and the work that goes into creating something like this and how nuanced it is with having ASL. How do you feel it differed a little bit from other projects you've worked on and this in terms of visuals?

>> Chris Houghton: Go ahead, Shane.

>> Shane Houghton: Well, just in terms of visuals, the big thing was ASL is a visual language. So we basically needed heavy reference. Everything in animation is drawn, every movement, every different gesture position, everything has to be figured out. So it was so helpful to have these consultants come in. We filmed them from different angles, signing the lines that we wanted at full speed and half speed. So our artists could really break it down and see exactly what is every finger doing. Is there a turn of the wrist here? We wanted to get all the small intricate motions correct. Because then we have to replicate them with pen and paper to try to figure out how to get this visually into the show. So that was definitely a different process for us. And again, it was just super helpful to have these guys in, to be able to basically ask questions are you doing something with your finger there? Or like, how fast does that need to be? Because timing is the other half of it. It's not just the getting the correct, like hand shapes drawn correctly, but it's also the timing of how the hands or face moves. And we want to make sure we got all that correct.

>> Tatiana Lee: Nice. I love all the intentionality and all the things that went into all the little details. So kudos. So now I want to welcome Delbert, Jevon and Justin. So can I have you guys join us in on this conversation? And my next question is for Delbert. So Delbert, you have more than two decades of experience working on animated feature films from the business affairs side of the animation industry to executive producer. What was your experience been like working on big city, working with the "Big City Greens" team and how has it evolved over the course of your collaboration?

>> Delbert Whetter: This is Delbert speaking. So coming into work with this team I knew that we needed to be in the same room with the "Big City Greens" team, because I understood that the ASL references just alone aren't quite enough. You really need to be in the room to discuss the intentions, what the animators need specifically and understand their workflow as well, how the team works. It that can really help them get what they need a lot quicker without having to follow up again and again, and go back and forth later on, for example, the directors being in the room and the showrunners as well, being in the room. It's nice to explain who the characters in the scene are to really understand their relationship and also how it's going to be framed. And also their personalities are important also because that can really change what signs that would be used. And so it's really important to give the team specifically exactly what they need. And it's really hard to do that, going back and forth over email. It's important to be in the room altogether at once to really discuss it then and make sure that they get everything they needed.

>> Tatiana Lee: Nice. And it seems like you guys being in a room together created some magic. So I think that is so important for people who are ASL, who use ASL and who are deaf and hard of hearing, or just people with disabilities in general, being in the room where the magic happens to get that authenticity. So thank you for sharing that with us. Jevon, you've worked on a variety of children's storytelling video projects as an educator. How is it different when working on a show aimed for children versus adults?

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon speaking. Well, most importantly is the target audience. And so I believe you really have to know who the target audience is. And so knowing that the target audience is children, you have to keep the signs simple, to really avoid extremely complicated signs and really focus on those children. So it's really easy to understand those signs. And so I was a performer in the past at the National Theater for the Deaf and Deaf West Theater. And I teach drama as well. And so I teach at California State University Northridge, I teach ASL drama there. And so when you have children performing, it's important to be extremely clear with your signs to keep them easy to understand. And so with these characters having four fingers, we tried to avoid a lot of marked hand shapes and keep it unmarked, those unmarked hand shapes. And so that requires some creativity and some improvisation as well to make those modifications, to make really make it work. And I think it worked out extremely well. And "A Quiet Place" is one of my favorite films too. So it was such a pleasure. I had such a great time working on this.

>> Tatiana Lee: That's awesome. I love that. And I just love how inspiration for one project that had authentic representation and it could lead to so many other things like this. So I think that is so cool. So, sorry, So this is the second children's animation project that this trio has worked on together. Delbert, please talk about the process you utilize to help production teams to ensure authenticity?

>> Delbert Whetter: This is Delbert speaking. So one thing that I've noticed all along is that it's extremely important to have a team there to work together, work together on the signs. you can't see yourself while you're signing. You need someone who's sitting across the room who's watching and someone who's skilled in ASL can say, hey, would you mind repeating that again? Because there might be a sign that's out of frame. And so the signer might not realize that, and sometimes the shift of where your shoulders are faced and your hands might be blocked. And so you might want to shoot it at a different angle or maybe a little bit slower, and that can really make sure the animators get exactly what they need. And that's one of the biggest parts of our learning process, as well as learning those, those nuances. And it's really important to have the team there in order to help that team get what they need. And also everybody throwing in and brainstorming ideas can really help figure out the best translation because there's of course, many different ways to sign one specific line of dialogue. And so the best way to do that, it's really nice to debate and go back and forth. That's really helpful. Justin, it's great working with him as well, to understand from a hearing perspective or a child of a deaf adults perspective and our deaf perspective. So we just worked together really well.

>> Tatiana Lee: I love that. I love that. I think that's so awesome. So Jevon, like many animated characters, the Green family is illustrated with just four fingers on each hand. Many ASL signs use more than four fingers. How did you work with the team to adapt the script to words that worked for sign language.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon speaking. Well, there's different deaf people out there, all over the world, right? And so some deaf people, just one example, someone might have a broken arm and have to use just one hand to sign. Sometimes you might be carrying a baby in one arm and signing with your other hand. And so we live with it constantly and some of us have physical limitations, but we're still able to communicate. And one finger doesn't cut off everything. So we looked at that coming from that perspective. And again, I guess my point is, is that with four fingers, we can avoid the marked hand shapes, which is very specific. So we were creative and thought of different ways to say the same translation just in a different way. And that has really helped by having many years of experience on the stage and as a teacher and dialogue coach. And so you sometimes have to think out of the box and one challenge was in this particular episode, they have signs as well as gestures in the same episodes, which are two completely different things. So gestures are more of like what would a mime would do in a performance, right? Or like when you play a game of charades with friends and some people don't know signs. And so you have to keep that in mind of what the story is. And there's one character that knows sign language. And so we had to combine gestures and signs in the same episode. And so it's not exactly black and white. You really have to think of the balance and find that. And so with four fingers, it wasn't really a problem for us. It wasn't a big deal. And I think that we just figured it out and we made really made it work. I hope.

>> Tatiana Lee: Awesome. I love that. It shows that you can-

>> Delbert Whetter: This is Delbert, I'd like to answer, is that okay? This is Delbert. So I had one thing I'd like to add. I really think that maybe when we started this, this team may not have realized that deaf people also are fluent in gestures because that's how deaf people communicate with the hearing world and hearing people who aren't fluent in sign language. And so we're really masters of gesturing and visual communication. And so our team realized that, and we can really take of that and throw out ideas that might be good or fit a certain situation. And so that really helps the creative process is getting the right gestures in there that, that deaf people actually would use. And it's really helped in that way, not just ASL, but gesturing too.

>> Tatiana Lee: Awesome. And I really feel like watching that so many more people are gonna be picking up ASL and gestures and things like that. And we're gonna have so many more people are able to communicate in sign language, which is just so awesome. So Justin, we talked about this earlier as a child of a deaf adult, you bring a different perspective to the team while it's important that any hearing ASL consultants should always partner with a deaf consultant. What does a hearing consultant specifically add as a member of the team?

>> Justin Maurer: Sure. I think, well, I'm a child of a deaf adult. My mom, my stepdad and my aunt are deaf and there's a lot of social media groups with CODA, a child of deaf adults. And they post videos. Like one example would be their deaf parent may not have changed the battery in the smoke alarm for like three years. And so every time they're over for Thanksgiving, it's like, hey guys, come on, you still haven't changed the battery. the beeping in the background or little things like that, the deaf people may not even realize that they subject their hearing children to. Another one was deaf parents arguing. And the child turned off the lights so that their parents couldn't argue anymore. Little things like that. And I think especially for comedy or for animation to have that CODA perspective is great. But to work with the deaf team, even though ASL was my first language, deaf people, it's their native language. I could choose to leave the deaf community at any time. I mean, obviously I'm not going to, but I could leave the deaf community and never use ASL again. But it's deaf people's natural native language that they use to communicate. And so you need to have a native speaker on your team. It's not the same thing as, as being an interpreter or being, or having some kind of fluency because these having a deaf team members, they'll always think of things that would never come to mind or just that gut instinct of does this feel right? Or does this feel realistic or does this feel appropriate? And having Jevon's years of stage experience and Delbert's eyes, he has like an eagle eye and he is always there. And if his expression is like, I can just tell he has something he's thinking about, like, all right, come on. Just, I think that quest for excellence and to get it exactly right. That's why we're there. So we want it to get it as close to perfect as possible. And it's also was a pleasure to work with two sets of siblings on this project. I think that might be a first for me, which is really, really cool. And so what a pleasure all around.

>> Tatiana Lee: That is awesome. I love stories that come out of production projects and stuff and where all the magic happens. So Shane, we talked a little bit about how "Quiet Please" episode paid homage to "A Quiet Place", how did this film influence the development of this episode?

>> Shane Houghton: Yeah, so we wanted to do an episode every once in a while, we'd come up with new ideas for like, wouldn't that be cool to see? And it usually just starts there. And our story editor, the head writer on the show said he would love to do an episode where the challenge was to write as little dialogue as possible. So basically to have kind of a quiet episode, and we started just talking about that premise and like, where would that take place? A library would be really fun, "cause you're supposed to be quiet there. You gotta either be quiet and not talk a lot or not talk at all. And as we were kind of like figuring out the beats to the story and figuring out how our characters fit into this, we kind of realized some of the structure of the episode just kind of fit with the structure of a quiet place. And we just thought that was really funny to take a very intense horror movie, but play it like a family sitcom. And so once we kind of made that connection, we kind of tied it all together and there's plenty of references to "A Quiet Place" in the episode "Quiet Please". But hopefully just enough to avoid any potential lawsuits.

>> Tatiana Lee: Nice. That's funny. That's funny. So yeah. Check out the episode and see what other kinds of things that you may or may not find in the episode and let us know. So Jevon, I know this is one of your favorite thriller movies in recent years. How did "Big City Greens" really stay true to the spirit of "A Quiet Place" in terms of authenticity?

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon speaking. So starting with the horror movie perspective, I was so impressed with how authentic this was, or it was as far as the sign language went because before, when you see actors learn sign language to actually and ask for the production to cast a deaf actor as well, that was a big plus. They didn't avoid dealing with deaf people and just cast a hearing person as a deaf person. So a lot of times, so obviously this production was brave, it was fearless, it was authentic. I felt that the film really well-represented the deaf community. And so when we saw this homage to that film, I was so thrilled to see it, it really was the right choice. If you chose another movie, it might be cringe-worthy, but this one was just right. And it was just all systems go. I was really glad that you guys chose that film to play homage to.

>> Delbert Whetter: This is Delbert, could I add something?

>> Tatiana Lee: Mm-hmm.

>> Delbert Whetter: One advantage of having, of working with the team -- Like I explained before, as far as gestures to taking advantage of deaf people's experience with gestures, another advantage with authenticity is discussing the hearing aid sounds. And so we actually were able to show our hearing aids to the "Big City Greens" team and the types of noises that it makes. And so they were trying to replicate that, my hearing aid wasn't quite loud enough. And so my older brother Jevon took his hearing aid off and it just made that horrible feedback noise and it screeched even more. So it was really, it was perfect. And so my older brother's always trying to one up me.

>> Tatiana Lee: Nice, actually that was gonna be my next question. I was gonna ask you about the hearing aid moment.

>> Jevon Whetter: Sorry, I've a turbo hearing aid, sorry.

>> Tatiana Lee: [Laughs] It is all good. So we're gonna talk about some behind the scenes moment. And one of those moments was the hearing aid and how that collaboration came about. Did you want to add anything else to it, Delbert or anything about that moment?

>> Delbert Whetter: That hearing aid moment is one of my favorite moments from our collaboration. I think it was really funny and it was such a great example of when you have authentic consultants from those communities, you can actually get some unexpected benefits sometimes. And that's actually what happened. Jevon, did you want to add anything? Did you have a favorite moment?

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon, that hearing aid was just really hilarious because there was no one really knew that the hearing aid makes what that screeching noise or that feedback sounds like. And so if anyone out there has grandparents or older uncles or aunts that wear hearing aids, ask them to take it off, then you might understand what I mean by that as it makes this feedback noise and it's very annoying. And so I really liked my audiologist. And so I asked my audiologist to get it to max volume so I can control it. And I'm pretty much deaf. So I have nothing to lose.

>> Tatiana Lee: That's funny. I love when projects do little things to like show that some people may get and some people may not get.

>> Delbert Whetter: This is Delbert. If I may add something quickly, just one thing that I was really impressed with Chris and Shane and their team, they really wanted to, they really wanted to tip their hats to respect the deaf community. And so they were kind of looking for inside jokes or slang that they might be able to use and were so willing and motivated to include something like that. That might be a little wink to the deaf community and ASL signing community. And so maybe some deaf folks that were watching the clip recently, they may not have realized, but there's two deaf people in the library themselves signing and it's not subtitled. So folks who don't know ESL have no idea what those two deaf people in the library are saying. So if you want to know what they're signing, I really encourage you all to learn ASL.

>> Tatiana Lee: I like that role reversal. Usually people who are deaf or hard of hearing, don't get to see what's on TV. So now the tables have turned. I love that.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. I have something to add if that's okay. I'd like to add that when we work with, with a new group of people or a new team on a certain project, we don't always know what to expect and or what these folks might look like, or if they're easy to work with or difficult, we have no idea. But when we went into the room and met Shane and Chris and their team at "Big City Greens", we were just, they were so friendly and positive and just open-minded. And we were so impressed. You really have an amazing team there. And we're really grateful to have the opportunity to work with folks who have an open heart and an open mind, and are flexible and willing to brainstorm or take suggestions. And so really thank you guys for that.

>> Chris Houghton: Oh, that's fine. Go ahead, Del.

>> Delbert Whetter: This is Delbert. So I think it really helped when they showed us the storyboard process that was extremely helpful, and that gave us an opportunity to kind of put ideas out there and really help the story be a little bit stronger. And I thought that was such a great time to bring us in during that storyboarding process. And I think that really helped make this episode shine. Absolutely.

>> Tatiana Lee: Awesome. Did anybody else have anything that they wanted to add before I went on to the next question?

>> Chris Houghton: Yeah, just real quick, Tatiana. It's funny to hear these guys say all that, because to be completely honest, and I don't want to speak for Shane, I was a little nervous. Just like these three didn't know what they were walking into, We all didn't know what we were walking into. Personally, my head went to, oh gosh, someone's gonna come in and say, you can't do this, or this isn't gonna work. And the experience couldn't be further from that, the golden rule in improv comedy is yes and. Whatever your partner says in the scene, you try to build off that. And Jevon, Del and Justin all did that. There was no, I mean, we had a lot of creative debates and there were times where just the three of these guys were all just talking and we all just kind of stood there and watched and there was a lot of back and forth. And so it was good. It was very much, it felt like improv. It felt like yes and. Even that joke that was done in ASL and only for people who can understand ASL. We were a little nervous about the joke, it's like, is this funny? Does this cross a line? And it was so exciting that the three of them it's like any creative partnership, a consultation, I think can be great. And it can probably, we haven't experienced this yet, but I'm sure it can be terrible if it's just not the right people all working together. So we all just gelled well, and they were all excited. We were excited and it just came together. I know we've said that, but I just wanted to explain it from our end, of going, we were just as nervous.

>> Shane Houghton: I think the reason they are so good at what they do is because yes, they're consulting on ASL, but they're thinking about characters first, relationships first, tone of the show, that is so important because that's all the stuff that Chris and I are always thinking about and always at the top of our priority list. And yes, like we want to get the ASL correct. We want it to be accurate and make sure we're not accidentally saying something we shouldn't be saying, or we want it to make sense. We don't want to end up making it seem like gibberish or something. So we want it to be accurate for good storytelling. And what was so nice was these guys came in and before we got into any of the ASL translation, they wanted to know about the show. They wanted to know what the series they want to know about this episode specifically. And most importantly, the characters, who these people are and how we view them and coming in with that kind of like storytelling sense before we got to like the nitty-gritty nuts and bolts of ASL translation, I thought was phenomenal and really like set the tone for the whole meeting, which is great.

>> Tatiana Lee: Awesome. I love that. I said it earlier, but I love hearing like awesome stories that come out of really great productions. And it shows in the work, the end product that comes out, it really, really shows. So we've noticed some chatter on social media asking what the deaf background characters, what the deaf background characters are signing. Justin, I believe there's a story about that. And that was a direct result of the collaboration between you and your team. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

>> Justin Maurer: Yeah, sure. I mean, like Del and Jevon were saying earlier, it's a show for children. So deaf people can be extremely direct and sometimes vulgar. And so we had to kind of pick something that wouldn't, offend anyone necessarily, but also be funny, like something deaf people would say behind hearing people's back, like what would a really annoying hearing family, what would deaf people actually say? And so that was really fun to think about, like Chris was saying earlier, to not cross the line, 'cause that does exist.

>> Chris Houghton: Sure.

>> Justin Maurer: -- In any language probably what's offensive and what's funny. And how far do you really want to go? But yeah, that was it. It was really, it was a blast to come up with that little line. And it's great that their team was so willing to make that little wink and say, hey, only a few of you are gonna know what this says, I think that's really cool.

>> Tatiana Lee: Awesome. Awesome. So this time, if any one that is viewing this has a question. If you have any questions for Chris, Shane, Delbert, Jevon, all of us, all of us. So just put your questions in and we will get to those in a moment. We are about to come up on that time. So Chris and Shane, I have a question for you. What message would you like to send to producers, writers and directors about creating stories with characters with disabilities?

>> Shane Houghton: Yeah. So there's always a saying with writers, which is write what you know, and I feel like there is truth to that, but at a certain point, I find it more interesting to write about stuff you don't know and expanding what you know. Within TV, there's always strict deadlines and tight schedules. And sometimes it's hard to be able to build in time for growth or learning or doing something different, but we've found it. It was so valuable through this experience. Chris and I both learned a lot. Our team learned a lot and very luckily like the executives at Disney made this a very smooth and easy process. Everybody from the standards and practices department to these consultants, the folks at RespectAbility, it was such a smooth way of working. And so we really appreciated it. So we'd love to do more types of inclusion in the future, in the show. And it was something that was different, but I feel like we've grown from it and that's a great thing to have happened in life.

>> Tatiana Lee: Chris, did you have anything to add? Go ahead?

>> Chris Houghton: I would just say for us personally, I don't know, I mean, other creators can do whatever they're gonna do, but for us, it was important to not make this episode feel like a very special episode of "Big City Greens", where it's like, we're gonna stop the fun and we're gonna deal with a serious subject here. I feel like you see that a lot. And it's like, it feels patronizing. I don't know how different communities-

>> Tatiana Lee: No. As a person with a disability, it is very patronizing to see stuff like that. So yes, continue.

>> Chris Houghton: Where it's just like, for us, we're a comedy show. Like we just live, breathe and eat comedy. It's all we want. Everything else falls somewhere under that top priority. So again, I just go back to, it was great that we were able to do this in a funny way. Like how can we make jokes with ASL? How can we play off of which characters in the family know ASL and who would not know? Oh, it turns out only one of them would know, everyone else wouldn't know. And just trying to when we have an episode that takes place, I don't know, at a circus, you try to have all your circus jokes in that episode. Like, what's funny about a circus. Why do people go to circuses? You try to really do a deep dive into a subject and try to wring out all the comedy. And so I think if we were to approach another topic that had a character with a disability, I think we'd approach it the same way. It's just like, what could be funny about this? What could be maybe even awkward about it? And can we lean into that for comedy? I just like that, I don't know. I just think comedy is a great thing and it can help. You can explore different topics in a way. It almost gives you a little, like, I don't know, a writing lubrication or something that makes it go a little easier. You can say, hey, we're just having fun. We all have differences and similarities, and let's explore that.

>> Shane Houghton: And Tatiana, you said something earlier that I hadn't really thought about before, but you mentioned like, because of "A Quiet Place" directly led to this. And I realized if we haven't seen "A Quiet Place", or if that movie was never made and didn't show that type of inclusion. I don't know if that would have happened in this episode of "Big City Greens". And so I kind of just realized it's like the more shows that are inclusive and show these types of things, then I feel like-

>> Chris Houghton: We can do parody.

>> Shane Houghton: The more shows we can parody in our show, it's like, yeah, one representation can lead to more. And hopefully that is a domino effect that happens in Hollywood.

>> Tatiana Lee: Yes. I love it. So can you guys from the animation perspective, talk about boarding sign language, and was it a challenge for the board artists to do the animation for this? Could you talk a little bit about that?

>> Chris Houghton: Yeah, definitely. So, yeah, it is a challenge turns out. I mean, that was the the question we kind of posed for ourselves early on. It was like, can we do this? Like, how would that work? We would need an actual artist and no one on our crew knows ASL. So obviously these guys came in like, like we've covered tons of footage, lots of back and forth. We were even trying to do the signs back to Jev and Del and Justin to see if we fully understood it. But all that aside, these guys leave, we're working on a bunch of episodes, TV production's crazy. And it really, all of it fell on this guy, Chris Wimberley, who was a board artist on our show, even temporarily, he was coming in just to help out for a few weeks. His wife was about to have a baby. And I think the two weeks before he went on paternity leave, he just really did a deep dive into all that research material and between him and then also the director, Monica Ray, on that episode, they really just focused and really had to pose out every small even kind of hand rotation. Everything had to be almost animated in here in LA. And then we send everything to Korea and our Korean studio's actually animate everything. But then when it comes back, we had double check, and we sent the finished animation to Del, Jevon and Justin. So there was just a lot of back and forth. But yeah, big, big tip of the hat to Chris Wimberley and Monica Ray.

>> Tatiana Lee: I love that, intentionality matters. So before we open up to questions from the audience-

>> Delbert Whetter: This is Delbert. Could I add something really quickly?

>> Tatiana Lee: Go ahead?

>> Delbert Whetter: So I'd like to emphasize that it's extremely important when animation is being reviewed at different stages. And so a storyboard, a storyboard is one part of the process, and then you have the animatic and then you have the rough animation and then your final. And so that really gives us the opportunity to give feedback and say, check out the speed, the time, the movement and the placement, and make small adjustments. And so it's a really great opportunity to be able to make those adjustments before it's too late. And so also during marketing and after everything is done, when you can show those clips, we're able to give a little bit of feedback as well for marketing or PR and catch those, any mistakes that there might be before it's too late.

>> Chris Houghton: And off of that, I think the mistakes that that were caught, or the things that we kind of did incorrectly on our end, after that initial consultation was facial expressions. And I didn't even realize that, it wasn't until, and I think it went through two rounds of us not really getting the facial expressions quite right. It was actually on the ASL joke of the two characters in the library, just the two, we call them incidentals, like background characters. We weren't focusing on their facial expressions correctly. And that was something that was just pure ignorance. At least for my part, I was kind of like, I think we got the signs, right? So I think we're good. And it's like, no, ASL is a full visual language and expressions really matter. So I think that was the biggest thing we had tweaked. Yeah, Jevon?

>> Jevon Whetter: Yeah, this is Jevon. So as far as the character signing, sometimes people forget the eye gaze and where the eyes are looking. And so we are receptive with our eyes not our ears, right. So hearing people can talk, it doesn't matter where they're looking, they can just talk and hear, but deaf people, when you're communicating eye contact is extremely important and where the eyes are specifically gazing and so where you're looking and who you're referring to. And so a lot of times the signs are correct, but certain animators forget about where the eyes should be looking and just little things like that.

>> Tatiana Lee: Awesome. That's awesome. So before we open up for questions to the audience, I want to hear from each of you on what do you see as the future of disability inclusion in children's programming?

>> Shane Houghton: Well, I, like we talked about earlier how "A Quiet Place" led to this episode, hopefully that trend continues where the more shows or movies have some sort of inclusive representation. The more of that you'll see to help just see more of it. I feel like I hope that that's the future of just kind of getting more of that out there and for all the other producers out there, we had a great time doing this. So it was, it was very easy on our part working with these three guys. So I would hope to see, yeah, more show with more movies doing a similar thing.

>> Tatiana Lee: Nice. Thank you. Actually, our first question was from Megan Clancy, she said, I'm impressed with your collaboration, especially on Disney Channel. And then she asked, would you do more episodes like this? So I guess that's a yes.

>> Chris Houghton: Yeah. We even, I think the tricky thing is always finding the comedy in it. It can be hard to approach a subject that at the first step might seem difficult or seem kind of sensitive. And that those are usually the areas that you might steer away from in a comedy, especially for kids. But I think what's great about this episode is it shows like, okay, we can do some stuff and we can still make it funny. I think it's just a fine line of like for us personally, again, just with our show, being such a comedy is how can we find ways to make everything funny? I think when we keep the funny on our characters that often is a way for us to get away with all kinds of crazy stuff. Whereas the Green family, they're the ones screwing up, they're the ones, Cricket will often make he's just an ignorant, naive kid. So he actually can get away with a lot of stuff. And I'm just speaking more from like a writer's standpoint, but those are just the challenges we have. it's not that we don't want to do it. There's been stories we've tried to break in the writer's room and then we get to a point where we go, gosh, we just don't have a good angle on this. That's funny. It just feels like we're kind of walking on eggshells. And it's a challenge, but it's a challenge that is possible to find some funny solutions to.

>> Tatiana Lee: Nice, nice speaking of that, we have another question that says about other topics to cover as far as disability. So someone said Cricket is a bit hyperactive, you mentioned. And are you open and interested to talking and talking about ADHD?

>> Shane Houghton: Yeah. Yeah. That's interesting that they brought that up. We have talked a lot about that and we do have an episode coming up where we kind of look into that a little deeper and kind of look at, it's an episode that discusses basically how people think and how specifically Cricket thinks. And Chris, I don't know how you feel about this. I know we've talked, or Chris, you good? Okay. Yeah.

>> Chris Houghton: I'm here, I'm here, I just lost the phone.

>> Shane Houghton: We've talked about, I think the biggest thing is we've talked a lot in the writer's room about Cricket and Tilly. And what we've seen online are people who think Tilly is autistic and that Cricket has some sort of attention deficit disorder. And I think we really like those angles on them, but we haven't like committed to a diagnosis in the show. And part of that is I think people who are diagnosed can see themselves in those characters, which is great, but people who aren't diagnosed may still see themselves in those characters. I think we really like including everybody, because there are personality traits that people have, whether you're on the spectrum or not, but it's still relatable characteristics. And so, yeah, I think we, we like to explore it, but we haven't had, I don't think we would do the diagnosis, like go into a doctor and get the diagnosis, but we definitely have episodes coming up that have not aired that kind of gets the next deeper dive into those issues with those characters.

>> Tatiana Lee: Nice, nice. So we have a question for Jevon and Delbert, for those who have become interested in the sign language, because of this show, how would you recommend those to take their first approach with learning more or even picking up sign language themselves?

>> Delbert Whetter: This is Delbert, I'll let Jevon respond.

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. Well, right now, ASL is the third most popular language in colleges and high schools all over the country. And German has taken a back seat to fourth place. And so what that means is that schools and universities are now offering ASL courses, even in high school, at the high school level, all over the place. And so if people are curious, they want to learn sign language. There's really many, many community colleges that are now offering ASL all over. And also my son, he's a CODA, a child of a deaf adult, and he was able to sign at five months old. And so it's not only deaf people, but babies before they're able to learn how to speak. They can learn sign language extremely early. And so his first sign was milk by the way. And so I was able to go know that he wanted milk and it was easy to communicate that. So for people that want to learn sign and understand more about deaf culture and deaf history and our language, if you really understand ASL, it has principles, grammar, and structure, and just like film, you have closeups and long shots and film language, and all types of film vernacular and terms. And so film language and ASL language, because it's a visual language, it's similar to the language of film. And so it's never too late. It's never too early. I encourage everyone to learn sign.

>> Delbert Whetter: This is Delbert. There's one thing in the past few years that I've noticed that really struck me is ASL is not only something used by deaf people, but also for people who are non-verbal. And so people who have speech difficulties, people who have autism, more and more autistic folks are learning sign language now. And so it's really great to have that option of communication. You can communicate verbally, or you can communicate visually through sign language, just depending on what's the best fit for you at that moment. So ASL is a visual language. It really has a place all over, not only for the deaf, but really so many folks can really benefit from sign language. And right now, during COVID many people wearing masks, it's really a challenge for deaf people to communicate with a mask on. I really wish that everyone could learn signs. So I didn't have to worry about having someone pull down their mask to try and get me to lip read so they could just sign so that I could understand them that way.

>> Chris Houghton: [Laughs] There we go.

>> Tatiana Lee: I love that mask. That is cool. So another question actually for Jevon and Delbert, do you guys plan on pitching your own show with an all signing cast?

>> Delbert Whetter: Go ahead. Go ahead, Jevon, go ahead.

>> Jevon Whetter: Well, what was your question again? Tatiana, sorry, would you mind repeating it?

>> Tatiana Lee: Oh, I said, someone asked do you both plan on pitching your own show with an all signing cast?

>> Jevon Whetter: This is Jevon. Well, it would be amazing, at the same time, I'm also thinking about something for a mainstream audience. Often I've wanted to develop a story that would appeal to everyone that would include sign language. And so that would be a dream, a dream of mine. Absolutely. But I would want to make sure most projects are able to incorporate sign language in some ways, I have just a lot of ideas in general. And so I think when it will be our turn, but it might be the time and opportunity for that.

>> Delbert Whetter: This is Delbert. I'd like to add that Jevon and I are now developing a feature film project, and maybe someday a TV project, but now we're actively developing a feature film project and it's called "Flash Before the Bang". And that's the title. And it's a true story about an all deaf track team from the state deaf school in Oregon who won the state championship. So I'd encourage everyone to keep their eyes open on that. We look forward to that project.

>> Tatiana Lee: Awesome. We have time for one more question. And this question, which I thought was quite interesting and goes back to the point of when you try to do disability in different projects, someone said, they're very curious as to the budget challenges that animating in ASL in 2D created, they have so often heard that it's too expensive to do, which everybody says that when it comes to disability inclusion, how did your team manage to include a moment like this without breaking the bank?

>> Shane Houghton: Yeah, I don't think -- it didn't really cost any extra outside of our normal show budget. If anything, maybe it took a little bit more time to get the storyboards and timing of the gestures or the signs correctly, but it really wasn't expensive. Usually in every episode, there's some scene or sequence that we want to put like a little extra juice in something to make like an action scene that looks really good or a really elaborate set piece. There's always something that like takes a little bit more time. And in this episode that just happened to be our ASL sequence. So we still deliver this whole episode on our normal episodic pipeline without any extra really costs or not even, it was the same amount of time and everything. Right, Chris?

>> Chris Houghton: I think it did cost time, I think there's kind of a, I think sometimes it takes, it takes the extra time to do it right. And to talk to people and learn about it. And then I think also this isn't part of the question, but I think also there's the backend fear or possibility that you didn't do it right. And that maybe the audiences won't respond well or something. And so I think oftentimes there's not a pressure, but I think oftentimes people just throw up their hands and go, you know what, let's just, let's just keep it moving and let's just do something else, because it's, especially in TV, it's just such an assembly line that it can be, that can be a common pitfall, right. Is just to take the easiest way out. And we're talking disability representation, but that can go for anything hiring decisions or creative decisions or anything. It's like, there's just such a speediness to everything. So again, all of our reasons why like Disney having those relationships with consultants made it really easy. We didn't have to search for anyone. We didn't have to interview a bunch of consultants. And then these three specific guys coming in were great. And so the time that cost us was actually very minimal, but it could have been a lot. I talked about my first thought of, oh gosh, they're gonna come in and tell us we can't do anything. And so this really worked out to be great. And because of all those factors, yeah, it didn't really cost much time.

>> Tatiana Lee: Awesome, go ahead, Delbert?

>> Delbert Whetter: This is Delbert. I just wanted to make a comment that a big advantage by including authenticity in your creative process is, it gives the creators as well as the audience. It gives them trust in the production. It gives them trust in what they're being shown and in that story as well. And in that also inspires confidence among the storytellers. And so just like it was mentioned earlier, this is a comedy show first and foremost. And so comedy and disability, people with disabilities have comedy in our lives every day. And so in general, we're really funny people just to let you know, but just how to show that in a comedy show is really an authentic way to have inclusion in that creative process. And that can inspire the confidence to have that true representation, if you do that right in comedy. And it's a way to introduce the ideas to people who may not have seen that authenticity in the past as well.

>> Tatiana Lee: Awesome. I totally agree. Well, thank you so much to Chris, Shane, Delbert, Jevon, and Justin. This was a really enlightening conversation. I've really enjoyed it. So to all I hope you will join us tomorrow when we will continue this conversation with focus on DreamWorks' "Madagascar A Little Wild", Delbert, Jevon, and Justin also consulted on this series. You guys are hot and on a roll, I love it.

>> Chris Houghton: Wait, what? You guys are consulting on other shows? (all laugh)

>> Tatiana Lee: It includes a deaf character who uses sign language also. The character's sister also signs. Tomorrow at 6:00 p.m. Eastern, 3:00 p.m. Pacific Standard Time, Learn from the teams ASL consultants, as well as the executive producer, Joanna Stein, co-executive producer and story editor, Dana Starfield, and supervising director, TJ Sullivan, on how these teams work together to bring about dynamic deaf characters. We're so excited to be seeing this upward trend of authentic representation. And thanks again for the folks at Disney Channel for this wonderful episode of "Big City Greens". Make sure you check it out and thanks for being here with us today. Bye.