

## Gesture, Sign Language — Ilicarluni, Iliigaaluni

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### AIGATENG ATURTAAQAIT LLICARLUTENG. – THEY USED TO USE THEIR HANDS, GESTURING (TO TALK).

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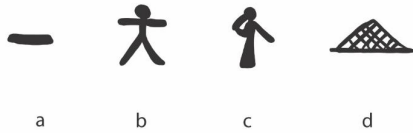


Image: Pictographs drawn by Vladimir Naumov ca. 1880.

The world's cultures have devised numerous, ingenious, ways to exchange information. Beyond the spoken and written word, societies use movement, expressions, pictures, and many forms of artwork for intentional communication. Gesturing is a particularly common form of non-verbal speech. People in many cultures use signs to replace words when it is not possible or appropriate to speak. For example, if your baby is sleeping, you might press an index finger against your lips to ask a visitor to be quiet and then beckon them into the next room with a horizontal wave of your hand.

In the late 1800s Valdimir Naumov, a Kodiak Alutiiq man shared his knowledge of more than a hundred signs used by Native people along the Gulf of Alaska coast. Naumov traveled widely with his father, a fur trader for the Russian American Company. In addition to speaking Alutiiq, Russian, and English he learned as many as six Native languages as well as a set of gestures travelers used to communicate when they did not understand spoken language. For example, according to Naumov, to gesture the word “night” you bow your head dropping your chin toward your chest. Then, you place your hands palm down, fingers tips touching, against your brow.

Naumov also knew how to use pictographs, simply painting figures that shared messages. People painted such figures on a piece of wood for others to read in their absence. For example, a person leaving home to travel might place a piece of wood painted with pictographs outside his door. This message told visitors where he had gone and when he planned to return.