

The Inspiring Helen Keller

² Helen Keller was born on June 27, 1880, in Alabama. In her first year and a half of life, she was much like other babies, happy and loved. Her family lived in a house that had been built by her grandfather. At a year old, she was learning how to talk. Then when Helen was just 19 months old, she got very sick. She had a high fever, probably scarlet fever or meningitis. There were no medicines to help her then. Her doctor and family thought that she might die. The fever went away, and her parents rejoiced. They thought she was well again. Then her mother realized that Helen did not react to sounds or lights. Her parents realized that the fever had caused Helen to become deaf and blind.



³ By the time she was six years old, she was an almost uncontrollable child. She smelled cake and grabbed a fistful of it. At dinnertime, she walked around the table grabbing food from everyone's plate, often knocking over their drinking glasses. She threw temper tantrums when she couldn't get what she wanted. She lived in a silent and dark world. She was aware of people around her but couldn't communicate with them beyond a few signs for things she needed. Her parents loved her but didn't know how to help her. Her mother knew they must find someone who could help Helen.

⁴ Her mother traveled with Helen from their home in Alabama to Baltimore to see a doctor she thought might help them. He sent them to meet with Alexander Graham Bell, the famous inventor of the telephone, who was working with deaf children at the time. Mr. Bell helped the Keller family find a teacher for Helen. Anne Sullivan, only twenty years old and with a sight disability of her own, came to live with the Kellers.

⁵ At first, Anne had a hard time with the undisciplined child. Helen often misbehaved and threw temper tantrums. Anne convinced the family to let her move Helen and herself into a small house on the family's property. Anne thought that Helen would have to learn to trust her and depend only upon her. Her parents finally agreed that Helen must go with Anne.

⁶ Anne began by showing Helen to behave properly. Anne would not allow Helen to walk around the table grabbing food with her hands. Helen would not be given her food until she sat at the table with a napkin in her lap. Helen rebelled at first, but soon she began to trust Anne. Anne began to spell out words with her finger onto Helen's hand. At first, Helen didn't know what Anne was trying to do. After about a month of this, one day Helen seemed to suddenly understand that the finger spelling meant something. Helen wanted a drink, and Anne led her to the water pump outside the house. She pumped water over one of Helen's hands as she spelled the word water onto the palm of Helen's other hand. Helen suddenly understood that the spelling on her hand meant the word for water.

⁷ After that, Helen wanted to learn the names of everything around her. She learned thirty words the first day! People around her home began hearing about Helen. Newspapers wrote stories about her and her wonderful teacher. People wanted to learn more about her, and soon

Helen became famous. When she was eight years old, Helen was invited to the White House where she met President Grover Cleveland.

⁸ Anne helped Helen discover the world outside. Helen said later that her beloved "Teacher" - the name she called Anne all her life - set her spirit free. Helen was curious about everything! She wanted to do everything that other people could do. She even learned to ride horses. She and Anne went to live at a special boarding school for blind children. Helen learned to read and write using Braille. Braille is a system that uses raised dots pressed into paper. Groups of dots spell words. People who cannot see can feel the dots with their fingers. Books opened up a new world to Helen.

⁹ By the age of ten, Helen learned to speak. She learned by touching Anne's mouth and throat when she spoke and copying Anne's movements to form her own words. Anne spelled each word onto her hand as she spoke it. Helen's words sounded blurred and indistinct since she couldn't hear others speak, but Helen could be understood.

¹⁰ At the age of twenty, Helen became the first deaf and blind person ever to go to college. She learned to read Braille books in French, Latin, and German, as well as books written in English. She learned to play chess. She graduated with honors from Radcliffe College four years later. While in college, Helen wrote a book about her life using a Braille typewriter. The book was called, "The story of My Life." She went on to write eleven more books throughout her life. One of them was turned into a Broadway play, and several movies have been made about her life.

¹¹ After Anne's marriage, Helen lived with the couple. Anne and Helen stayed together for fifty years until Anne died in 1936. Together they traveled the world and raised money to help people who were blind or deaf. Helen traveled to thirty-nine countries and gave speeches to help end poverty and educate people about living with disabilities. She campaigned for women's suffrage (the right to vote) and for equal educational opportunities for women. Since it was founded in 1924, the American Foundation for the Blind credits Helen Keller with raising over two million dollars for that organization.

¹² Helen Keller died on June 1, 1968, at the age of 87. In her lifetime, she met every U.S. president from Grover Cleveland to Lyndon Johnson. She continues to inspire people because her life shows that disabilities can be overcome. On a list of the one hundred most-admired people of the 20th century, Helen Keller was chosen as number five. Hospitals and schools have been named for her, and her picture is on Alabama's state quarter. She was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1964. Thanks to a very special teacher, Helen learned how to communicate in spite of her disabilities. She led a long life devoted to helping others. She is a symbol of courage, capability, intelligence, and perseverance.

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1. How old was Helen when she lost her sight and hearing? How old was Helen when she learned to speak?
2. What caused Helen to lose her sight and hearing?
3. What great inventor helped the Keller's find a teacher for Helen?
4. What was the name of Helen's teacher?
5. What do you call the special kind of raised dot patterns, which form letters of the alphabet?
6. What was the title of Helen's first book?
7. Why do you think that Anne Sullivan was interested in helping Helen?
8. Do you think that Helen Keller should be on the list of the most-admired people of the 20th century? Give reasons to support your answer.
9. Helen said that her teacher, Anne Sullivan, "set her spirit free." Why do you think she said that?

<p>10. What can the reader infer about Helen's family?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A The Keller family was probably wealthy.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B They were African-Americans.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C There is not enough information given to infer any of these things.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D The Keller family was probably very poor.</p>	<p>11. Which of these did Helen Keller not speak for?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A Helping the poor</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B Women's right to vote</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C Helping find homes for animals</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D Women's right to education</p>
<p>12. What famous person did Helen meet when she was young?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A Henry Ford</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B Alexander Graham Bell</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C Lyndon Johnson</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D Albert Einstein</p>	<p>13. Which college did Helen attend?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A Mount Holyoke College</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B Radcliffe College</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C Harvard</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D Princeton</p>
<p>14. In which of these languages did Helen learn to read in addition to English?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A French</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B German</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C Latin</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D All of the above</p>	<p>15. Which of these honors did Helen receive in her lifetime?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A The Alexander Graham Bell Medal</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B The Presidential Medal of Freedom</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C The American Foundation for the Blind Medal</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D Her picture on the Alabama state quarter</p>

Bonus Question:

- . If 4 Braille words take up one square inch of space, how many words can you fit on an 8 1/2 x11 inch sheet of paper?

