

Helen Keller

A Reading A-Z Level P Leveled Reader

Word Count: 716



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Helen Keller



Written by Ellen Forrest

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Level P Leveled Reader
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Introduction

Imagine not being able to see or hear. How would you learn about the world around you? How would you learn to **communicate**? You would face many serious challenges, wouldn't you?

These are the challenges Helen Keller faced more than 100 years ago. When she was born on June 27, 1880, in Tuscumbia, Alabama, Helen could see and hear. When she was 19 months old, she became ill and had a very high fever. She **survived** her illness, but the fever left her blind and deaf.

With time and teaching, Helen Keller would **overcome** her **disabilities** and become an **inspiration** to many people.



Ivy Green, where Helen was born

Helen's Early Years

At the time when Helen was a small girl, people didn't know much about disabilities. They didn't think that blind and deaf children could learn to communicate. Nobody had

ever tried to teach someone like Helen who was both blind and deaf.



*Helen and her pet poodle,
around 1887*

Helen and her parents tried to work with her disabilities. Helen did not have rules to follow. At times she seemed out of control. Her parents had little hope that

Helen would lead the kind of life they had imagined she would.



Alexander Graham Bell, right, did research on teaching deaf people like Helen, left, to speak.

Helen Gets a Teacher

Helen's parents grew more and more **frustrated**. A friend of Helen's parents, Alexander Graham Bell, the man who invented the telephone, had an idea. When Helen was about 7 years old, he suggested they hire a young woman to teach Helen. The young woman's name was Anne Sullivan. Helen's parents agreed to give it a try. From that day on, Helen's life changed.

At first, Helen did not like Anne. Anne made Helen do things she didn't want to do. Anne made Helen eat from a plate, pick up after herself, and dress herself. Helen fought her, but Anne kept trying.



Helen, age 12, and Anne Sullivan in 1892



Helen relied on her senses to help understand the world around her.

Anne knew that Helen could not see and hear. But she knew that Helen had other **senses**. She could touch, smell, and taste.

Anne began to teach Helen to use these senses to communicate and to learn about the world around her. Anne knew that Helen was very smart. She thought it would only take some time before Helen learned how to communicate.



Helen's sense of touch became her most important sense.

Teaching Years Pay Off

Anne thought about how she could teach Helen to communicate. She used Helen's sense of touch to teach her.

Anne taught Helen **sign language**. In sign language, people use their fingers to make words and letters. Anne began teaching Helen to spell words with her fingers. Anne would spell words into the palm of Helen's hand so that she could *feel* the words being spelled, since she couldn't see them.

For a long time, Helen didn't understand the finger game Anne played with her. But Anne did not give up.

One day at the water pump, sort of like a water fountain, Anne pumped water over one of Helen's hands. She used her fingers to spell W-A-T-E-R on Helen's other hand. Suddenly Helen became very still.



A movie called "The Miracle Worker" shows how Helen learned her first word.

Helen got it! She understood! She finally realized what Anne was doing. She realized that Anne was communicating with her. Helen then used her fingers to spell W-A-T-E-R into the palm of Anne's hand.

Next, Helen pointed to Anne and then to her own hand. Anne spelled out T-E-A-C-H-E-R. From that day forward, Helen called Anne *teacher*. Then Helen had Anne spell out the names of other things around her.



Anne, right, spells into Helen's hand, around 1893.



Helen feels the lips of a girl to understand what she is saying.

Helen learned to spell words as quickly as Anne could teach them to her! Next, Anne taught Helen to use her sense of touch to read. She taught Helen to read books printed in **Braille**. Braille uses raised dots instead of ink to make letters and words. Helen learned to *feel* words.

Helen also learned to understand what people were saying by placing her fingers on their lips. As people said different words, Helen could *feel* their lips change shape.



Helen wears her cap and gown after graduating from Radcliffe College in 1904.

Helen's Adult Years

Once Helen learned to communicate, a new world opened up to her. She went to college, and Anne went with her. Anne signed into Helen's hand what teachers said during classes. She also made Braille notes for Helen to read. Helen graduated with Anne's help.

Helen Keller spent most of her life traveling with Anne Sullivan. She gave many speeches and wrote books about her life. She proved to the world that blind and deaf people deserved respect. Helen overcame her disabilities and became an inspiration to people everywhere.



**Helen Keller died on June 1, 1968, at age 87.
The portrait above was taken in the 1950s.**

Glossary

Braille	a system of printing using raised dots to represent letters (p. 13)
communicate	to make thoughts or ideas known (p. 4)
disabilities	conditions that create a lack of ability to do something (p. 5)
frustrated	being unable to complete a task (p. 7)
inspiration	a good influence (p. 5)
overcome	to win a victory over some challenge or obstacle (p. 5)
senses	understanding the world through sight, touch, taste, smell, and hearing (p. 9)
sign language	a system of hand, face, and body movements used to communicate (p. 10)
survived	to have remained alive (p. 5)

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