

# InsideOUT

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## THE MIRACLE WORKER

By William Gibson  
Directed by Art Manke

**Nov 14 - Dec 20**

The Space Theatre



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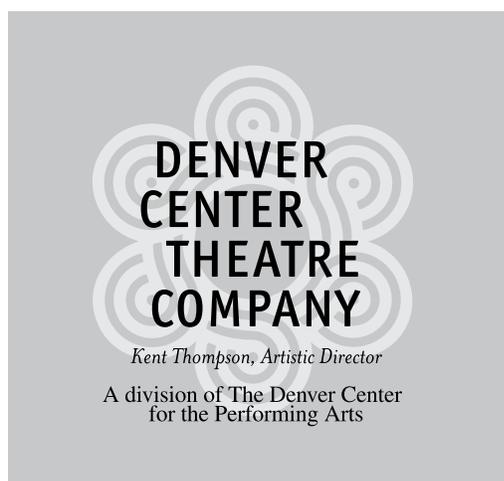
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# Inside**OUT**

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## Synopsis

After a severe childhood illness, Helen Keller is left blind and deaf. She grows into a wild, restless child who cannot communicate with her family. A doctor refers the Kellers to the Perkins Institution for the Blind, where director Michael Anagnos appoints a tutor for the young girl: 20-year-old Annie Sullivan, herself partially blind, a recent graduate of Perkins. Annie arrives at the Kellers' home Ivy Green in Tuscumbia, Alabama, to find six-year-old Helen an uncontrolled and spoiled child. Annie insists she must remove Helen from her family's indulgence in order to reach her. The Kellers allow Annie two weeks living alone with Helen and are amazed with her progress, but Annie is not satisfied with a clean and obedient Helen: she wants to teach Helen language.

# Chronology

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1866 April 14: Anne Sullivan is born in Feeding Hills, Massachusetts.

1871 Annie's vision is severely compromised by trachoma.

1874 Annie's mother Alice Sullivan dies.

1876 February: Annie and her brother Jimmie are sent to the Tewksbury Almshouse.

1876 Jimmie dies of tuberculosis a few months after entering the poorhouse.

1880 Annie is admitted to the Perkins Institution for the Blind in Boston.

1880 June 27: Helen Keller is born in Tuscumbia, Alabama.

1882 February: illness (scarlet fever or meningitis) takes Helen's sight and hearing.

1886 June 1: Anne Mansfield Sullivan graduates from Perkins as class valedictorian.

1887 March 3: Annie Sullivan arrives in Tuscumbia, Alabama, as a tutor to Helen Keller.

1887 April 5: Annie has a breakthrough teaching moment with Helen at the water pump.

1888 Annie and Helen arrive at Perkins Institution for the Blind in Boston.

1894 Helen studies speech at New York's Wright-Humason School for the Deaf.

1900 Helen enters Radcliffe College.

1902 Helen writes *The Story of My Life*, published serially by *Ladies' Home Journal*.

1903 Helen's "Optimism, an essay" is published.

1904 June 28: Helen graduates with honors from Radcliffe.

1904 Annie and Helen move to Wrentham, Massachusetts.

1905 May 3: Anne Sullivan marries John Macy.

1908 Helen's *The World I Live In* published.

1909 Helen joins the Suffragist movement.

1914 Annie and John Macy separate.

1914 Helen and Annie begin their first transcontinental lecture tour.

1914 Polly Thomson joins Annie and Helen as Helen's secretary.

1916 Annie and Polly go to Puerto Rico and stay for five months.

1917 Annie, Helen and Polly move to Forest Hills, New York.

1918 Annie, Helen and Polly go to Hollywood to make a movie about Helen's life.

1922 Annie and Helen begin two-year tour with vaudeville show on the Orpheum Circuit.

1924 Annie and Helen begin work for the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB).

1929 Helen's *Midstream: My Later Life* published.

1930 Helen, Annie and Polly travel abroad, visiting England, Scotland and Ireland.

1932 Annie receives an honorary degree from Temple University.

1936 October 20: Anne Sullivan Macy dies.

1938 Helen's *Journal* is published.

1943 Helen visits deaf, blind and disabled soldiers of World War II.

1949 Helen founds the Committee for the Deaf-Blind of America, a department of the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB).

1954 A documentary, *Helen Keller in Her Story*, wins Helen an Academy Award.

1964 President Lyndon B. Johnson gives Helen the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

1968, June 1: Helen Keller dies in her sleep.

# Anne Sullivan

*Perhaps the real miracle was a statistical one. Of all the possible teachers who could have been assigned to Helen Keller, the task fell to the one teacher in a million who was equal to the task.*

– Sociologist Herbert Rusalem

Anne Sullivan was born April 14, 1866, in the small village called Feeding Hills in western Massachusetts. Her parents Alice and Thomas Sullivan were among the hundreds of thousands of poor Irish immigrants who flocked to America in the 19th century only to find crushing poverty in this country as well. Thomas was an unskilled laborer who could not read or write; he was an alcoholic and prone to violence. When Annie was five years old, her eyes became red and swollen and clouded over; one of her earliest memories was hearing someone say about her, “She would be so pretty if it were not for her eyes.” Later diagnosed with trachoma, Annie would battle blindness for the rest of her life; in fact, her right eye caused her so much pain that it was removed in 1929.

Alice Sullivan died from tuberculosis when her daughter Annie was about eight years old, and Thomas Sullivan later abandoned their three children. Mary, a healthy toddler, was adopted; partially blind Annie and her sickly little brother Jimmie were sent to live in Tewksbury Almshouse, arriving on February 22, 1876. Jimmie died of tuberculosis three months later. Annie remained at the Almshouse for four years. When a group of inspectors led by Mr. Frank Sanborn came to investigate the conditions at Tewksbury, Annie threw herself into their midst, crying “Mr. Sanborn, Mr. Sanborn, I want to go to school!”

Anne Sullivan arrived at Perkins Institute for the Blind at age 14, not knowing how to read or write, and, as she herself later admitted, “utterly unacquainted with the usages of civilized people.” Annie’s fiery temper and tart tongue nearly got her expelled more than once, but Perkins director Michael Anagnos, who nicknamed her “Miss Spitfire,” didn’t have the heart to send her back to the poorhouse, so she was allowed to stay. In a surprisingly short time, Annie bridged the academic

gap between herself and other students her age, and eventually she adjusted socially and began to make friends, including Perkins resident Laura Bridgman, the first successfully educated deaf-blind person. To communicate with Laura, Annie mastered the manual alphabet, spelling words with her fingers into Laura’s hand. The manual finger alphabet of the deaf was first used in France in the early part of the 18th century. It was originally brought from Spain, where it was reportedly invented by Trappist monks to converse with one another while not breaking their vow of silence. Annie would soon use this skill to reach Helen Keller.

On June 1, 1886, at the age of 20, Anne Mansfield Sullivan graduated from Perkins Institute for the Blind as valedictorian of her class. In need of employment, she soon accepted a position as teacher of a deaf-blind-mute child named Helen Keller in Tuscumbia, Alabama, arriving on March 3, 1887. Annie remained with Helen for the rest of her life, translating the world into Helen’s hand for nearly half a century and supporting Helen’s educational and social endeavors.

When Anne Sullivan Macy died on October 20, 1936, at the age of 70, 56-year-old Helen Keller was holding her hand. What Helen had often feared—“if she were gone away, I should be blind and deaf in very truth”—had happened. Yet she was not alone. Her Scottish secretary and companion Polly Thomson immediately applied for citizenship; two weeks later the two sailed for Scotland “to find a quiet time in which to readjust our lives,” and later for Japan. Helen’s *Journal*, written in 1936 and 1937 and published in 1938, is “a record of her awakening from a great spiritual numbness into a renewed determination to make her life a service to others—to live so that on each third of March to come she can look back upon some achievement that has justified her teacher’s faith in her.” Anne Sullivan Macy’s ashes were laid to rest in the National Cathedral in Washington, DC. She was the first teacher and the first woman to be so honored. When Helen Keller died in 1968 at the age of 87, her ashes were placed in the National Cathedral next to those of her beloved Teacher.

# Anne Sullivan's Valedictory Address

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Perkins Institution for the Blind

June 1, 1886

**T**oday we are standing face to face with the great problem of life.

We have spent years in the endeavor to acquire the moral and intellectual discipline, by which we are enabled to distinguish truth from falsehood, receive higher and broader views of duty and apply general principles to the diversified details of life. And now we are going out into the busy world to take our share in life's burdens and do our little to make that world better, wiser and happier.

We shall be most likely to succeed in this if we obey the great law of our being. God has placed us here to grow, to expand, to progress. To a certain extent our growth is unconscious. We receive impressions and arrive at conclusions without any effort on our part; but we also have the power of controlling the course of our lives. We can educate ourselves; we can, by thought and perseverance, develop all the powers and capacities entrusted to us, and build for ourselves true and noble characters. Because we can, we must. It is a duty we owe to ourselves, to our country and to God.

All the wondrous physical, intellectual and moral endowments, with which man is blessed, will, by inevitable law, become useless unless he uses and improves them. The muscles must be used or they become unserviceable. The memory, understanding and judgment must be used or they become feeble and inactive. If a love for truth and beauty and goodness is not cultivated, the mind loses the strength which comes from truth, the refinement which comes from beauty and the happiness which comes from goodness.

Self-culture is a benefit, not only to the individual, but also to mankind. Every man who improves himself is aiding the progress of society, and every one who stands still holds it back. The advancement of society always has its commencement in the individual soul. It is by battling with the circumstances, temptations and failures of the world that the individual reaches his highest possibilities.

# Early Days in Tuscumbia

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*The most important day I remember in all my life is the one on which my teacher, Anne Mansfield Sullivan, came to me. I am filled with wonder when I consider the immeasurable contrasts between the two lives which it connects. It was the third of March 1887, three months before I was seven years old. – Helen Keller*

Upon her arrival in Tuscumbia, Alabama, Annie Sullivan first saw Helen Keller standing on the porch of her home Ivy Green, with “one hand stretched out, as if she expected someone to come in.” Annie started up the porch steps, and six-year-old Helen rushed toward her so forcefully that Annie nearly fell backward. Helen’s busy fingers felt Annie’s face and dress and bag. Annie wrote her friend Mrs. Hopkins at Perkins that Helen “is very quick-tempered and willful, and nobody, except her brother James, has attempted to control her.”

A few days after her arrival, Annie wrote to Mrs. Hopkins, “I had a battle royal with Helen this morning.” The battle scene had been the breakfast table. When Annie refused to let Helen take food from her plate, “a contest of wills followed.” The family left the room, and Annie locked the door. After two hours, Annie had finally succeeded in making Helen eat her own food with her own spoon and fold her napkin. “Then I let her out into the warm sunshine and went up to my room and threw myself on the bed exhausted. I had a good cry and felt better.”

Annie soon realized that “I could do nothing with Helen in the midst of the family, who have always allowed her to do exactly as she pleased. I saw clearly that it was useless to try to teach her language or anything else until she learned to obey me.” She persuaded the Kellers to allow her to live alone with Helen; her parents could visit so long as Helen did not realize they were there. Annie and Helen moved into a small cottage near the main house, after Helen had been taken on a long ride so she would not know where she was. Every task was a challenge. “I never saw such strength

and endurance in a child,” Annie revealed. “But fortunately for us both, I am a little stronger, and quite as obstinate when I set out.” One morning Helen refused to get dressed, and Annie refused to let her eat breakfast until she did. When Captain Keller looked in the window and saw his daughter still in her nightgown and her breakfast uneaten on the table, he stormed back to the main house saying he had “a great mind to send that Yankee girl back to Boston.” However, after a week in the cottage, Annie wrote, “My heart is singing for joy this morning. A miracle has happened! The wild little creature of two weeks ago has been transformed into a gentle child.”

As soon as Annie arrived in Tuscumbia, she began spelling words into Helen’s hand, although Helen did not realize the finger motions meant anything yet. Helen mimicked the motions back to Annie without understanding that they were words which named objects or actions. Annie had taught Helen the spellings for “mug” and “milk” and the verb “drink,” but Helen kept mixing them up, not understanding that they stood for different things. On the morning of April 5, Helen pointed to the water as she was washing up, and Annie “spelled ‘w-a-t-e-r’ and thought no more about it until after breakfast. Then it occurred to me that with the help of this new word I might succeed in straightening out the mug-milk difficulty. We went out to the pump-house, and I made Helen hold her mug under the spout while I pumped. As the cold water gushed forth, filling the mug, I spelled ‘w-a-t-e-r’ into Helen’s free hand. The word coming so close upon the sensation of cold water rushing over her hand seemed to startle her. She dropped the mug and stood as one transfixed. A new light came into her face. She spelled ‘water’ several times. Then she dropped on the ground and asked for its name.” Annie called this “the second great step in Helen’s education. She has learned that everything has a name.” Helen learned thirty new words that first day, including “Teacher,” the name by which she called Annie Sullivan for the rest of their lives.

# The Miracle Worker

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Playwright William Gibson based his play *The Miracle Worker* on Helen Keller's 1903 autobiography *The Story of My Life* and Nella Braddy's 1933 biography *Anne Sullivan Macy*. The title of the play comes from Mark Twain's designation of Annie Sullivan as a "miracle worker." The first version of *The Miracle Worker* was broadcast live on television in 1957 by CBS's *Playhouse 90* starring Teresa Wright as Annie and Patricia McCormack as Helen. When Helen Keller heard that a teleplay had been written about her early life, she was amazed. "Never did I dream a drama could be devised out of the story of my life." Gibson rewrote the play for the stage; the 1959 Broadway version, starring Anne Bancroft as Annie and 12-year-old Patty Duke as Helen, ran for almost two years and a total of 700 performances. Rave reviews declared the play a contemporary classic, "harrowing and explosive" theatre that also was "stirring."

In the spring of 1960, Patty Duke visited Helen Keller at her home Arcan Ridge. Entranced by Patty, Helen gave her one of the beautiful Japanese dolls from the glass case in her bedroom. Patty spelled into Helen's hand, and the two visited the garden together. Patty later recalled, "When I first saw Helen walking down the stairs, she looked almost regal. She was close to 80 years old by then, but she carried herself very straight. She had alabaster skin, very thin white hair, almost like an angel's hair, and was very buxom with small hips and great-looking legs. And a terrific smile. And she was so jolly, like a jolly grandma. I'd expected serious or sweet, but not jolly. Not someone who loved to laugh, and about everything, even the fact that we'd come before she'd had a chance to take her rather large bras in off the laundry line. Occasionally she would spell to me, just to be gracious and indulge me because I wanted her to, but mostly she would talk out loud. To understand me, she would put her thumb on my lips and her fingers on different vibration points. She didn't miss a thing."

Anne Bancroft and Patty Duke reprised their roles for the 1962 movie version of *The Miracle Worker*, and both women won Academy Awards. At the time Duke was the youngest actor to win an Oscar, and she is one of very few who have won the award for a non-speaking role. Duke later portrayed Annie Sullivan in a 1979 television remake of *The Miracle Worker*, with Melissa Gilbert as Helen.

## Famous Friends:

### Alexander Graham Bell & Mark Twain

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*In this child I have seen more of the Divine than has been manifest in anyone I met before.*

– Alexander Graham Bell

A leader in the field of deaf education, Alexander Graham Bell was instrumental in beginning Helen Keller's education. At the time of their first meeting, Bell thought her well-formed face "chillingly empty," unlike the expressive faces of most normal six-year-olds that reflect a distinct personality. He suggested that her father write to Michael Anagnos, the director of the Perkins Institution for the Blind, requesting a teacher for Helen. This letter resulted in the arrival of Annie Sullivan in Tuscumbia, Alabama,

and the eventual education of Helen Keller. After Annie managed to communicate with Helen and begin her schooling, Helen might have remained anonymous had it not been for the support of these two powerful men—Anagnos and Bell—who stood to profit professionally from the world's hearing about "the miracle."

Bell's interest was the promotion of the teaching of speech to the deaf, and he stood alone among Helen's admirers and celebrators in his insistence that what Annie Sullivan and Helen Keller had done was not a miracle but a brilliantly successful experiment. He became a champion of Annie's teaching methods and a lifelong friend and correspondent of Helen's. Helen wrote in her

autobiography *The Story of My Life*, which she dedicated to Bell, that “Dr. Bell is proficient in many fields of science, and has the art of making every subject he touches interesting, even the most abstruse theories. He makes you feel that if you only had a little more time, you, too, might be an inventor. He has a humorous and poetic side, too. His dominating passion is his love for children. He is never quite so happy as when he has a little deaf child in his arms. His labors in behalf of the deaf will live on and bless generations of children yet to come; and we love him alike for what he himself has achieved and for what he has evoked from others.”

In 1894, Helen Keller met Samuel Clemens, better known as Mark Twain. Usually not impressed by other well-known people, he considered Helen to be the most remarkable woman he had ever met in his life. He later recalled, “The wonderful child arrived now, with her almost equally wonderful teacher, Miss Sullivan.” He told Helen a long story, “which she interrupted all along and in the right places, with cackles, chuckles, and care-free bursts of laughter.” Clemens and Helen

became lifelong friends, and both enjoyed their time together immensely. Clemens’s language could be coarse, but Helen loved him because he never tried to sound refined in her presence, although occasionally he would remove her hand from his lips, with the warning, “Now, Helen, I must curse.” Helen wrote in her autobiography, “I read from Mark Twain’s lips one or two of his good stories. He has his own way of thinking, saying and doing everything. I feel the twinkle of his eye in his handshake. Even while he utters his cynical wisdom in an indescribably droll voice, he makes you feel that his heart is a tender Iliad of human sympathy.” Clemens once sent a photograph of himself to Annie Sullivan, signing it “with warm regard and with limitless admiration of the wonders she has performed as a miracle worker.”

*The two greatest characters in the 19th century are Napoleon and Helen Keller. Napoleon tried to conquer the world by physical force and failed. Helen tried to conquer the world by power of mind—and succeeded!*

– Mark Twain

## Oralism vs. Manualism

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**M**anualism and oralism are two opposing philosophies regarding the education of the deaf. Manualism is the education of deaf students using sign language and oralism is the education of deaf students using spoken language. Since the beginning of formal deaf education in the 18th century, these two philosophies have been on opposing sides of a heated debate that continues to this day, although many modern deaf educational facilities attempt to integrate both approaches.

The manualists claim that the oralists neglect the psychosocial development of deaf children. In their zeal for training in articulation which requires long tedious practice, oralism leaves them with no time or energy to advance academically and socially. The result is inadequate skills and often with poor speaking ability despite the great effort invested since the oral method works best with children who have lost hearing after already having learned to speak. Manualists feel nothing is more important

than giving deaf children a visual-motor language they can truly master so as to enable their intellect and humanity to develop normally.

In general, oralism is the education of deaf people to communicate by lip-reading (or speech reading) and speech alone without any sign language. Many people believe that if a child is taught to sign, they will never develop speech skills. However, a deaf or hard of hearing person’s ability to speak clearly is directly related to the time of onset of deafness and how much residual hearing they have. The oralists claim that the manualists’ emphasis on sign language isolates them from the wider culture and hearing family members thus serving to inculcate them in a clannish subculture that leaves them unable to succeed in the general population. They also point out that only a tiny percentage of the general population can use sign language. Oralists feel that nothing is more important than giving deaf children the tools to fit in with their families and

society at large. However it is a great achievement that many deaf children may not accomplish due to the great degree of time and effort involved.

During his lifetime, Alexander Graham Bell was revered by millions as a great friend of the deaf. Ironically, today many of the hearing-impaired view him as “an enemy” and “something of an ogre.” In 1880, at the International Congress of Educators of the Deaf at Milan, Bell, a zealous advocate of oralism, had used his authority to exclude deaf teachers from voting, and the use of sign language was officially prohibited in the schools. For many in the deaf community, Bell’s edict had disastrous consequences. Previously, using sign language, many had achieved high goals, writing books and entering public life. Now they were forbidden to use their natural language and expected to use English only, a trend that prevailed until the 1980s. As a result, many bright deaf children became less literate and educated than those generations who had used signs.

Deaf, blind and mute from infancy, Helen Keller wanted very much to be able to speak and be understood. At age nine, she heard of a deaf-blind girl in Norway who had been taught to speak, and she determined that she too would learn. Her first instruction came from the principal of the Horace Mann School for the Deaf in Boston, Sarah Fuller, who let Helen feel the position of her tongue and lips when she made a sound. Unfortunately, no one except Annie and Sarah Fuller could understand Helen at all.

Continuing to learn with Annie, Helen’s cousin reported, “it was necessary for Helen to put her sensitive fingers in Teacher’s mouth, sometimes far down her throat, until Teacher would be nauseated, but nothing was too hard, so Helen was benefited.” In order to study speech further Helen entered the Wright-Humason School for the Deaf in 1894, where she was the only deaf-blind student. From there she wrote, “How I should like to speak like other people! I should be willing to work night and day if it could only be accomplished. Think of what a joy it would be to all of my friends to hear me speak naturally.”

While taking speech lessons, Helen learned to read other people’s words by placing her middle finger on the nose, her forefinger on the lips and her thumb on the throat of the person with whom she was communicating so that she could “hear” the spoken words. After developing this ability, Helen largely discarded the manual alphabet as a form of communication, vastly preferring lip reading and spoken language. Helen’s voice was once described as “the loneliest sound I have ever heard, like waves breaking on the coast of some lonely desert island.” She worked all her life to improve her voice; she did achieve lucidity and often spoke publicly, but her voice always sounded strange to someone first hearing it.

## Radcliffe College

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*The highest result of education is tolerance.*

– Helen Keller

**H**elen Keller’s dream of attending college came true in 1900, when she entered Radcliffe College, the women’s branch of the all-male Harvard University (Radcliffe gradually merged into union with Harvard, becoming fully absorbed in 1999).

Helen Keller quickly discovered that college was not the “romantic lyceum” she had imagined. Her eagerness to enter college was not reciprocated by the administration: “Radcliffe did not desire

Helen Keller as a student,” Dean Agnes Irwin later revealed. In general, Helen felt distanced from her professors; in large classrooms, “one does not meet the great and wise face to face, one does not even feel their living touch.” She considered most of her teachers as “impersonal as Victrolas”; “the professor is as remote as if he were talking through a telephone.”

Only one professor, William Allan Neilson, learned the manual finger language in order to communicate directly with Helen. Impressed with her creative writing skills, he encouraged her to write her autobiography, which was first published

serially in the Ladies' *Home Journal*, then as a book entitled *The Story of My Life*.

Helen Keller also despised the frenetic pace of college learning because it deprived her of time to meditate. "I used to have time to think, to reflect, my mind and I. We used to sit together of an evening and listen to the inner melodies of the spirit which one only hears in leisure moments. But in college there is no time to commune with one's thoughts."

Annie Sullivan attended every class with Helen, spelling the professors' lectures into her hand. Helen later wrote her notes in Braille from memory. Few of Helen's schoolbooks were available in Braille, so Annie read them to Helen. All this reading further stressed Annie's eyes,

and she consulted a doctor. "When he heard that Teacher read to me five or more hours daily," Helen recalled, the doctor exclaimed, "That is sheer madness, Miss Sullivan. You must rest your eyes completely." But there was no time to rest her eyes, and Annie continued helping Helen with her studies. To prove that Helen's work was really her own, Dean Irwin did not permit Annie to be present when Helen took exams; someone else translated the exam questions into Braille for Helen.

In 1904 Helen Keller, guided to the stage by Annie Sullivan, graduated from Radcliffe College *cum laude*. Helen was the first deaf-blind person to earn a college degree. Many people, including Helen, thought that Annie also deserved a diploma.

## Religion

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*The Bible gives me a deep, comforting sense that "things seen are temporal and things unseen are eternal."* – Helen Keller

**A**t age 16, Helen Keller was introduced to the writings of the famous 18th-century Swedish theologian, scientist and philosopher Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). Deeply moved by Swedenborg's accounts of the mystical visions he had experienced during his spiritual crisis when he turned away from scientific research and devoted himself to biblical study and the writing of religious philosophy, Helen became a devout Swedenborgian.

Shortly after her father's death in 1896, Helen wrote, "Teacher has read *The Immortal Fountain* to me, and as she spelled the words into my hand, I forgot my heartache, and only thought of dear father in his heavenly home, surrounded by angels, and learning all that he could not learn here. So you see what a great help those truths are to me. Oh, I have never needed them so sorely before."

Swedenborgianism's concepts of a universal spiritual reality and brotherhood, a loving God and an afterlife in which no one would suffer from limitations and handicaps appealed to Helen, who declared Swedenborg "one of the noblest champions true Christianity has ever known." Annie Sullivan, however, never shared Helen's

spiritual beliefs; she remained an agnostic who thought Swedenborg a scientific genius who had descended into madness.

In 1927 Doubleday published Helen's deeply felt book about Swedenborgianism, titled *My Religion*; the book was later reissued with the title *Light in My Darkness*, from Helen's statement "I know that life is given us so that we may grow in love. And I believe that God is in me as the sun is in the color and fragrance of the flower, the Light in my darkness, the Voice in my silence."

Helen was a lifelong Swedenborgian; at age 76, she wrote in a 1956 *Guideposts Magazine* article, "Since my 17th year, I have tried to live according to the teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg. By 'church' he did not mean an ecclesiastical organization, but a spiritual fellowship of thoughtful men and women who spend their lives for a service to mankind that outlasts them. He called it a civilization that was to be born of a healthy, universal religion—goodwill, mutual understanding, service from each to all, regardless of dogma or ritual."

Late in her life, Helen arranged for a Swedenborgian minister of The New Church in New York to officiate at her own funeral service; however, this ceremony never took place because her family and trustees disregarded her wishes.

# Socialism

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*If ever there was a superwoman that woman is Helen Keller. By her indomitable will she wrought a miracle, and when one ponders over her achievements, the brain is dazzled by the possibilities of the human mind. To us Socialist Helen Keller ought to be doubly precious, for she is our Comrade—let us glory in that.*

– Socialist Party Daily *The Call* 4 May 1913

**H**elen Keller was first introduced to socialism when Anne Sullivan Macy, herself not a socialist, suggested she read H. G. Wells' *New Worlds for Old* for its "imaginative quality and electric style." Moved deeply, Helen concluded that the workers' struggles against their oppressive capitalist bosses mirrored her own battles against deafness and blindness. She asked John Macy, who was a socialist and in 1916 wrote *Socialism in America*, to introduce her to further socialist writings; she began to read Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in German Braille. Helen became a member of the Socialist Party in 1909. By 1912, a year in which nearly one million Americans voted for socialist Eugene Victor Debs for president, Helen had become a national voice for socialism and working class solidarity. She became friends with many anarchists and radical leaders, including John Reed, Emma Goldman and Arturo Giovannitti.

Her articles and speeches take on a harder edge as the country drew close to war and the reformist tendency in the Socialist Party forced a split with its revolutionary wing. She called for party unity in 1913 and then broke publicly with reformism and sided wholeheartedly with the Industrial Workers of the World in 1916, taking up the struggle against President Wilson's preparations for war. This antiwar, antipatriotic stand eventually brought the entire Socialist Party to grief.

Many of Helen Keller's articles were published by *The Call*, which was founded in New York in 1908 and quickly became America's leading socialist newspaper. The paper opposed United States involvement in World War I and this resulted in its prosecution under the Espionage Act. Among

other people who wrote for the New York *Call* were Agnes Smedley, Margaret Sanger, Kate Richards O'Hare, Robert Minor, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and Eugene Debs.

The newspaper also suffered under the Red Scare and its offices were raided and wrecked in 1919. Norman Thomas, future leader of the Socialist Party of America, became editor of the newspaper, but this failed to stop its being closed down in 1923.

Helen Keller's impassioned socialism caused discomfort among her family as well as those who later sought to perpetuate her image as a handicapped wonder woman. Before going to Hollywood in 1918 to create her film *Deliverance*, she had to agree to quiet her antiwar cries and soften her public image. To her family, this new crusading Helen was almost as remote and unreachable as the barbaric child who had pinched them until they bled. They failed to realize that her monumental childhood rage had not been dampened—it had simply been channeled into a political and social activism they found equally incomprehensible.

*When indeed shall we learn that we are all related to the other, that we are all members of the same body? Until the spirit of love for our fellow men, regardless of race, color or creed, shall fill the world, social justice can never be attained.*

– Helen Keller

# Hollywood

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**H**elen Keller and Anne Sullivan Macy had long depended on wealthy patrons' generosity to pay Helen's tuition and support the women's household and travel, but both women wanted to earn their own living. In addition, Helen feared that if she died before her teacher, Annie would be left destitute.

In 1914 the two women embarked on their first transcontinental lecture tour, speaking as part of a traveling Chautauqua presenting lectures, music and dramatic entertainment to communities across the country. Helen fulfilled speaking engagements in Canada, California, Michigan, Minnesota, Iowa and other Midwestern states. Polly Thomson from Glasgow, Scotland, joined the women in October 1914 and served as Helen's secretary and companion for the rest of her life.

Helen first experienced Hollywood in 1918 when she, Annie and Polly went to California to turn Helen's life story into a movie called *Deliverance*. World War I had drained money and interest from the Chautauqua circuit, and American patriots did not want to hear from a self-proclaimed Bolshevik like Helen. The trio of women needed money when they agreed to make the film, but Helen also had high hopes of creating a motion picture as influential as the recent *The Birth of a Nation*. To screenwriter Francis Trevelyan Miller, Helen wrote of the film, "It will help me carry farther the message that has so long burned in my heart—a message of courage, a message of a brighter, happier future for all men. I dream of a day when all who go forth sorrowing and struggling shall bring their golden sheaves home with them in joy. I dream of a liberty that shall find its way to all who are bound by circumstances and poverty. As the dungeon of sense in which I once lay was broken by love and faith, so I desire to open wide all the prison-doors of the world."

However, Helen's hopes were not realized in this hodgepodge film, which she later disavowed. She claimed in her 1955 tribute *Teacher Anne Sullivan Macy*, "it was only the hope of providing for Teacher that led me to Hollywood to have a film made of my life story." The movie was a

docudrama with added symbolism and a fanciful plot line, in which Helen had a childhood friend named Nadja who was insanely jealous and only realized Helen's worth after her own son was blinded in the war. Other elements of Helen's early life depicted in the film were more closely based on reality and were later dramatized in William Gibson's play *The Miracle Worker*.

Helen found many of the movie's scenes hilariously farfetched, including a sequence in which "Knowledge" (played by a stuntwoman) and "Ignorance" (played by a male giant) had a fistfight for her mind as an infant. In another scene, Helen appeared at a formal banquet attended by all her friends, both living and dead. In the picture's final scene, Helen rode a white charger and blew a trumpet as she represented a sort of Joan of Arc leading the peoples of the world to freedom. Her horse reared during the filming, and Helen might have been seriously injured if not for the quick intervention of a cameraman.

The screenwriter Miller and the Hollywood producers were uncomfortable with their subject's seemingly sexless existence. They knew that if they presented her as an asexual woman, the audience would amble toward the exits; therefore, she must have a cinematic boyfriend. Knowing that Helen loved the blind Ionian poet Homer, they decided her lover would be none other than the mythical Ulysses.

Scenes were filmed that depict this unlikely couple's romance, which takes place only in Helen's mind. In the shot following Helen's graduation from Radcliffe College, she is wearing a revealing tunic and seated outside a Greek temple, where she is wooed by the bare-chested Ulysses, the survivor of a shipwreck on the isle of Circe. Their love for each other is demonstrated by a lusty kiss before the requisite discreet fade-out. Helen laughed every time the Ulysses scene was described to her.

(The movie producers did not know that Helen had recently had a love affair and very nearly eloped with Peter Fagan, a 29-year-old socialist secretary who had briefly replaced Polly during

her vacation. Helen had been staying with her family while Annie convalesced, when their secret engagement was discovered by Helen's mother, who banished Peter from the house. Later Helen's brother-in-law chased Peter off with a gun, but Peter and Helen maintained communications. However, the night she packed her bag and waited on the porch for him to take her away, he never came.)

Disillusioned with many aspects of Hollywood, Helen nevertheless enjoyed horseback riding with Polly and Annie every day at dawn: "Nothing refreshed me as did the cool breeze, scented with sage, thyme, and eucalyptus. Some of the happiest hours of my life were spent on the trails of Beverly Hills." Additionally, the women became acquainted with Charlie Chaplin, whom Helen later declared one of "the three greatest men of our time" (with Vladimir Lenin and Thomas Edison). They also met Lillian Gish, Constance Talmadge, Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford.

Helen, Annie and Polly came to New York for the opening of *Deliverance*, only to discover that it coincided with the strike of Actors' Equity, the

actors' and stage managers' union. When Helen realized that her picture was being used as a strikebreaker, she refused to attend the opening and instead joined a protest march with the striking actors. The film received some good reviews, but was not a commercial success. Distributor George Klein wrote to Helen that "*Deliverance* has been appreciated by what may be called the more refined classes and thinking people, but it did not succeed in drawing crowds to the box office." Helen declared herself and Annie the kind of people "who come out of an enterprise poorer than when we went into it."

A later foray into Hollywood earned Helen an Academy Award for the 1954 documentary *The Unconquered*, later renamed *Helen Keller in Her Story*. The film, narrated by Katharine Cornell, features many vintage still photographs of Helen and Annie, as well as rare film footage of Annie explaining how Helen was taught speech and of Helen learning the art of the dance from Martha Graham and the acclaimed dancer and choreographer Robert Helpmann.

## Vaudeville

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After the financial opportunities of their lecture series wore thin and their venture to Hollywood to create the movie *Deliverance* did not produce the monetary windfall they had hoped for, Helen and Annie turned to the vaudeville stage. Ironically, Helen's first offer of employment in vaudeville came when she was a child in the late 1880s, when she had been offered \$500 a week to appear on B. F. Keith's vaudeville circuit. The only reason that Helen was not exhibited like P.T. Barnum's sensational assortment of midgets, bearded ladies and the Siamese twins Chang and Eng was her mother Kate Keller's violent objections to her daughter's being displayed publicly as a curiosity. Helen later revealed that her mother had written "a heartbroken letter to Teacher declaring that she would die before she would let this happen."

In 1920 performing in the vaudeville circuit offered more money than literary work or lecture tours, so Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan Macy went coast to coast with the Orpheum Circuit,

performing twice a day from February 1920 until the spring of 1924 when Annie's health was declining.

In their vaudeville sketch, which was based on their lecture, Annie introduced Helen as "the Star of Happiness to all struggling humanity," after which Helen entered to the orchestra's "The Star of Happiness," which had been composed in her honor. Annie would then explain how she taught Helen to speak. Later in the scene Helen said "My teacher has told you how a word from her hand touched the darkness of my mind and I awoke to the gladness of life. I was dumb; now I speak. I owe this to the hands and hearts of others. Through their love I found my soul and God and happiness. I lift up my voice and thank the Lord for love and joy and the promise of life to come." After a repeat chorus of "The Star of Happiness," the formal act closed with Helen's affirmation "This is my message of hope and inspiration to all mankind." A question-and-answer session followed, in which

Annie interpreted Helen's answers to questions from the audience (the women prepared in advance for a variety of audience questions).

Helen and Annie were among the highest-paid performers on the vaudeville stage, headlining for \$2,000 a week at New York City's Palace Theater. Helen enjoyed dressing up in sequined evening gowns and theatrical makeup, the interaction with the audience and the observation of her fellow vaudeville performers. She later wrote, "I can conceive that in time the spectacle might have grown stale. But I shall always be glad I went into vaudeville, not only for the excitement of it, but also for the opportunities it gave me to study life."

Annie did not enjoy vaudeville as Helen did. Helen was proud to earn a living by "a dignified act," but Annie was mortified by the disdain of high society for vaudeville, which catered to the

lower classes. She winced each time she passed the backstage signs declaring that "Vulgarity will not be tolerated. Check with manager before using any material you have any doubt about. Don't use words 'hell,' 'damn,' 'devil,' 'cockroach,' 'spit,' etc." Annie considered most of their fellow performers degenerates; she and Helen shared the stage with tabloid celebrities, a man acquitted of murder and billed as "the Man-Woman," and "The Human Tank," who swallowed frogs and threw them up alive.

While performing in Toronto in 1921, Annie collapsed with a severe case of the flu; the following year bronchitis prevented her appearance on stage. After that Polly Thomson performed with Helen, until Annie's deteriorating health led the three women to retire from the stage altogether.

## American Foundation for the Blind (AFB)

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**A**lthough estimates vary, there are today approximately 10 million blind and visually impaired people in the United States, including 1.3 million Americans who are legally blind. Legal blindness is a level of visual impairment that has been defined by law to determine eligibility for benefits. It refers to central visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with the best possible correction, as measured on a Snellen vision chart, or a visual field of 20 degrees or less. There are around 5.5 million elderly individuals who are blind or visually impaired, and 55,200 legally blind children. Roughly 109,000 visually impaired people in the United States use long canes to get around. Just over 7,000 Americans use dog guides; about 1,500 individuals graduate from a dog-guide user program annually. Only 32% of legally blind working-age Americans is employed.

Approximately 93,600 visually impaired or blind students, including 10,800 who are deaf-blind, are served in the special education programs of the United States. About 5,500 legally blind children use Braille as their primary reading medium. Only 45% of individuals with severe visual impairment or blindness have a high school diploma, compared to 80% among fully sighted individuals. Among high school graduates, those with severe visual impairment or blindness are about as likely to have taken some college courses as those who were sighted, but they are less likely to have graduated. About 62% of visually impaired whites complete high school or higher education, compared to 41% of visually impaired blacks and 44% of visually impaired Hispanics.

Founded in 1921, the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) is a national not-for-profit organization that expands possibilities for people with vision loss. AFB's priorities include broadening access to technology; elevating the quality of information and tools for the professionals who serve people with vision loss, and promoting independent and healthy living for people with vision loss by providing them and their families with relevant and timely resources. The organization also is proud to house the Helen Keller Archives and honor the more than 40 years that Helen Keller worked tirelessly with AFB to expand possibilities for people with vision loss.

In 1923 Helen and Annie began speaking at meetings of the AFB, the organization that would employ Helen for the rest of her life. Fund-raising was not a new role for Helen: at the Perkins Institution, director Michael Anagnos had shrewdly let her make the appeal herself for the Kindergarten for the Blind, and she had raised astonishing sums of money. In middle age she had not lost her touch, even though she was privately ashamed of her extraordinary ability to extract money from wealthy people. Philanthropy went against the grain of her socialist beliefs. She wrote, “Teacher and I felt real shame to appear as mendicants at the doors of plenty, even though we were laboring with all our might to raise the blind from beggary.”

For a fledgling organization like the AFB, which needed the public’s support to advance its cause, Helen Keller was the perfect ambassador. Spiritually as well as physically beautiful, intelligent, with an unquenchable zest for life, Helen delivered a message that the public, afraid for its own health and normalcy, desperately wanted to hear: being disabled was not synonymous with despair and physical ugliness, but an opportunity for heroism and spiritual transcendence.

People flocked to the meetings at which Helen mounted her appeals for the blind. These appeals were a repeat of Helen and Annie’s vaudeville act, which in turn had been based on their lectures. After a performance by one or more blind artists and a brief talk by someone representing the foundation, Helen and Annie made their long-awaited appearance. The meeting concluded with another musical interlude as ushers collected cash donations and distributed membership blanks.

As with vaudeville, Annie was the less enthusiastic partner in Helen’s cause. Helen later wrote, “If Teacher had been left free to choose her destiny, she would never have limited herself to the cause of the blind. It was only because she saw a chance of usefulness to them that she joined her wealth of mind and heart to my endeavors.”

In 1946 Helen Keller made the first of her world tours for the American Foundation for the Overseas Blind, a sister organization to the AFB. Within the next 11 years she would visit 39 countries on five continents on behalf of the disabled.

## The 39 Countries Helen Keller Visited

*As Counselor to the American Foundation for Overseas Blind I have labored long and traveled far in recent years to bring a measure of comfort and hope to my blind and deaf-blind fellows in distant places.*

– Helen Keller

Australia - 1948	Greece - 1946	Panama - 1953
Brazil - 1953	Iceland - 1957	Peru - 1953
Burma (now Myanmar) - 1955	India - 1955	Philippines - 1948, 1953
Canada - Nova Scotia in 1901, 1957	Indonesia - 1955	Portugal - 1956
Chile - 1953	Ireland - 1930	Scotland - 1932, 1934, 1955
China - Manchuria in 1937, Hong Kong in 1955	Israel - 1952	South Africa – 1951
Denmark - 1957	Italy - 1946, 1956	Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) - 1951
Egypt - 1952	Japan - 1937, 1948, 1955	Spain - 1956
Finland - 1957	Jordan - 1952	Sweden - 1957
France - 1931, 1946, 1950, 1952	Korea - 1948	Switzerland - 1957
Germany - 1956	Lebanon - 1952	Syria - 1952
Great Britain - 1930, 1932, 1946, 1951, 1953	Mexico - 1953	Yugoslavia - 1931
	New Zealand - 1948	
	Norway - 1957	
	Pakistan - 1955	

# Helen Keller's 1925 Address to Congress

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I am deeply gratified that the cause of the blind of America for which I am working is to be heard here in the chief city of the land. I am indeed grateful to President and Mrs. Coolidge for assisting me so kindly in my work. Truly we are blessed when God raises up for us helpers in high places! Their authority is loving-kindness, their decrees are acts of healing to the unfortunate and the discouraged. I like to think that in Washington I shall find a city of helpers for the sightless. Was it not here that the effort to rehabilitate our blinded soldiers started? Was it not here that appropriations were made to emboss books for the blind? Was not the National Library for the Blind established here? With such a bright record, it seems to me most fitting that Washington should assist in a very special way the American Foundation for the Blind—an organization whose object is to make useful, self-respecting men and women out of the dependent, unhappy blind of this country.

The Foundation is only four years old; but in that short time it has demonstrated its unique value. It grew out of the imperative needs of the blind, and was called in to being by the blind themselves. It is national and international in scope and significance. It seems to me to represent the best and most enlightened thought on our problems that has been reached so far. If the Foundation is only financed and equipped properly, its power for good will be incalculable. It will give new life to large numbers of people who lose their sight when it is too late for them to go to school. It will hold out a helping hand to them in the darkest hour of their tragedy. Through its ministrations they will be enabled to learn to read with their fingers, to work in the dark and enjoy some of the satisfaction of life. It will make life more worth living for all the blind by increasing their economic value and giving them more of the joy of normal activity. Remember, living always in the shadow of disaster as they do, they cannot throw off sad thoughts as the seeing can. They cannot find forgetfulness in watching the scenes about them. It is doubly necessary to find occupations suited to their capabilities, and that is what the Foundation seeks to do. I tell you, it will be a center from which rays of good will and encouragement will shine in to thousands of despairing hearts.

Oh, my friends, this is the vision of better days for the sightless which I have cherished for many years. I stand before you, myself deaf and blind; in halting words I plead with you not to let such a splendid and truly American philanthropy fail for want of funds. I was once without hope or joy. I was alone, imprisoned in a dark silent world because no one could communicate with me. Then my teacher came to me, and with a word dropped from her fingers, a ray of light from her soul, I found myself, found the world and found God! It is because she cared about me and helped me to overcome my limitations that my own life has been bright in spite of deafness and blindness. But I cannot rest while I think of the speechless prayers, the lonely, obscure lives of the blind who are not helped as I have been! It is the caring that matters. The gift without the giver is bare. If you care—if we can make the American people care—thousands of unfortunate human beings will look up with new hope, square their shoulder to the burden and play a man's part in the world. Your faith in them will be a staff in their hands, and your kindness a torch in their darkness. This is your responsibility towards the handicapped, and I am sure you cannot help meeting it generously.

I appeal to the people of Washington—to you who are strong and kind, you who have eyes and ears, you who have power and nation-wide authority, to sponsor and foster the work of the American Foundation for the Blind.

# Letter to J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation

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March 31, 1949

Dear Mr. Hoover:

I am indeed happy to inform you that a Committee on the Deaf-Blind of America has finally been started. It is to be one of the departments of the American Foundation for the Blind with which I have worked for 26 years.

All that time there has burned within me an unceasing pain because the problems of the doubly handicapped remain for the most part unsolved, and I have made one attempt after another on their behalf.

Now that there is a Committee to study their needs, I am writing to you because it offers a wonderful opportunity for your noble impulses—effective aid to the most appealing and loneliest group of human beings on earth. They are widely scattered over a vast continent, and it will require careful study and patient search if they are to be properly served.

Try to imagine, if you can, the anguish and horror you would experience bowed down by the twofold weight of blindness and deafness, with no hope of emerging from an utter isolation! Still throbbing with natural emotions and desires, you would feel through the sense of touch the existence of a living world, and desperately but vainly you would seek an escape into its healing light.

All your pleasures would vanish in a dreadful monotony of silent days. Even work, man's Divine heritage—work that can bind up broken hearts—would be lost to you. Family and friends might surround you with love, but consolation alone cannot restore usefulness, or bring release from that hardest prison—a tomb of the mind and a dungeon of the body.

I doubt if even the most imaginative and tender normal people can realize the peculiar cruelty of such a situation. The blind who are taught can live happily in a world of sounds, and the deaf use their eyes instead of ears, but the deaf-blind have no substitute for sight or hearing. The keenest touch cannot break their immobility. More than any other physically fettered group, they need right teaching and constructive procedures to reclaim them to normal society.

Will you not, dear friend, give some thought to the Helen Keller Committee on the Deaf-blind, so that more of those who cannot see and hear may regain life's goodness and the dignity of useful work? I plead for your financial support of this work, where so much needs to be accomplished.

Trustingly and cordially yours,

Helen Keller

# Books Written by Helen Keller

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1903 *The Story of My Life*

1903 *Optimism*

1908 *The World I Live In*

1910 *The Song of the Stone Wall*

1913 *Out of the Dark: Essays, Letters and Addresses on Physical and Social Vision*

1927 *My Religion* (later retitled *Light in My Darkness*)

1929 *Midstream: My Later Life*

1932 *Peace at Eventide*

1933 *Helen Keller in Scotland*

1938 *Helen Keller's Journal*

1941 *Let Us Have Faith*

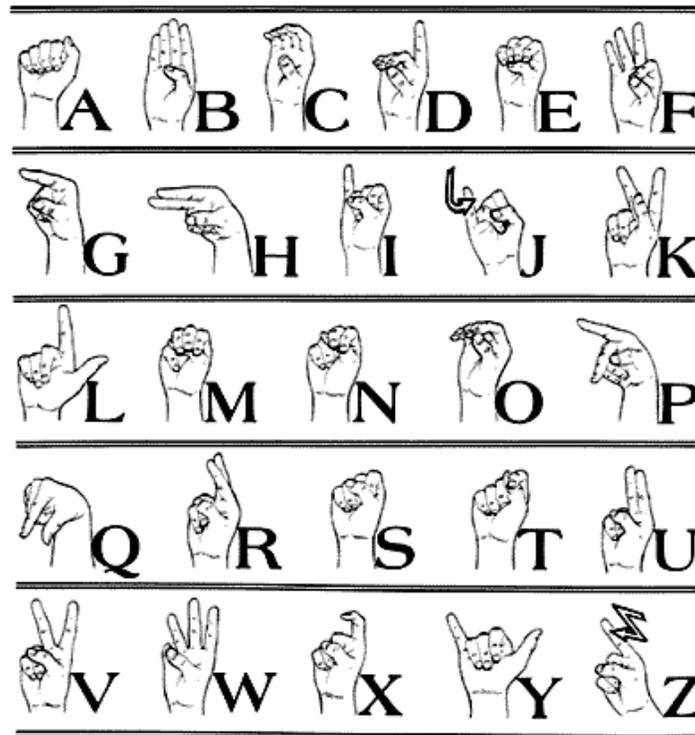
1955 *Teacher Anne Sullivan Macy: A Tribute from the Foster-Child of Her Mind*

1957 *The Open Door*

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## Sign Language Alphabet

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Keller, Helen. *Light in My Darkness, The Open Door, Optimism, Out of the Dark: Essays, Letters and Addresses on Physical and Social Vision, The Story of My Life, Teacher Anne Sullivan Macy: A Tribute from the Foster-Child of Her Mind and The World I Live In*.

Lash, Joseph P. *Helen and Teacher: The Story of Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan Macy*. Cambridge: Perseus, 1980.

# Resources on Deafness and Blindness

## ORGANIZATIONS

### **American Foundation for the Blind**

[www.afb.org](http://www.afb.org)

The American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) is a national nonprofit that expands possibilities for people with vision loss. AFB's priorities include broadening access to technology; elevating the quality of information and tools for the professionals who serve people with vision loss; and promoting independent and healthy living for people with vision loss by providing them and their families with relevant and timely resources.

### **Anchor Center for Blind Children**

[www.anchorcenter.org](http://www.anchorcenter.org)

In Denver, CO, Anchor Center for Blind Children is a not-for profit organization dedicated to providing early intervention/education to blind and visually impaired children throughout the state of Colorado. Its staff of highly trained vision specialists, therapists and teachers strives to foster the full potential of children who are blind by providing exemplary education, therapy and family support services.

### **Colorado Center for the Blind**

[www.cocenter.org](http://www.cocenter.org)

By providing comprehensive training, support and opportunities to blind persons and others in developing positive attitudes, the Colorado Center for the Blind, located in Littleton, CO, empowers blind persons to lead independent lives as fully integrated, productive and contributing members of society.

### **Colorado Resource Guide for Families of Children who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing**

[www.handsandvoices.org](http://www.handsandvoices.org)

Whether you're a parent who has just discovered your child has a hearing loss, or you're a teacher, a school administrator, an audiologist, or someone else related to the community of deaf and hard of hearing individuals, this booklet is for you. Published by Colorado Families for Hands and Voices.

### **The Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind**

[www.csdb.org](http://www.csdb.org)

Located in Colorado Springs, CO, the Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind is the center of excellence for specialized, statewide, high-quality, educational services supporting data-driven decisions that are best for each individual.

### **Deafness Research Foundation (DRF)**

[www.drf.org](http://www.drf.org)

For more than 50 years, DRF has worked to make hearing health possible for everyone through quality research and education. As the leading national source of private funding for research, its grants have resulted in treatments for hearing and balance related conditions helping those living with hearing loss and protecting those at risk.

## **Helen Keller Foundation for Research and Education.**

[www.helenkellerfoundation.org](http://www.helenkellerfoundation.org)

Based on the legacy of Helen Keller, the Foundation strives to prevent blindness and deafness by advancing research and education. The Foundation aspires to be a leader in integrating sight, speech and hearing research with the greater biomedical research community, creating and coordinating a peer-reviewed, worldwide network of investigators and institutions.

## **Helen Keller International**

[www.hki.org](http://www.hki.org)

Founded in 1915, Helen Keller International (HKI) is among the oldest international not-for-profit organizations devoted to fighting and treating preventable blindness and malnutrition. HKI is headquartered in New York City, and has programs in 22 countries in Africa and Asia as well as in the United States. HKI builds local capacity by establishing sustainable programs, and provides scientific and technical assistance and data to governments and international, regional, national and local organizations around the world. HKI programs combat malnutrition, cataract, trachoma, onchocerciasis (river blindness) and refractive error. The goal of all HKI programs is to reduce the suffering of those without access to needed health or vision care and, ultimately, to help lift people from poverty.

## **Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults**

[www.hknc.org](http://www.hknc.org)

The mission of the Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults (HKNC) is to enable each person who is deaf-blind to live and work in his or her community of choice. Authorized by an Act of Congress in 1967, the HKNC is a national rehabilitation program serving youth and adults who are deaf-blind.

## **Helen Keller Services for the Blind**

[www.helenkeller.org](http://www.helenkeller.org)

Helen Keller Services for the Blind helps people of all ages who are blind or visually impaired to develop independence and to participate actively and fully in their communities.

## **Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center at Gallaudet University**

[www.clearcenter.gallaudet.edu](http://www.clearcenter.gallaudet.edu)

The Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center (Clerc Center) at Gallaudet University comprises two federally mandated demonstration schools for students from birth through age 21 who are deaf. Its two demonstration schools on Gallaudet's campus work in collaboration with a network of exemplary programs and professionals to identify, research, develop, evaluate and disseminate innovative curricula, materials, educational strategies, and technologies for deaf and hard-of-hearing students. The Clerc Center also provides training and technical assistance to families and programs throughout the United States, and serves as a model individualized educational program, working in close partnership with our students and their families.

## **National Institute for Deafness and Other Communication Disorders**

[www.nidcd.nih.gov](http://www.nidcd.nih.gov)

Established in 1988, the National Institute for Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD) is mandated to conduct and support biomedical and behavioral research and research training in the normal and disordered processes of hearing, balance, smell, taste, voice, speech, and language. The Institute also conducts and supports research and research training related to disease prevention and health promotion; addresses special biomedical and behavioral problems associated with people who have communication impairments or disorders; and supports efforts to create devices which substitute for lost and impaired sensory and communication function.

## **National Sports Center for the Disabled**

[www.nscd.org](http://www.nscd.org)

Located in Colorado, the National Sports Center for the Disabled (NSCD) provides quality outdoor sports and therapeutic recreation programs that positively impact the lives of people with physical, cognitive, emotional, or behavioral challenges.

## **Rocky Mountain Deaf School**

[www.rmdeafschool.net](http://www.rmdeafschool.net)

Rocky Mountain Deaf School in Golden, CO is founded on the belief that deaf children can and should succeed. The driving force behind the school is a theme of excellence in research-based academic programs. In this intellectually stimulating environment, communication is totally accessible throughout the day from every person in the child's environment. Each student's potential is maximized as teachers continue to instill in each child the joy of living and learning.

## **United States Association of Blind Athletes**

[www.usaba.org](http://www.usaba.org)

The United States Association of Blind Athletes is a Colorado-based nonprofit organization that provides life-enriching sports opportunities for children, youth and adults who are blind or visually impaired.

## **BOOKS**

*Adventures in Darkness: Memoirs of an Eleven-Year Old Boy* by Tom Sullivan. Publisher: Thomas Nelson.

*Crashing Through – A True Story of Risk, Adventure, and the Man Who Dared to See* by Robert Kurson. Publisher: Random House. A biography of Mike May. A movie based on *Crashing Through* will be produced by Fox 2000 to be written by Diana Osanna.

## **PERSONS**

Mike May: Highlight on Mike May at <http://www.senderogroup.com/mike.htm>

Tom Sullivan:<http://www.sullivanspeaks.com>

Marla Runyan:<http://www.marlarunyan.com>

# Miracle Worker Q & A

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## Questions

- 1) How does Annie Sullivan's life experience make her qualified to teach Helen Keller? Why do you think Annie takes the job?
- 2) What does Annie want Helen to learn? How does Annie teach Helen? Does Annie succeed in teaching Helen?
- 3) How do the Kellers feel about Annie and her instruction methods? How do their feelings differ and what is the end result?
- 4) How do the Kellers treat Helen? Annie? Each other?
- 5) How does Helen change during the course of the play? How do the other Kellers change? How does Annie change?
- 6) Why do you think that Helen acts so spoiled and why is Annie certain that she must address this problem before anything else?
- 7) What does Annie hope to accomplish by sequestering Helen and herself away from the rest of the Kellers? What obstacles do they run up against?
- 8) How does Annie communicate with Helen? Explain why you think this is effective or not.
- 9) What is the conflict between James and the Captain? How does the playwright show and resolve the problem?
- 10) Describe some of the limitations that characters may have and if they are successful in overcoming these limitations.
- 11) Who would you consider the "miracle worker?" Explain your answer.
- 12) What is the difference between language, speech and communication?

## Activities

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### Audio Description

Audio describers relay the actions on stage for blind and visually impaired audience members. They watch the performance and relay descriptions of costumes, props, actions and other moments to enhance the theatrical experience. They are trained to give an objective description so the audience member can make his/her own judgment regarding what is happening on stage.

From what you remember from the performance of *The Miracle Worker*, create an audio description of the beginning of the show. Start by describing the set, the lighting and some of the props. Describe the first actor's costume and the action that is happening. Pay particular attention to varying your vocabulary and use lots of adjectives.

Read your description to a partner and have that partner close his/her eyes.

-and/or-

Describe the classroom. Start by describing the room and some of the objects in the room. Describe some of the characters (i.e. other students, the teacher, etc.) that also are in the room. Convey the action that is taking place.

Questions to ask: Explain what was easy or difficult about the activity. Were the words that were used descriptive or can you come up with more vivid words? Was your description objective or subjective?

**Reading and Writing 2: Students write and speak for a variety of purposes and audiences.**

**Reading and Writing 4: Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing.**

# Communicating Part I

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Materials: Pieces of banana, chocolate, lemon, pad of paper, pen/pencil, objects.

The incredible journey of learning and understanding that Helen Keller and Annie Sullivan take shows that limitations can be overcome. This exercise will explore limitations and tactics to overcome these obstacles.

Split the large group into three separate groups.

Group #1 will have no communication limitations placed on them.

Group #2 is to communicate by using sound but not speech.

Group #3 is not allowed to speak, make noise, write or draw when communicating.

Allow Group #2 and Group #3 to use charades, but be wary of Group #3 communicating with known sign language such as a thumbs up to signify “yes.”

Begin with a list of foods and ones that are easily accessible. For example, a banana, a piece of chocolate, and/or a lemon. Each group is given the food and is asked to describe the food paying particular attention to the limitations that are placed on them. When describing the food, explore the taste and the textures and any other important information that you wish to convey. You may either pick one of the tastes to explore this exercise or try all three to compare.

Have the groups share their findings, first with the limitations of their group and then without the limitations in a forum.

Questions for each group: What forms of communication did you rely on to convey what you wanted to say? What are some of the ways that you can communicate without using words? What was easy or difficult about this exercise? List the obstacles your group faced and how your group overcame them? How would you describe these tastes to someone who has never been able to taste or smell?

# Communicating Part II

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Write your conclusions of what happened in the exercise in three sentences. After the three sentences are completed, try it without using language. How can you convey the three sentences without using words but still using a pencil or pen? What are some of the ideas that you used? Was it effective?

Now try the exercise again but use three-dimensional objects to relay the information. How can you construct a sentence using just the objects? Was it effective? What could you do to make the information stronger?

**Dance 3: Students will create, communicate, and problem solve through dance.**

**Visual Arts 1: Students recognize and use visual arts as a form of communication.**

# Trust Walk

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Materials: Blindfolds

- 1) Each player gets a partner and decides who is Player A and Player B.
- 2) Player A blindfolds player B and takes hold of one of Player B's hands. When the leader says, “Go,” A begins to lead B around the room slowly and then faster until a run.
- 3) After a while, Players will switch places and repeat the game.

**Theatre 5: Students analyze and assess the characteristics, merits, and meanings of traditional and modern forms of dramatic expression.**

# Glass Cobra

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Participants stand in a circle and close their eyes (or are blind-folded) and silence their voices. They will remain silent with eyes closed for the entire activity. Facilitators rearrange participants so that they no longer know next to whom they are standing. Everyone turns to the right and puts hands on the shoulders of the person next to them. They should memorize the shoulders, neck, hair, etc. of this person. Participants turn to the right again, take a few steps forward, to the side, and around until they are mixed up. Participants are asked to find the familiar shoulders again and recreate the original circle.

**Reflection:** Describe your experience. What was an obstacle for you? In the activity you started in a place you knew, then you were mixed up and directed to find a familiar place again. In the play, Helen undergoes a similar journey, pushed by Annie to move outside her comfort zone. This is the place where learning happens. How do you push your students to uncomfortable places to learn, simultaneously supporting and encouraging them?

(Contributed by Anne Penner and Taylor Pringle)

**Science 3.3: Students know and understand how the human body functions, factors that influence its structures and functions and how these structures and functions compare with those of other organisms.**