

Who is Helen Keller?

Name _____

Class · period _____

Date _____

THE SHORT VERSION

Helen Keller (1880–1968) was born hearing and sighted, but a high fever at 19 months left her Blind and Deaf. After Anne Sullivan reached her through fingerspelling in 1887, Keller learned Braille, speech, and typing, and became the first Deaf-Blind person to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree.

EARLY LIFE

A fever at 19 months, a frustrated child, and the teacher who reached her

01 CHILDHOOD IN ALABAMA

01 Helen Keller was born in June of 1880 in Tuscumbia, Alabama.

Although she had been born hearing, when she was 19 months old a high fever left Helen Blind and Deaf.

02 While she was growing up, Keller's parents indulged her, leading to her being a disobedient child. This was added to by her lack of the ability to communicate, causing her to become frustrated and have many outbursts.

02 ANNE SULLIVAN ARRIVES

01 In 1887, Anne Sullivan entered Keller's life as her teacher.

Anne was able to break through Helen's barriers by teaching her fingerspelling in American Sign Language. It is said that Helen was feeling water through her fingers in one hand while Anne was fingerspelling the word W-A-T-E-R in the other and things clicked.

EDUCATION AND IMPACT

Braille, Radcliffe, and a life spent lecturing, writing, and raising awareness

03 EXPANDING KNOWLEDGE

01 After Helen soaked in information to communicate full sentences using the hand alphabet, she tackled the task of learning Braille, a language consisting of raised dots that one can read by feeling.

02 Keller also successfully learned speech, along with becoming an accomplished typist.

03 Through all of her studies, including Helen attending the Ivy League school Radcliffe, Anne Sullivan was there.

Helen became the first Deaf-Blind person to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree.

04 LEAVING AN IMPACT

01 After graduating in 1904, Keller became a world traveler, lecturing, writing, fundraising and raising awareness about issues concerning the disabled, poor and oppressed.

She also visited wounded soldiers from World War II, encouraging those who lost their sight in battle to recognize that they could still live a full life.

02 Keller was also awarded the *Presidential Medal of Freedom*, which is just one example of the recognition she received for her efforts to improve the world around her.

LESSER KNOWN FACTS

Mark Twain, an Akita, and the 8th Wonder of the World

05 PEOPLE SHE KNEW AND FAMILY TIES

01 Helen came to know other renowned individuals like author Mark Twain and inventor Alexander Graham Bell, and exchanged letters with several U.S. Presidents.

Famous people were in her family as well; Helen's mother was related to John Adams, a founding father and second U.S. President, and her Grandmother Keller was General Robert E. Lee's second cousin.

02 One of Helen's Swiss ancestors was the first to teach the Deaf in Zurich and authored a book on the subject.

06 THE STAGE, HER BOOKS, AND AN AKITA

01 After Anne Sullivan and Helen Keller hit the stage for performances in the 1920s, Helen was billed as the “8th Wonder of the World.”

02 Helen also penned several books. One of her earliest works was an autobiography, *The Story of My Life*, which she wrote while studying at Radcliffe.

Teacher is a nickname Helen gave Anne Sullivan, and is also the title of a book she wrote in Anne’s honor. Firsthand observation on Helen’s life can also be found in a travel journal and letters that are still in publication today.

03 Helen was also the person who introduced the Akita dog to the U.S.

After being gifted an Akita by a Japanese police officer, she returned home with one, introducing them to the U.S., and then being gifted a second from the same litter upon the first’s death.

THE END OF HER LIFE

Eighty-seven years, and a set of ideas she left behind

07 HER DEATH AND HER WORDS

01 In 1968, just short of her 88th birthday, Helen Keller died in her sleep of natural causes. Helen left a huge impact on the world, and left the world with so many ideas.

Keep your face to the sunshine and you cannot see the shadows.

HELEN KELLER

We all have limitations of one kind or another. The only difference is in the way we meet them with lifted head and smiling face.

HELEN KELLER

08 NAMES AND TERMS TO KNOW

NAME OR TERM	WHY IT MATTERS IN THIS STORY
Anne Sullivan	The teacher who entered Keller's life in 1887 and stayed through all of her studies. Helen called her "Teacher."
Fingerspelling	The hand alphabet Anne used to break through Helen's barriers, including at the moment with the water.
Braille	Raised dots read by feeling, which Keller took on after the hand alphabet.
Radcliffe	The Ivy League school where Keller became the first Deaf-Blind person to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree.
<i>The Story of My Life</i>	Keller's autobiography, written while she was still a student.
Presidential Medal of Freedom	One example of the recognition Keller received for her work on behalf of the disabled, poor, and oppressed.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Answer in complete sentences using what you read

09 WRITTEN RESPONSE

01 How did Helen Keller become Deaf and Blind, and how old was she?

02 Why did Helen have so many outbursts as a young child? Give two reasons from the reading.

03 Describe what happened at the water, and explain why that moment mattered so much.

04 List three ways Keller learned to communicate after Anne Sullivan arrived.

05 What did Keller do with her life after she graduated in 1904, and who did she work on behalf of?

06 Keller wrote that we all have limitations, and that the difference is in how we meet them. Using her life as evidence, explain what she meant.

10 WHERE THIS INFORMATION COMES FROM

American Foundation for the Blind	afb.org
<i>Extraordinary People With Disabilities</i>	Deborah Kent & Kathryn A. Quinlan
<i>I Am Helen Keller</i>	Grace Norwich
Perkins School for the Blind	perkins.org
<i>The Story of My Life</i>	Helen Keller
<i>To Love This Life: Quotations by Helen Keller</i>	Helen Keller