



Unit 1 – A biography of Helen Keller

Talking about...

Key Vocabulary

| | | |
|------------------|-------------|----------------|
| an autobiography | handicapped | to be cremated |
| braille | | to isolate |
| a disability | | to manage |
| discipline | | to publish |
| a lecture | | |
| a palm | | |
| a task | | |
| willpower | | |

A biography of Helen Keller

Helen Adams Keller (June 27, 1880 – June 1, 1968) was a deaf and blind American author, activist, and **lecturer**.

Helen Keller was born in Tuscumbia, Alabama, on June 27, 1880. Her **disabilities** were caused by a fever in February, 1882 when she was 19 months old. Her loss of ability to communicate at such an early developmental age was very traumatic for her and her family, and she became quite **unmanageable** because of it.

Keller did not have the illness for a long time, but the illness left her blind, deaf, and unable to speak. By age seven she had invented over sixty different signs that she could use to communicate with her family.

In 1887, her parents, Captain Arthur H. Keller and Kate Adams Keller, finally contacted Alexander Graham Bell, who worked with deaf children. He advised them to contact the Perkins Institute for the Blind in Watertown, Massachusetts. They delegated the teacher Anne Sullivan, who was then only 20 years old, to try to open up Helen's mind. It was the beginning of a 49-year period of working together.

Sullivan demanded and got permission from Helen's father to **isolate** the girl from the rest of the family, in a little house in their garden. Her first **task** was to instill **discipline** in the spoiled girl. Helen's big breakthrough in communication came one day when she realized that



the motions her teacher was making on her **palm** symbolized the idea of "water" and nearly exhausted Sullivan demanding the names of all the other familiar objects in her world (including her prized doll).

Anne was able to teach Helen to think intelligibly and to speak, using the Tadoma method. She also learned to read English, French, German, Greek, and Latin in **braille**.

When Helen was 24 in 1904, she graduated cum laude from Radcliffe College, where Anne Sullivan had translated every word in her hand, and became the first deaf and blind person to graduate from a college.

With tremendous **willpower** Helen went on to become a world-famous speaker and author. She made it her own life's mission to fight for the sensorially **handicapped** in the world. In 1915 she founded Helen Keller International, a non-profit organization for preventing blindness. Helen and Anne Sullivan traveled all over the world to over 39 countries, and made several trips to Japan, becoming a favorite of the Japanese people. Helen Keller met every U.S. President from Grover Cleveland to John F. Kennedy and was friends with many famous figures including Alexander Graham Bell, Charlie Chaplin and Mark Twain.

In 1960 her book *Light in my Darkness* was **published**. She also wrote a lengthy **autobiography**. She wrote a total of eleven books, and authored numerous articles. Keller devoted much of her later life to raising funds for the American Foundation for the Blind.

On September 14, 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson awarded her the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the United States' highest civilian honor.

Helen Keller died on June 1, 1968 at the age of 87, more than thirty years after the death of Anne Sullivan. She was **cremated** and her remains were placed in the Chapel of St. Joseph of Arimathea in Washington National Cathedral.

Questions

- 1) What made Helen Keller unique – as a child, young adult, adult?
- 2) Why do you think her teacher wanted to isolate her from her family?
- 3) Why might people have thought she was stupid? Was she? How do you know?
- 4) What are some of her famous accomplishments?

Vocabulary

Complete the following sentences choosing from the following new vocabulary words:

autobiography - to cremate - task - discipline - disability - to isolate - Braille - developmental age - willpower - lecturer



- 1)After being _____, the family tossed his ashes into the sea.
- 2)Many elevators have the floor numbers encoded in _____ so that blind people can get around independently.
- 3)The health ministry has requested that travelers returning from Mexico voluntarily _____ themselves for a week to prevent the spread of the Swine Flu.
- 4)It takes a lot of _____ to stick to a diet when everyone around you is eating cake.
- 5)That baby is well ahead of his _____ and already speaking in sentences at the age of just over a year.
- 6)The army teaches one _____ as soldiers must obey all orders.
- 7)She had many _____ to do and wasn't sure she would get them all done in time.
- 8)People think she has such an interesting life that they suggested she write her _____.
- 9)While some people have physical _____, often emotional ones are much more difficult to cope with.
- 10)Since he is such a dynamic _____, his classes are always full to capacity.

Speaking tip: Describing people

Personality and Appearance

Tell me about your father.

What kind of person is he?

What does he look like?

What does your mother look like?

How about your little sister?

Clothing

What is your brother wearing?

What kind of shoes does he have (on)?

Is Susan wearing a dress?

Anything else?



Grammar: Pronouns

| Personal Pronouns (Subject) | Personal Pronouns (Object) | Possessive Pronouns | Reflective Pronouns |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| I | me | mine | myself |
| you | you | yours | yourself |
| he | him | his | himself |
| she | her | hers | herself |
| it | it | its | itself |
| we | us | ours | ourselves |
| you | you | yours | yourselves |
| they | them | theirs | themselves |

Personal pronouns are substitutes for nouns. They can serve as **subjects** (doing the action) or as **objects** (receiving the action) in a sentence. Possessive pronouns are used to indicate **possession** or ownership. In the reflective form they refer **back to the subject**.

Grammar exercise

Write the sentences below again and replace the underlined word by the correct pronoun:

1) Helen Keller was a famous American author.

2) Helen received an award from the president.

3) Helen's family didn't know what to do.

4) The parents contacted Alexander Graham Bell.



5) Alexander Graham Bell worked with deaf children.

6) Helen and Anne Sullivan traveled all over the world.

7) She had invented over sixty different signs.

Essay to go further

Some famous people decide to tell the story of their life. Do you like reading autobiographies from famous people? Who would you like to read about? Is reading an autobiography different from reading other kinds of books?

Write about what reading an autobiography gives you.