

Name: _____

Great Minds: Helen Keller

by Lydia Lukidis

Imagine what life would be like if you weren't able to see or hear. Everything would be dark and silent, all the time. Helen Keller never had to imagine it, because she lived it. She was born on June 27, 1880 in Alabama. She was very healthy and had no medical problems. Her father worked for a newspaper and her mother stayed home to take care of her. She grew up on the family's large farm.

But when Helen was 1½ years old, something unexpected happened and she got very sick. For about a week, she had a terrible fever and headache. Doctors suspected she contracted scarlet fever or meningitis. She survived, but she lost her sight and hearing at the same time. Her parents were shocked.

As Helen grew up, she tried to communicate with her family and friends. It was sometimes frustrating for her because it was hard to let others know what she needed. At times, she would get angry and throw tantrums. Helen quickly realized she was different, and her parents recognized she needed help.

They called the Perkins Institute for the Blind in Boston to get advice. The director said Annie Sullivan might be able to help. Annie used to attend the school when she was blind, but she got a special surgery when she was 15 and was able to see. Since she understood what it's like to be blind, people thought she could really help Helen. Little did anybody know that they were about to form a 50 year friendship and special bond.

Now imagine how hard it would be to learn words when you're blind and deaf. Annie began to teach Helen words, and she had some special tricks. For example, let's say she wanted to teach her the word, cup. She would place a cup in one of Helen's hands and she would press the letters C-U-P in the other hand.

Helen started learning some words this way. It was not easy and things didn't really click just yet.



Helen Keller, ~1904. She was around 24 years old.

Helen would get very frustrated and even once knocked out one of Annie's teeth during a lesson. But then one day, Helen really started to grasp it. Annie put Helen's hand in water, then spelled out W-A-T-E-R in her other hand. Helen finally understood how the process worked. It was a big day for her, and she learned many words after that.

The next challenge was learning how to read. Annie taught Helen how to read Braille. Braille is a specific reading system for blind people, and the letters are made out of little bumps on a page that you can touch. Helen caught on fast and was able to read entire books and use a typewriter by the age of 10. She was determined to persevere.

At that point, Helen was ready to learn how to speak, and Sarah Fuller helped her with this. Sarah was a teacher for the deaf. She knew certain techniques that would help. As she spoke, Helen would place her hand on Sarah's lips. Instead of hearing the sound, she felt the sound vibrations and felt how the lips moved to make certain sounds. Helen herself started saying a few letters and sounds. She was ecstatic. This was the first time in her life she was able to do that! Eventually, she learned complete words. And with hard work and determination, she was able to say full sentences.

When Helen was 16 years old, she went to Radcliffe College for women in Massachusetts. This was her first time in a public school. Annie went to class with her to help her. Helen did really well in

“The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart.”

- Helen Keller

school and graduated with honors. She then went on to college and wrote articles and books about her unique experiences.

Helen Keller is a great example of someone who was always determined and never let obstacles get in her way. She took the challenges life presented her and turned them into something positive. As she grew older, she wanted to help others who had the same challenges. She became an activist and her mission was to inspire others. She spent her life raising money and awareness for the rights of women and people with disabilities. She wrote over a dozen books, traveled all over the country, and lived until she was 87 years old.



Helen Keller, ~1920. She would have been around 40 years old here.

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1. According to the article, how did Helen Keller become blind and deaf?
 - a. She was born blind and deaf.
 - b. She was in a terrible horseback riding accident.
 - c. She became blind and deaf later in life due to old age.
 - d. She contracted a serious illness as a child.

2. Based on the information in the article, why did Helen Keller become angry and upset when she was a child?
 - a. Keller was used to getting her way, and she had tantrums when she didn't get her way.
 - b. Keller was frustrated that she couldn't communicate with her family and friends.
 - c. Keller was treated unkindly by her brothers and sisters because of her disabilities.
 - d. Keller experienced a lot of physical pain from her disabilities.

3. Who was Annie Sullivan?

4. Who was Sarah Fuller?

5. Which of the following statements about Helen Keller is **not** correct?

- a. Helen Keller learned how to read Braille, use a typewriter, and even speak.
- b. Helen Keller lived a very isolated life, surrounded only by family and a couple friends.
- c. Helen Keller lived until the age of eighty-seven years old.
- d. Helen Keller became an author and a political and social activist.

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The following terms are vocabulary words from the article. Match the vocabulary word with its correct definition by writing the corresponding letter on the line.

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|---------------------|---|
| 1. _____ Braille | a. help or guidance from a knowledgeable person |
| 2. _____ ecstatic | b. a person who campaigns for social change |
| 3. _____ tantrums | c. to keep going even though something is very difficult |
| 4. _____ techniques | d. a system of raised bumps on a surface that people who are blind can read with their fingertips |
| 5. _____ advice | e. understand or comprehend |
| 6. _____ persevere | f. outbursts of anger or frustration, often by a young child |
| 7. _____ vibrations | g. encourage; motivate |
| 8. _____ grasp | h. overwhelming excitement or happiness |
| 9. _____ activist | i. tremors or quivering that occur when sound travels |
| 10. _____ inspire | j. methods or strategies for mastering a skill or task |



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