

Helen Keller (1880-1968)

Helen Adams Keller was born a healthy baby girl on June 27, 1880 to parents Kate and Captain Arthur Keller of Tusculum, Alabama. But before her 2nd birthday, Helen contracted a serious illness, believed to be scarlet fever or meningitis, which made Helen extremely ill. While doctors believed Helen would not survive, she did, but lost her sight and hearing as a result of her illness.

Without support or education, the Kellers did the best they could to raise Helen, but she was a difficult child, known to throw violent temper tantrums. By the age of six, the Kellers considered putting Helen into an institution, but instead sought the services of the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind to find a teacher for Helen. Anne Sullivan, a former student of the Institution was assigned to Helen. After several weeks of struggles and challenges, a connection was made between Helen and Anne, and Helen finally learned to communicate. The play, *The Miracle Worker*, documents that early teaching.

Helen learned at an unusually rapid pace, and it was not long before Anne had taught Helen to read and write using Braille. Helen eventually attended the Cambridge School for Young Ladies in 1896 and in 1900 entered Radcliffe College, becoming the first deaf-blind person to have ever enrolled at an institution of higher learning. In 1904, Helen graduated from Radcliffe.

She became a famous figure, writing and speaking of her experiences together with Anne Sullivan, who served as a confidante and an interpreter. Helen even wrote an autobiography entitled, *The Story of My Life* in 1902.

Helen continued throughout her life to lecture and raise money for the deaf and blind, and publicly campaign for civil rights, human dignity, women's suffrage, and world peace. In 1924, she began to work for the *American Foundation for the Blind*, serving as a spokesperson and ambassador until 1968.

In 1964, Helen was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom and was inducted into the Women's Hall of Fame at the World's Fair in 1965. She died in her sleep on June 1, 1968.

Anne Sullivan (1866-1936)

Anne Mansfield Sullivan Macy is best known as the strong-willed teacher of the blind and deaf Helen Keller. She was born on April 14, 1866, and at the age of five, became almost completely blind from trachoma, a disease of the eyes. Two years later, her mother died and her father abandoned her, and Anne was placed in the state institution, the Tewksbury orphanage. She and her brother Jimmie lived in the institution, and due to poor health conditions and lack of medical care, Jimmie eventually died of tuberculosis.

Anne was later admitted to the Perkins Institution for the Blind in 1880, and after several operations, her sight was partially restored. She graduated in 1886 as class valedictorian and was chosen a year later to teach Helen Keller. Although she had no experience as a teacher of the deaf-blind, she gratefully accepted the challenge. She was eventually able to tame the "wild" child and teach her to communicate, and Anne and Helen began a friendship that would last a lifetime.

In 1905, Anne married John Macy, an instructor and writer, while Helen was at Radcliffe College. The marriage was shaky, and by 1914, the two had officially separated. Anne and Helen worked closely after Helen's graduation, touring and lecturing for civil rights and equality, and as advocates for the *American Foundation for the Blind*. Anne Macy died in New York on October 20, 1936 at the age of seventy.

Standards Focus: Exploring Expository Writing

Directions: Using the articles on Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan, answer the following questions using complete sentences.

1. How did Helen Keller become deaf and blind? _____

2. What important event happened to Helen at the age of six? _____

3. What college did Helen attend? Why is her acceptance and graduation from college noteworthy?

4. What did Helen write in 1902? _____
5. How did Anne and Helen spend their time after Helen graduated from college? _____

6. What honors did Helen receive before her death in 1968? _____

7. What tragic event did Anne and Helen have in common? _____

8. Where did Anne live when she was young? Why did she live there?

9. How successful was Anne in school? What honor did she receive at graduation? _____

10. What challenge did Anne accept after her graduation? _____

11. Describe Anne's married life. _____

