

The story of Helen Keller



This text is a short biography of an American woman called Helen Keller. A biography is a non-fiction account about the life of a real person. It usually gives the dates of the person's birth and death. It also tells you about key events in the person's life.

Helen Keller was born on 27 June 1880 and for 18 months was a happy, healthy baby. Then, suddenly, she became ill and very nearly died. When she recovered, her parents realised that Helen had lost her eyesight and hearing: she was deaf and blind.

They continued to care for their little girl at home in Alabama, USA, but it was not easy. Helen clung to her mother's skirt, feeling lost. She recognised people by feeling their faces and clothing. She touched people's hands to discover what they were doing. When Helen wanted some bread, she made her parents understand by pretending to cut a loaf. For ice cream, she hugged herself and shivered. But this was not enough. She could not understand the world around her.

At last, when Helen was six, a teacher arrived who was to change her life. Anne Sullivan had once been blind herself. Slowly and patiently, she taught the little girl how to spell words with her fingers. Helen copied, but did not understand what she was doing.

One day, Anne led Helen to a water-pump. Holding her hand under the water, she signed W-A-T-E-R into Helen's hand. Suddenly, the little girl understood. The signs represented what was pouring over her hand. Excitedly, she led Anne everywhere, picking up familiar things – now a doll; now a cake: within an hour she had learnt 30 words.

Helen no longer felt shut out of the world. Later, Anne taught her to read in Braille, by feeling patterns of raised dots on a page. Helen grew up to go to college and write her autobiography. She became famous, travelling the world, giving lectures and helping other deaf and blind people to live full, happy lives. Helen died soon after her 88th birthday, in 1968.

1 'Deaf' is to 'hearing' as _____ is to 'eyesight'. 1 mark

2 Read these statements.
After each one, write T for 'True' or F for 'False'. 1 mark

a) Helen Keller was under two years old when she became ill. _____ 1 mark

b) Helen's illness made her go deaf and blind. _____ 1 mark

c) Helen's parents put her into a care home in Alabama. _____ 1 mark

d) Helen licked her lips when she wanted an ice cream. _____ 1 mark

e) The first word Helen understood in sign language was 'water'. _____ 1 mark

3 Once Helen understood that the wetness she could feel on her hand had a name, 'water', how did it make her feel, and why?

_____ 2 marks

4 How did Helen recognise a person who was in a room with her?
_____ 1 mark

5 How did she find out what other people were doing?
_____ 1 mark

6 Blind people learning to read use lettering made up of raised dots on paper. What is the name of this lettering?
_____ 1 mark

7 Helen grew up to write a book. What was it about?
_____ 1 mark