

Arts On Stage, Ltd. presents a

Study Guide  
for



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**"The best and most beautiful things in the world  
can not be seen or even touched. They must be  
felt within the heart."..... Helen Keller**

## The World In My Hands: The Inspiring Story of Helen Keller

### TIME LINE OF HELEN KELLER'S LIFE:

JUNE 27 1880	.....HELEN KELLER BORN IN TUSCUMBIA, ALABAMA
FEBRUARY 1881	.....HELEN BECOMES DEAF AND BLIND
MARCH 3 1887	.....ANNIE ARRIVES IN TUSCUMBIA
1888	.....HELEN AND ANNIE GO TO PERKINS INSTITUTE FOR THE BLIND- FOR FORMAL EDUCATION
1900	.....HELEN ENTERS RADCLIFFE COLLEGE (Now part of Harvard University)
1902-03	.....JOHN MACY HELPS HELEN WRITE AND PUBLISH AUTOBIOGRAPHY "THE STORY OF MY LIFE"
1904	.....HELEN GRADUATES RADCLIFFE COLLEGE WITH HONORS
1906	.....HELEN APPOINTED TO MASSACHUSETTS COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND
1909	.....HELEN BECOMES A SUFFRAGIST
1919	.....FILM "DELIVERANCE" BASED ON HELEN'S LIFE PRODUCED IN HOLLYWOOD; HELEN AND ANNIE GO ON THE VAUDEVILLE CIRCUIT LECTURING
1923	.....HELEN BEGINS LIFELONG ROLE AS WORLD-TRAVELING SPOKESPERSON FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES
1924	.....HELEN BEGINS WORK FOR AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR THE BLIND
1931	.....NAMED ONE OF THE TWELVE GREATEST LIVING AMERICAN WOMEN
1932	.....HELEN AND ANNIE RECEIVE HONORARY DEGREES FROM TEMPLE UNIVERSITY
OCTOBER 30 1936	.....ANNIE SULLIVAN MACY DIES - PARTED AFTER 50 YEARS
1953	.....RELEASE OF DOCUMENTARY BASED ON HELEN'S LIFE: "THE UNCONQUERED"
1957-59	.....BROADWAY PLAY "THE MIRACLE WORKER"
1962	....."THE MIRACLE WORKER" MADE INTO MAJOR MOTION PICTURE
1964	.....RECEIVES HIGHEST CIVILIAN AWARD- THE PRESIDENTIAL MEDAL OF FREEDOM
JUNE 1 1968	.....HELEN ADAMS KELLER DIES AT HER HOME IN CONNECTICUT.



Photo: Helen Keller as a 22 year old student at Radcliffe, using the Manuel Alphabet to "speak" to Alexander Graham Bell.

" **HELEN ADAMS KELLER** met and befriended many famous people in her life. Many of them were astounded and enamored by her intelligence, humor and caring nature. She corresponded with many writers, educators, publishers and heads of state; some of which include: Alexander Graham Bell, Edward Everett Hale, Mark Twain, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Presidents Hoover and Franklin Roosevelt. Helen wrote 14 books in all, some of them biographies of her and her teacher's lives. There are 9 magazines, 42 books, a documentary, 2 feature films and 2 Broadway plays relating to Helen Keller and her life and work. Helen was a suffragette, was outspoken on her views against war, and was tireless in her pursuit of paving a better way for all persons with disabilities. On her eightieth birthday, The Herald Tribune published a question/answer interview, where upon being asked for a statement of her basic philosophy; Helen replied: "God gave us life for happiness, not misery. And I believe that happiness, attained, should be shared." As Helen attended the Radcliffe dedication ceremony of the Anne Sullivan Macy Memorial Fountain, Helen knelt down, smelled the flowers, and chose one simple word in response: "WATER."

**"The education of this child will be the distinguishing event in my life.".....  
Annie Sullivan**

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

**USING BRAILLE:** Many students will have seen Braille in elevators, next to the numbers - and even in McDonald's restaurants. Just as sighted people learn that different shapes mean different letters, people who are blind, learn that different bumps mean different letters. It's like a secret code. It requires as much practice to learn Braille as it does the alphabet. Using the Manual Alphabet chart, have the students learn and memorize their names spelled out on their fingers. Try other words like: "sit", "stop", "no", "yes", or other words used frequently in the classroom. Teach the students phrases spelled out in the Manual Alphabet, such as " Please Be Quiet" and see how fast you get their attention and response.

**DISCUSSION:** Using the above Braille and Sign language manual alphabet examples, talk about how these are forms of communication, just as English, Spanish, German or any other "spoken" language is a form of communication. Ask the students what other forms of communication they could use to convey meaning, i.e.: dance, song, gestures, etc. Do you remember how hard it was to learn how to read? How hard do you think it is for a blind person to learn Braille? How hard would it be for them to learn a sighted person's alphabet?

**DISABILITIES AWARENESS:** "The Blind Walk" (or Blind Man's Bluff) This activity should be done with care in paired groups of two - one "sighted" "guider" one blindfolded "follower". Instruct the students to take turns walking around the classroom with the blindfolded person being "guided" by the sighted person. Switch roles. Ask the students to write or draw pictures about their experiences. What was it like? What did you learn? Ask the students to watch a certain television show with the sound turned off. What was it like not hearing the words? Could you understand the action? In groups of two's, ask the students to put a jigsaw puzzle together without speaking to one another, but by using gestures or "signs". What did you learn? Was it hard to communicate without words?

**ARTS AND CRAFTS:** 1.) Ask the children to draw pictures of the characters in the play. Which character was your favorite? Why? Try making puppet cutouts of their drawings and have them re-enact the story.

2.) Using the Braille chart above, some dried peas, glue and cardboard, have the students figure out how to write their names in Braille. Glue the peas to the cardboard in those shapes. Then, with their eyes closed, have the students feel how their names feel like in another language.

**WRITE YOUR OWN STORY:** Help the children come up with a new story of their own- where the characters must overcome physical obstacles. Discuss the tools used for the character's success.

**COMMUNITY PROJECT:** Using the resources of the department of special education in your school or district, invite a person who is blind or deaf, or someone who works with or teaches persons with these disabilities to come and speak to the class. Ask about accomplishments made by people with these disabilities. Ask the students to list several things they think persons who are blind or deaf could teach them and tell why they think so.

**HISTORY:** Discuss how things are different from now and the time-period of the play, i.e. clothing, school, homes, values, etc. How is it different for persons with physical disabilities today as opposed to the late 1800's?

**"One can never consent to creep when one feels an impulse to soar." ..... Helen Keller**

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU MEET A DEAF-BLIND PERSON:

- 1.) Treat a deaf-blind person as you would treat anyone else. Always be natural - never patronizing in your questions or actions.
- 2.) Address a deaf-blind person directly, not through someone else. Likewise, always address a Deaf person by looking directly at them, not at an interpreter.
- 3.) Use the words "see", "hear", "deaf" and "blind" naturally, and without hesitation, if your conversation calls for them.
- 4.) Let the deaf-blind person know when you are entering or leaving a room. Always tell them who you are. Guessing isn't fun. Do not push him or her ahead of you to guide them; rather let them hold your arm just below the elbow.
- 5.) You do not have to physically support a deaf-blind person who is entering a car or a train or going up/down stairs. Just place their hand on the doorknob or stair rail for guidance. Deaf-blind persons do not need help sitting down, just help them put one of their hands on the back of a chair so they can judge it's position.
- 6.) Describe things that are happening (or are about to happen) around you.
- 7.) Show deaf-blind persons that you are confident they can do useful things. This is an important form of encouragement.
- 8.) Remember that your behavior toward deaf-blind persons will not only affect your attitude, but may be important in reinforcing the attitudes of their families and friends.

**Reading List and Sources:**

The Story Of My Life, by Helen Keller and John Albert Macy. New York, Doubleday, Page, and Company 1903.

Helen and Teacher: The Story of Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan Macy, by Joseph P. Lash. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company 1980.

Helen Keller and the Big Storm, by Patricia Lakin. A Ready to Read Book by Simon and Schuster, 2002.

The Children's Book Of Heroes by William J. Bennett, Simon and Schuster, 1997.

**The American Foundation For the Blind**

**The New York Institute For Special Education** (Founded 1831 as The New York Institute for education of the Blind)

**Rochester Institute of Technology** (National Institute For the Deaf)