



Managing Director **Nancy Coy**

# THE MIRACLE WORKER

## Study Guide for Teachers

**October to December, 2002**

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**Special points of interest:**

- Relate *The Miracle Worker* production to your Ontario Dramatic Arts Curriculum
- Learn how fight choreography impacts a production
- Get ideas on research and project activities for your classroom

**CAST:**

*Featuring:*

**Carmen Grant** as Annie Sullivan  
**Mary Krohnert** as Helen Keller

**Stephanie Belding** as Mrs. Kate Keller  
**Paul Braunstein** as James & Doctor  
**Greg Ellwand** as Captain Keller  
**Laurel Paetz** as Viney  
**Martha Ross** as Aunt Ev  
**Brian Sills** as Mr. Anagnos & Percy

**PRODUCTION:**

Set Design by **Charlotte Dean**  
 Costume Design by **Victoria Wallace**  
 Lighting Design by **Andrea Lundy**  
 Projections by **Cylla von Tiedemann**  
 Sound Design by **Todd Charlton**  
 Music composed and performed by **Kirk Elliott**  
 Fight Director **James Binkley**  
 Dialect Coach **Diane Pitblado**  
 Assistant Director **Nicole Arends**  
 Stage Manager **Sauna Janssen**  
 Assistant Stage Manager **Patricia Levert**



Written by **William Gibson**  
 Direction by **Leah Cherniak**  
 Sponsored by **The Globe and Mail**

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## Theatre Etiquette

**As members of the audience, you play an important part in the success of a theatrical performance.** Students accustomed to watching television in their own homes and those who attend rock concerts and movies are used to eating snacks, moving around, getting in and out of their seats or sharing comments aloud during a show. Movies and TV shows are not affected by the audience. Please make clear to students that the rules are different at a live theatre performance.

We want you to laugh, cheer, clap and really enjoy your time at the theatre but there are a few rules that need to be followed. Students behaviour is the responsibility of school staff and volunteers. LKTYP staff cannot discipline your students but will insist on their removal if they disrupt other groups.

*Please review the following theatre rules with your students prior to your LKTYP visit:*

- **Food, drinks, candy & gum chewing are not permitted in the theatre.** The LKTYP snack bar is not open at school performances. NO PEANUTS or NUT products may be brought to our theatre as so many children have severe life-threatening allergies.
- **No electronic devices are permitted in the theatre – they affect our sound system!** e.g. Walkmans, radios, pagers, cell phones, etc. Students seen with such equipment will be asked to leave them at the Box Office for pick-up after the show.
- **Photography and both audio or video recording during a performance is strictly prohibited by Canadian Actors' Equity regulations.**

### **Canadian Actors' Equity regulations.**

Film or video cassettes will be confiscated by LKTYP staff.

- **Please be considerate audience members!** Talking, whispering, shuffling about in your seats or rattling candy papers during a live performance are rude and disruptive behaviours that are disturbing for other audience members and distressing to the actors.
- **Please do not leave your seat and re-enter the theatre during the performance**  
Try to plan washroom visits before the show and during intermission.
- **Do not throw anything on to the stage or into the audience.**
- **Students are not to permitted to leave the building during intermission** unless accompanied by a teacher or parent supervisor.
- **Be respectful of the LKTYP staff**  
They are available to ensure that ALL audience members have the best possible theatre experience.
- **Please report any disturbances or disruptive behaviour** during the performance to an LKTYP staff member.

**Remember, your students are ambassadors of your school when you're out on a field trip!** A hard-working cast of actors and a host of talented theatre artists, technicians and craftspeople have worked hard to create an enjoyable and entertaining theatre experience for our school and family audiences. With your co-operation in following these guidelines, we are sure it will be just that!



## Directors Notes—Leah Cherniak

The theme of LKTYP's 2002-03 Season is "a celebration of freedom." This context is very

appropriate to *The Miracle Worker*.

The play chronicles a pivotal point in Helen Keller's journey towards the freedom she will enjoy once she reaches her maximum capacity to communicate with others and live a fully functional life. The process is set in motion by the arrival of Annie Sullivan. It is she that will unlock doors for the young Helen. Watch for how keys and locked rooms are used by the playwright. Helen is not the only character in the play that is "stuck" as a result of communication difficulties. Her half-brother, James, also struggles with a barrier. Somehow he cannot communicate with his father and his father's love cannot reach him. By the end of the play he too has found a way to unlock doors and find freedom. Annie Sullivan is also on her own journey towards freedom.

The nature of love and its relationship to freedom is another theme of the play. Annie Sullivan's teaching process may not seem too loving-and certainly does not seem so to Helen's parents-but in the end it is this process that enables Helen to unlock the door to communication. Only with access to communication can Helen have choices and only then is she truly free. The play forces us to consider: when is love cruel? We also are confronted with the opposite question: can what seems cruel actually be the best demonstration of love? This will be an interesting set of questions for students to discuss.

How we learn is very interesting to me personally, perhaps because I am a mother, and it impressed me how Annie Sullivan

compared her method of teaching Helen to the way we communicate with babies. We say many words before the baby knows what the words mean. The baby begins to imitate the sounds and one day the connection is made and after that, learning is very swift. Students may want to share their experiences of younger siblings (or babies within the extended family) learning to speak.

It is important to remember that the title of the play is *The Miracle Worker*. This should indicate to us that the central character is Annie Sullivan. Annie arrives haunted by memories of a horrific past and also by personal doubts. Can she succeed in teaching Helen and can she succeed as an independent young woman with a way to earn a living? She is afraid to fail and she is afraid to succeed. By the end of the play she has worked her way to freedom from her past and the doubts.

William Gibson wrote a well-crafted play in *The Miracle Worker* and I hope to bring to the stage with the company at LKTYP a faithful rendering of the work. The play is set within a particular time and place—the post civil-war southern United States—and the manners, dress and attitudes reflect that time. The one innovation I will be bringing to the production will be the addition of slide projections to provide an additional layer of meaning. I'm doing this to place the play in the larger context of the sensory world and also the full life of Helen Keller as the play covers only a short bit of her life. We want to know what happens next at the end of the play and I hope that students will be interested enough to read more about this fascinating woman.

*"Only with access to communication can the doors be unlocked"*

## The Fight Choreographer-James Binkley

*An important part of the artistic team!*



When we are watching stage action where actors are engaged in physical fights, whether they are wrestling, hitting or engaged in elaborately staged sword fights, it's easy to get caught up in the action and the emotions.

This is true for the actors also, as they have to remain in character to project those strong emotions to the audience.

This is a situation in which actors could get hurt without careful preparation, skillful choreography,

and every move being so well rehearsed that it will not be forgotten even in the heat of battle!

Actors who are going to engage in onstage combat need time to warm up their muscles before going onstage to prevent injury.

How important do you think the role of the fight choreographer was in *The Miracle Worker*?

Research and discuss in class what other jobs are involved in putting on a play.

## GRAPHIC ART ACTIVITY

Studying a scene from the play, have students draw images that would place the scene in its sensual environment if they were the Director. Students need to ask questions like:

- Are the leaves rustling in the trees?
- Will the crickets be chirping?
- Will there be the scent of honeysuckle in the garden?

### **The Characters:**

A Doctor

Kate Keller: *Helen's Mother*

Capt. Arthur Keller: *Helen's Father*

Aunt Ev: *Arthur Keller's sister*

Helen Keller

James Keller: *Helen's half brother*

Dr. Michael Anagnos: *Director for the Perkins Institute for the Blind*

Annie Sullivan: *Helen's teacher*

Viney: *A servant*

### **Character Study:**

Taking the role of one of the secondary characters (any character other than Annie or Helen) in the play, write a diary entry about Annie's arrival, her progress with Helen, your opinion of the likely success of teaching, or another topic of interest to your character

## SYNOPSIS

*From the moment Annie arrives, it is clear that she and Helen will be gripped in a great struggle*

This play opens with a doctor assuring Captain Keller and his wife, Kate, that their infant daughter, Helen, will recover from a serious fever. Soon after the doctor leaves, however, Kate realizes that Helen is deaf and blind. In the next scene, Helen is about six years old. She is a wild, undisciplined child. Though they try, her parents are unable to help or control her. In desperation they hire a young woman, Annie Sullivan.

From the moment Annie arrives, it is clear that she and Helen will be gripped in a great struggle. But Helen is not the only problem for Annie. Annie must also convince the Kellers, especially the Captain, that she needs complete control of Helen if she is to reach the child. Annie is certain

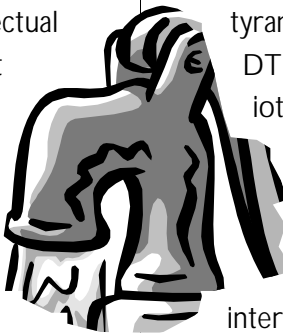
that language is the key to gaining access to Helen's mind, and she constantly spells the names of things on Helen's palm.

Although Helen can spell them back on Annie's palm, the understanding that the words represent things eludes her. After spending two weeks together in the garden house, Helen finally obeys Annie, but when the time is up and they return to the family, Helen quickly reverts to her former behavior. The Kellers are indulgent, ready to fall back in their old pattern of behavior, but Annie doesn't let them. When Helen spills a water pitcher on Annie, Annie takes her out to refill it. She spells "water" into Helen's hand, and suddenly the miracle happens. Helen understands.

## VOCABULARY

The following vocabulary from the script may be new to students.

acute congestion	TB (tuberculosis)
valedictorian	affliction
impertinent	tantrum
vitality	epileptic fits
Initiate	deprived
ineffectual	tyrant
oculist	DT (delirium tremens)
chivalrous	iota
immodest	hireling
specialists	tolerate
temperance	governess
frivolous	disinter
impudence	interminable
impaired	precocious
radical	deadhouse
asylum	boon
contention	desiccated spinster
state almshouse	incompetent
obstinate	inadequate



## Biography of Helen Keller

Helen Keller was born on June 27, 1880 in Tuscumbia, a small town in Alabama, USA. She was the daughter of Captain Arthur Henley Keller and Kate Adams Keller. Captain Keller was a plantation owner and ran a weekly newspaper. Kate Keller was the second wife of Captain Keller and Helen was her first child. When Helen was nineteen months old, she lost her sight and hearing due to meningitis fever. She became both blind and deaf. In 1887, Annie Sullivan became Helen's live-in tutor under the recommendation of The Perkins Institution for the Blind in Boston. This relationship would become a friendship that would last for the rest of their lives.

Under Annie Sullivan's teachings, Helen learned 'finger-spelling' and Braille and quickly learned to communicate through spelling words into people's hands and through writing. At the age of 8, Helen left Alabama to attend the Perkins School in Boston with Annie where her quick learning and exceptional memory for detail earned her the nickname of 'miracle child'. By the age of nine, she had learned to speak by feeling the shape of her speech teacher's mouth and shaping

the same syllables with her own mouth. In a similar manner, she also learned to read lips by placing her fingers on the mouths of speakers.

By the time she graduated from Radcliffe College with honours in 1904, Helen Keller had become famous for her triumphs over her barriers of blindness and deafness. Helen devoted the remainder of her life to promoting social reform and to educate the public about the treatment of blind and deaf persons. She won many humanitarian awards and toured Europe, North and South America, Asia and Africa lecturing about the need to improve the lives of disabled people. She published 14 books including her autobiographies 'The Story of My Life' and 'Midstream : My Later Life'. She also met every President of the United States from Calvin Coolidge to John F. Kennedy.

Helen Keller died on June 1, 1968 at the age of 87 and will be remembered as one of the greatest women in the world. Senator Lister Hill eulogized her as 'one of the few persons not born to die.'

*Helen  
lost her  
sight  
and  
hearing  
at 19  
months  
of age*

## Biography of Annie Sullivan

Annie Sullivan was born in 1866 in Springfield Massachusetts of poor Irish immigrant parents. From birth to age 14, Annie's life was for the most part a nightmare, which fuelled the fires of her rebellion and determination in her later years. Annie's father Thomas Sullivan was a drinker and a brawler, and her mother Alice bore five children, only two of whom reached adulthood. Alice died at age 28 when Annie was 8 years old. Annie contracted an eye disease, trachoma, that was untreated and gradually destroyed her vision. Her much loved brother Jimmie, was born partially crippled. At the age of 10, Annie and Jimmie were sent to the state poorhouse in Tewksbury, Massachusetts. The conditions in the poorhouse were extremely bad and the

death rate, especially among the children, was very high. Death became a common event to Annie but her grief and loneliness knew no bounds when her adored Jimmie died. After Jimmie's death, Annie's one desire was to get out of the poorhouse and go to school. She sensed she was different and she wanted so much more from life than the other inmates at Tewksbury. She studied at the Perkins Institution and struggled to become one of Perkin's top graduates and valedictorian of her class. Shortly after her graduation, Annie was offered one of the most intriguing challenges of all time - becoming Teacher to Helen Keller. Annie Sullivan and Helen Keller would become inseparable until Annie's death in 1936.

## Helen's World —Birth to Age 20

Helen grew up in a world of exciting technological development

Year	Science	Culture	Events
1880-85	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Edison invents the light bulb</li> <li>The first wire photos</li> <li>The linotype is invented</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rodin sculps "The Thinker"</li> <li>Tolstoy is born</li> <li>Quaker Oats is a new breakfast food</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>James Garfield elected US president 1880</li> <li>Czar Alexander II killed</li> <li>Greenwich Mean Time adopted</li> </ul>
1886-90	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The first Kodak box cameras are produced</li> <li>Photo printing processes are developed</li> <li>Internal combustion engine developed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Eiffel Tower is designed</li> <li>The first daily newspapers appear in major cities</li> <li>Sherlock Holmes stories are written</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coca-Cola is invented</li> <li>Jack the Ripper terrorized London</li> <li>250,000 telephones exist in the world</li> </ul>
1891-95	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Radio-telegraph invented by Marconi</li> <li>Punch-card used to collect census data</li> <li>Adding machines invented</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tchaikovsky's "Nutcracker" is first performed</li> <li>First US motion picture studio built</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Typewriters become common in offices</li> <li>The first Hershey's chocolate bar</li> </ul>
1895-1900	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The X-Ray is invented</li> <li>George Washington Carver performs agricultural research on the use of the peanut</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>H.G Wells writes "The Time Machine"</li> <li>Daily mail delivery becomes possible in the US, Canada, England</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wilfred Laurier is elected Prime Minister in Canada</li> </ul>

## Biography of William Gibson

William Gibson was born in 1914 in New York City where he spent most of his childhood. Gibson enjoyed success in his early academic years earning him the privilege of skipping grades. He showed promise as a writer being an avid reader and winning several awards for his writing in high school. Despite his success in literature, Gibson struggled in subjects such as math, science and history. Gibson was also a talented piano player and often performed popular duets with his father at community gatherings. Gibson attended City College in New York City, but became frustrated after enrolling in a science program under the bad advice of a

professor. He decided to pursue his love of writing as a result of the encouragement of his literature professor and his expulsion from college for not completing any other courses. It would be 20 years before Gibson made a living in his chosen profession, and was supported until then by his wife and odd part-time jobs. His most popular plays are *The Miracle Worker* and *Two for the Seesaw*. In 1982, Gibson wrote a sequel to *The Miracle Worker* entitled *Monday after the Miracle* based on the life of Helen Keller as a college student. Gibson now lives in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, where he co-founded the Berkshire Theatre Festival.

## ACTIVITIES

The following activities relate *The Miracle Worker* to specific outcomes outlined in The Ontario Dramatic Arts Curriculum for the gr.5-OAC level. Teachers may use this study guide to enhance their classroom visit to *The Miracle Worker*, to deepen student understanding about the play and the production, and to achieve expectations as outlined in The Ontario Dramatic Arts Curriculum. Use the highlighted dramatic outcomes on the sides of the page to select activities suitable for the grade and development level of your group and to adapt exercises to the needs of your students. The Lorraine Kimsa Theatre for Young People continues to support the arts education community in our services, teacher guides, and programs.

## TRUST

*The following exercise explores gestures and body movements in preparing for a character role (gr.5-7), develops understanding of how a character may be developed (gr.8-9), and helps create roles using appropriate techniques. (gr. 10-OAC)*

Trust exercises are standard in drama classrooms where students must learn to accept one another in order to take risks without fear of ridicule or embarrassment. The greater the sense of the safety a student feels within a group, the more likely the student will explore their own sense of creativity, develop characters that are different from their every day selves, and work with his or her peers in developing their dramatic potential.

Helen Keller lived a world without sight or sound. What would it be like to live without those senses? Explore sensory awareness with your class using the following trust exercise. Ensure that the students are in a safe environment such as a gymnasium or a place where there is little physical danger. Share experiences with each other of what it was like to not have sight or hearing after the exercise. How were they able to sense and identify the world around them?

Students should gain a greater appreciation for the challenges as well as the heightened awareness that people with physical challenges face. What are some misconceptions that students previously had about blind or deaf-blind people? What have they discovered?

For older students, ask how their discoveries can help them develop roles of characters with physical challenges.

What have the students learned about how their senses affect their own physicality? How has this trust game helped them trust their fellow drama students in the classroom?

Exercise—Divide the class in pairs, labeling each student as either an A or a B. A is blindfolded and led throughout the room, trusting only B to navigate their paths without danger. In this manner, A learns to trust B through confidence in their ability to protect them from harm. Helen had to learn to trust and rely on Annie before the 'miracle' of her breakthrough could occur.

At the end of their walk, the A writes down his or her immediate impressions of the journey. B should not explain the path they took. A is challenged to trace the course they traveled based on the sensations of sound, touch, and smell.

Repeat the exercise with A leading B on a different course.

An advanced variation of this exercise would be for the 'blind' partner to also wear earplugs of some kind. The necessary level of trust becomes much higher and the task much more difficult.



## SENSORY AWARENESS EXERCISES

*The following exercises interpret the meaning of a play using drama techniques and build an appreciation of sensory awareness. (gr.5-8)*

In the previous exercises students explored what it was like to exist without all of their senses. These exercises are designed to help students isolate the information they receive from each of their senses. Remember to identify what input students are receiving from their senses. How do we perceive the world when one of our senses is impaired? How do our other senses compensate? How careful are we in interpreting the input we receive from our senses every day?

Those with both sight and hearing very often come to take them for granted. The following exercises help to both appreciate and sharpen these senses.

Listening – Have the students close their eyes and suggest that they put their heads on their desks. Ask them to listen for and identify any sounds they hear outside of the building. Next have them identify sounds inside the building. Then listen

inside the class and, finally, their own breathing. Take the time for quiet and careful listening and do not share discoveries until the end of the exercise.

Detective Sound – All eyes remain closed. The teacher walks quietly around the room and makes between five and ten sounds using different objects (e.g. flipping the pages of a book, rustling a paper or plastic bag, banging a pipe, rattling a doorknob, etc.). The class remains silent until all the sounds are heard and then try to identify them in the right order and location.

NOTE: An advanced version of this exercise is to ask the class to imagine what else a particular sound could be. For example, a plastic bag could be people walking through leaves, somebody eating potato chips, rain on a window, an animal in a bush, a present being opened and so on.

## RADIO PLAYS—based on sensory exercises

*This activity interprets the meaning of a play using drama techniques (gr.5-8), shows how a variety of dramatic forms can be used in the construction of drama (gr.9), and demonstrates the function of sound in the communication of a drama. (gr.10)*

Radio plays come from a historical era when radio drama programming occurred much the same as television programming does today. Weekly soap operas and short stories were featured using character voices and home-made sound effects from broadcasting stations to the delight of audiences. This form of audio entertainment enjoyed great popularity and stimulated the imagination of listeners since people had to imagine the story in their minds instead of having it presented to them in the manner that television does.

Divide the classroom into groups of 4-6 students each. Students must create their own 'radio dramas' by presenting an auditory creation to the rest of the class, which will be presented behind a cardboard wall. This cardboard flat will ensure that although their auditory performances will be heard, the students and their sound-makers will not be seen which would distract the audience and detract from the 'magic' of the radio play.

Each radio drama should be around 5 – 10 minutes in length and feature a title. (eg. A

New Planet, The Big Storm, My Island Adventure) Students must come up with sound effects that would help illustrate the narrative of their stories. Keep in mind that some sounds often sound like other sounds. For example, a dropped book may sound like a gun shot or many hands hitting their thighs may sound like rain. Furthermore, students may take on 'character voices' in which the speaker uses a voice that is not their own to better portray a character and their intentions. For example, an angry or malicious character will speak differently from a happy or spirited character. A character who wants something may use a wheedling tone of voice or perhaps a demanding one in order to get what they want.

Students may build on their discoveries from the sensory awareness exercises which were explored previously. Remind students of their observations of when some sounds sounded like other sounds and encourage them to use this information in their radio plays.

## LANGUAGE-Experiment with descriptive language

*To demonstrate awareness of audience when writing in role and use appropriate language and vocabulary (gr. 5-8) and to demonstrate understanding of roles and techniques used to re-create roles (gr. 9,10)*

Helen Keller lived in a world of only touch, taste, and smell. Her writings reflect a person whose language described a world in terms of touch and smell which we normally identify through sight and sound. A person's language strongly reflects their world and culture. Here, Helen Keller describes how she experiences a spring walk in the forest.

In her essay "Three Days to See," Helen Keller described her walk in the woods:  
"I pass my hands lovingly about the smooth skin of a silver birch, or the rough, shaggy

bark of a pine. In spring I touch the branches of trees hopefully in search of a bud, the first sign of awakening Nature after her winter's sleep. I feel the delightful velvety texture of a flower, and discover its remarkable convolutions... I am delighted to have the cool waters of a brook rush through my open fingers. To me a lush carpet of pine needles or spongy grass is more welcome than the most luxurious Persian rug."

Write a scene as though you were Helen Keller. Use only words describing the senses of touch and smell.

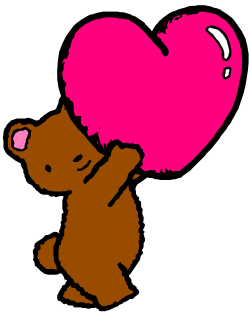
## LANGUAGE-Describing emotion

Another concept which Annie needed to teach Helen was describing emotions.

Naming Feelings – How do you think Annie explained different emotional states to Helen? In pairs, have the class refer to a list of emotions and try to explain them to each other as if they had no knowledge of them. For example – "Lonely is the feeling I get when I cannot find anyone to play with so I sit by the window and think about something."

Be careful not to use one emotion to explain another. Use the following list to start off with and add to it.

Happy  
Sad  
Angry  
Lonely  
Brave  
Shy  
Scared  
Excited  
Impatient  
Proud  
Calm



## CHALLENGES

*To demonstrate understanding of the motives of the characters they interpret through drama (gr.7-9) and to identify and describe the function of various methods of reflection (gr.10)*

Helen Keller faced a great challenge in life. We all face challenges. Think of a challenge you face. Answer the questions below and write about the challenge you must overcome in the form of journal writing.

1. What is a challenge for you?
2. Why is overcoming this challenge important?
3. How might you overcome it and be successful?
4. Who might help you? How?
5. What will you gain by overcoming your challenge?

## OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

*To research, interpret and perform some type of drama using a range of forms (gr.6-10) and to produce pieces of writing which show their ability to analyze and find solutions in real life. (gr.8)*

Many people in history have achieved noteworthy success and have served as an example to others through their triumphs over physical challenges. Examples of such people are Christopher Reeve who is quadriplegic, Andrea Bocelli who is blind, Michael J. Fox who battles Parkinson's disease, Steven Hawking who has Lou Gehrig's Disease, and Terry Fox who had leg cancer.

Who are other famous people who have overcome challenges in their lives? Who are other inspirational people who have overcome blindness specifically?

Have students research and produce a performance piece or a piece of writing on people who have overcome challenges in their lives. The central character may be one that is suggested above or a contemporary famous person. The created works should show solutions that students have found to problems in real life. The obstacles that need to be overcome as well as their solutions should be clearly presented. Dramatic presentations can be developed using a range of forms such as choral speaking or tableaux.



## READING COMPREHENSION

*To interpret the meaning of plays, scripts and other materials from a wide variety of sources and cultures. (gr.5-8)*

1. Before Annie Sullivan arrived, what strategies were Helen Keller's family considering in dealing with Helen?
2. Before Annie's arrival, how did Helen's disabilities and behaviour affect the Keller family? Be specific in discussing the Captain, Kate, and James.
3. Describe Annie Sullivan. What kind of young woman was she? Cite examples from the play to support your views.
4. Describe Captain Keller and Kate. Why do you think they had so much trouble controlling Helen?
5. How do you think Annie's background, especially her memories of her younger brother, Jimmie, influenced her behaviour as an adult? Explain.
6. What are James's and Aunt Ev's roles in the story? Why do you think the author included them?
7. Why wouldn't Annie let Helen take food from her (Annie's) plate? Why was

Annie's battle with Helen at the table so important?

8. Why was it necessary for Helen to be completely dependent on Annie during her learning? What was the Captain's reaction to Annie's demand that she stay alone with Helen at the garden house? Why do you think he finally gave in?

9. When Helen and Annie returned from the garden house, why do you think Helen "tested" Annie and her parents at the table? What happened? In your opinion, was Annie right?

10. Why do you think "water," "wah, wah," was the first word Helen recognized?

11. The characters undergo profound changes by the end of the play. Explain how Helen, Annie, the Captain, and James changed.

## WRITING

*To write in role in various forms (gr.7,8), to identify and perform a variety of drama presentations (gr.9,10), to create and original dramatic presentation (gr.11) and to script, revise and present a scene. (gr.11-OAC)*

For Helen Keller, writing was the only way to communicate effectively with the world around her. Her letters and speeches would inspire those around her from both the impaired and the unimpaired world. Society was constantly amazed at her triumphs and her tireless campaigns to elevate the status of women and the physically challenged. Helen Keller's words are often quoted when promoting a worthy cause or idea.

Who inspires you? Write a speech/letter in the role of a person who inspires you. Older students can perform their speeches to the class in the form of a dramatic speech, a character monologue, or a soliloquy that reveals his or her thoughts.



## RESEARCH - TOPICS

*To identify and pursue appropriate questions in beginning a research topic (gr.10) and to describe the social and historical contexts of the plays studied. (gr.11)*

1. Louis Braille
2. Alexander Graham Bell
3. What recent technological advances have helped in the education of the blind and the deaf?
4. How are guide dogs trained and obtained?
5. The history of Gallaudet University
6. Musicians Ray Charles and Stevie Wonder are blind. Prepare a report

discussing the effect of blindness on their musical careers.

7. Annie derived some of her techniques from those Samuel Gridley Howe had used with Laura Bridgman, a blind-deaf girl that he had taught at the Perkins Institute. Prepare a report on Laura Bridgman and her relationship with Annie Sullivan, her roommate.
8. Samuel Gridley Howe
9. American Sign Language

## RESEARCH-PROJECT IDEAS

1. Research Helen Keller. Write a biographical sketch of this truly remarkable woman. Include her achievements and triumphs.

2. Write an additional scene for the play. What happens after Helen begins to understand words? Create a scene that shows how Annie continues to teach Helen. With the help of classmates, act out and dramatize your scene.

3. Toward the end of the play, Annie says to Kate, "We're born to use words..." With your group, discuss the importance of language. Brainstorm how different life would be without language. Appoint a recorder for your group to write down your ideas, and then discuss your ideas with the members of another group.

4. Research Annie Sullivan and present an oral report about her to your class. Include her background, her education, and her accomplishments.

5. Before Annie came to the Keller house, Helen was wild and undisciplined. Her parents seemed unable to control her. Organize a panel to discuss this question: How important is parental discipline and guidance to children? Support your opinions with examples from the play as well as from your own experiences.

6. Louis Braille created a method by which blind people can read. Research the Braille method. How does it work? Obtain a book or magazine written in Braille and see if you can read it through touch.

## Further Reading

The following collection of thematically related readings is available in *The Miracle Worker and Related Readings* in McDougal Littell's *Literature Connections* series.

Excerpt from **"Three Days to See"** by Helen Keller, © 1933

**"Darkness at Noon"** by Harold Krents from *The New York Times*, May 26, 1976

**"And Sarah Laughed"** by Joanne Greenberg

(from *Rites of Passage*, © 1972)

**"The Game"** by Judith Ortiz Cofer

(from *The Latin Deli: Prose & Poetry*, © 1993)

**"Miss Awful"** by Arthur Cavanaugh, © 1987)

**"A Man"** by Nina Cassian, translated by Roy MacGregor-Hastie (from *The Other Voice*, © 1976)

Excerpt from **"Seeing"** by Annie Dillard (from *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, © 1974)

## Related Reading

### Fiction

Gibson, William. *Monday after the Miracle*. 1982. A sequel to *The Miracle Worker* but much less popular, this play portrays Helen as a college student with Annie as her translator and companion.

Garfield, James B. *Follow My Leader*. New York: Viking, 1957. An 11-year-old boy, who is suddenly blinded by a firecracker, adjusts to his situation with the help of a guide dog named Leader. (easy)

Greenberg, Joanne. *Of Such Small Differences*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1988. A young poet who is both blind and deaf seeks to live a normal life with the help of his girlfriend. (challenge)

Rosen, Lillian. *Just Like Everybody Else*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981. A 15-year-old girl struggles to cope after a freak accident leaves her deaf. (average)

### Nonfiction

Keller, Helen. *The Story of My Life*. 1902. New York: Doubleday, 1954. An autobiography composed during Keller's sophomore year at college, which includes letters written by Annie Sullivan. (challenge)

Krementz, Jill. *How It Feels to Live with a Physical Disability*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992. Twelve disabled children, ages six to sixteen, describe in their own words the physical and emotional challenges they face every day. (easy)

Peare, Catherine Owens. *The Helen Keller Story*. New York: HarperCollins, 1959. A condensed biography of Helen Keller that presents the highlights of her life up until the time the book was published. (easy)

## Other Resources and Credits

### McDougal Littell—Teacher's Language Arts Guides

[http://www.mcdougallittell.com/disciplines/\\_lang\\_arts/litcons/miracle/guide.cfm](http://www.mcdougallittell.com/disciplines/_lang_arts/litcons/miracle/guide.cfm)

### The Life of Helen Keller

<http://www.rnib.org.uk/wesupply/fctsheet/keller.htm>

### Time Magazine—The Most Important People of the 20th Century

<http://www.time.com/time/time100/heroes/profile/keller01.html>

### The Miracle Worker

<http://www.geocities.com/jed51459/miracle.html>

**Special thanks to The Birmingham Children's Theatre for contributing some of the material used in this guide.**

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# American Sign Language

American Sign Language as we know it today developed over time. The opening of schools for the deaf in the United States further promoted the standardization of American Sign Language. Each country's sign language has its own history. The history is often similar to that of American Sign Language. For example, Nicaraguan sign language developed only a few years ago when Nicaragua's first school for the deaf was opened.

