

Water

Helen Keller

Try to imagine what it would be like to be both blind and deaf at the same time. The world around you would be completely dark and silent. It would be very hard to understand anything or to communicate with another person. This is the kind of world that young Helen Keller lives in, and there doesn't seem to be much hope for her. But her teacher Miss Sullivan is determined to help her. And one day she finds a new way for Helen to connect to the world around her.

As the story opens, Helen describes her first experiences with Miss Sullivan, her new teacher:



The morning after my teacher came she led me into her room and gave me a doll. . . . When I had played with it a little while, Miss Sullivan slowly spelled into my hand the word “d-o-l-l.” I was at once interested in this finger play and tried to imitate it.



Helen finally succeeds in making the letters correctly. She is filled with childish pride and runs to show her mother what she has learned.



I did not know that I was spelling a word or even that words existed; I was simply making my fingers go in monkey-like imitation.



In the days that follow, Helen learns to hand-spell many other words. One day

TAKE NOTES

Activate Prior Knowledge

Think of a time when you felt upset because you could not understand something. Describe how you felt when you finally understood it.

Literary Analysis

A **narrative essay** is a true story about real events. Is this a narrative essay? How do you know?

Read Fluently

The bracketed passage says that Helen did not understand the words she spelled. To better understand the paragraph, break the long sentence into shorter sentences.

I did not know that I was

I did not even know that

I was simply making

Vocabulary Development

imitate (IM uh tayt) *v.* to copy the way someone else speaks, moves, or does something

TAKE NOTES

Reading Skill

An **author's purpose** may be to instruct, to entertain, to persuade, or to express ideas. The bracketed paragraph describes Helen's feelings about her breakthrough experience. What do you think is her purpose for writing? Explain.

Stop to Reflect

Why does Helen's discovery of words make her so happy?

Reading Check

What smell attracted Helen and Anne Sullivan to the well-house? Circle the answer.

Miss Sullivan keeps trying to get Helen to understand that "d-o-l-l" applies to her big rag doll as well as to her new doll. But Helen grows impatient at these attempts. She dashes her new doll on the floor, breaking it into pieces. Helen feels no sorrow or regret, just relief. Miss Sullivan then takes Helen outside into the warm sunshine.



We walked down the path to the well-house, attracted by the fragrance of the honeysuckle with which it was covered. Some one was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over one hand she spelled into the other the word *water*, first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten—a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that "w-a-t-e-r" meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand.

I left the well-house eager to learn. Everything had a name, and each name gave birth to a new thought.



Inside the house, Helen finds the broken pieces of her doll. For the first time she feels sorrow. That day Helen learns many new words, including *mother*, *father*, *sister*, and *teacher*.



It would have been difficult to find a happier child than I was as I lay in my crib at the close of that eventful day and lived over the joys it had brought me, and for the first time longed for a new day to come.

Vocabulary Development

drawing (DRAW ing) *v.* making flow

consciousness (KAHN shuhs nis) *n.* awareness

Water

1. **Draw Conclusions:** Helen Keller learned the word *water*. What will Keller want to do when she wakes up the next day?

2. **Evaluate:** Why is it important to be able to communicate?

3. **Reading Skill:** An **author's purpose** is the main reason that the author writes a story. What is one purpose Keller may have had for writing this essay?

4. **Literary Analysis:** An **autobiographical narrative** tells about a certain time in an author's life. Complete this chart to figure out why Keller talks about a certain event in her autobiographical narrative.

Event From Narrative	Author's Thoughts and Feelings	Why Is It Included?
Helen connects the word <i>w-a-t-e-r</i> with water from the pump.		

Writing: Letter

Write a **letter** to the director of the school for the blind as Anne Sullivan. Use the following questions to write notes for your letter:

- How do you think Sullivan felt about Helen Keller before she learned words?

- How did Sullivan teach Keller what *w-a-t-e-r* means?

- How do you think Sullivan feels about what happened?

Research and Technology: Project

Use the following chart to record information about careers, duties, and training from your source. Complete the chart on another sheet of paper.

Which source did you use? _____

Career	Duties	Training