

Introduction

This is a story about a young man named Felix, who learns about disabilities. It is a difficult lesson so it requires some serious expertise. He meets Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan, and through the character and wisdom of these women he learns to see with his heart.

Helen Keller was both blind and deaf, and this is also her story. At the age of seven, Anne Sullivan taught her about letters and words using the manual alphabet (finger spelling). Helen grew to become a scholar, a linguist with knowledge of several languages, a champion for those who want to triumph over adversity, a true "miracle woman." One of Helen's enduring character traits was a "sweetness of spirit" that was forgiving and tolerant—a trait that is so effectively portrayed by Phyllis Frelich, a hearing impaired actress who plays Helen in this video.

But this is also a story about teachers. Anne Sullivan was a great teacher who had risen above the ashes of her own difficult childhood. She began at the age of 20 to devise new techniques to educate blind-deaf students. Others had some success in this area, but none had a pupil like Helen, who responded so quickly. The lives of Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan, student and teacher, became entwined, each one adding to the greatness of the other.

Using The Video

Tragedy to Triumph is a springboard to launch a whole study into dealing with disabilities and attitudes toward the disabled, as well as a study of the lives of two great heroes in this struggle. The objective of this material is to teach students about acceptance of people with differences. Teaching ideas and historical background included in this guide are available to supplement your study.

The Life of Helen Keller

Helen Keller was a child in darkness who discovered a new world through the eyes and ears of others. Quotes are from *Helen and Teacher*, by Joseph P. Lash, a definitive work on Helen Keller.

- **Birth**--She was born June 27, 1880 in Tuscumbia, Alabama. Her father, Captain Arthur H. Keller, had fought with the Confederate army at Vicksburg. He edited a news weekly and was periodically a US Marshall. Her mother was Captain Keller's second wife and had been raised in the social circles of Memphis. Both were consummate southerners.
- **The dark comes**--Helen was a bright and lively infant, but at the age of 19 months she had a fever which left her blind and deaf. There has never been a precise diagnosis for the type and cause of the fever. Helen had a distant memory of what light was like from her time before the fever came. Also, she had begun to make sounds before the fever and had remembered the word "wah-wah" for water. This was a foreshadowing, for water was to be the key to her world of language.

I cannot remember how I felt when the light went out of my eyes. I suppose I felt it was always night and perhaps I wondered why the day did not come. --Helen Keller

- **The coming of teacher**--The Kellers sought advice and remedies for Helen. As she approached the age of 7, they visited Alexander Graham Bell in Washington D.C. because he was an activist in deaf education. Bell recommended the Perkins School for the Blind in Boston. A recent graduate of the school, Anne Sullivan, also known as Annie, was offered the position of tutor. In March, 1887, Annie arrived in Tuscumbia to live with the Kellers as governess.
- **The wild thing**--Helen had learned to communicate many of her wishes with various signs--there were some 60 gestures she had invented to ask for things or identify people. But she was otherwise frustrated in her attempts to communicate, and her frustration led to behavior problems. She would kick and fuss and demand her own way, even though there was a lovable streak in the child.

I saw clearly that it was useless to try to teach her language or anything else until she learned to obey me. I have thought about it a great deal, and the more I think, the more certain I am that obedience is the gateway through which knowledge, yes, and love, too, enter the mind of a child. --Anne Sullivan

- **Obedience first**--Annie became a live-in teacher. She immediately began to use finger spelling in Helen's hand to name objects. Helen quickly learned the finger-spell patterns but considered them a game and did not yet relate them to names for objects. She also did not accept her teacher's authority and continued with her wild ravings. For a time, Annie and Helen lived in a separate house away from the

family, because of Annie's concerns about family interference in her attempts to create structure. Eventually, the behavior problems were brought under control, but Helen still did not understand words.

- **Water**--The communication breakthrough came with a trip to the well. Helen had been learning the finger spell patterns for W-A-T-E-R and M-U-G, but she still did not relate them to a liquid and its container. Later, when they were walking by the well house, Annie placed Helen's hand under the water coming from the pump and spelled W-A-T-E-R. Suddenly Helen had a realization. The cool liquid coming from the pump had a name. There were names for everything.

Helen got up this morning like a radiant fairy. She has flitted from object to object, asking the name of everything and kissing me for very gladness. Last night when I got into bed, she stole into my arms of her own accord and kissed me for the first time, and I thought my heart would burst, so full was it of joy. --Anne Sullivan

- **Learning words**--By the summer of 1887, some four months after Annie arrived, and as Helen approached her seventh birthday, she had a vocabulary numbering hundreds of words, and was forming simple sentences. Much of her communication was by finger spelling, but she had also learned the shapes of letters.
- **Learning to write**--During the summer of 1887 she could print using block letters. To write she used a grooved writing board that was placed over a sheet of paper. Helen wrote the letters in the grooves, writing with a pencil and guiding the end of the pencil with the index finger of her left hand. She began to mail letters to her relatives. That same summer Helen also learned the Braille alphabet.
- **Perkins School**--In the spring of 1888, as Helen approached 8 years old she left Alabama with Annie to go to the Perkins School in Boston. This was the first of several trips to the school. Helen was exposed to a wonderful array of resources and her abilities increased. She learned quickly and had an exceptional memory for details. Her capacity for quick learning and retention gave her the name of "miracle" child.
- **Learning foreign languages**--It was during this summer that Helen learned about other languages such as Latin, French and German. She soon was peppering her writing with phrases from these languages.
- **Learning to speak**--In her ninth year, Helen Keller began to learn to speak. Her first speech teacher, Sarah Fuller, had her feel the shape of her mouth as she spoke, feeling inside the mouth to feel the position of the tongue. Helen then shaped the sounds on her own. First she learned to say letter sounds, then syllables. At first her speech was difficult to understand. She spent many years trying to perfect her speaking ability, even into adulthood.
- **Reading lips**--As she learned to speak, she also learned to read lips with her fingers. This was a brand new form of communication that Helen began to use immediately.
- **Helen's character**--Helen spent a life in helping others. She had boundless energy. Many noted her kindness, generosity and enthusiasm. She thought the

best of people and typically brought out the best. She had numerous friends, and an endless communication with dignitaries around the world, but she never lost a sense of true empathy for the poor of the world--for the disabled.

- **Letters, letters, letters**--Helen was a tireless letter writer, even as a child. Her writing ability appeared to be a gift, and she used it extensively. A piece of paper was her main vehicle of communication to the world.
- **Radcliffe Class of 1904**--As Helen approached the end of her regular schooling, she began to think of college. Some said she shouldn't do it, but many schools wanted her to attend. She chose the one college in America who did not want her--Radcliffe. They thought she could not compete with "sighted" students, and this was tantamount to a challenge to Helen. She first passed her entry exams, and then with Anne Sullivan as a translator, attended regular classes. She graduated cum laude in 1904.
- **Anne Sullivan Macy**--During her college years Helen wrote *The Story of my Life* for the "Ladies Home Journal." John Albert Macy, a Harvard English instructor, was hired to help with the organization and editing. He worked closely with Helen and Anne, and in the years following this effort, he and Anne fell in love. Anne resisted because of her commitment to Helen and because John Macy was some 10 years younger, but with Helen's encouragement they were married on May 2, 1905.
- **Polly Thompson**--In 1914, it was apparent that with Anne Sullivan's health failing, a new companion was needed for Helen. This was how Polly Thompson entered Helen's life. Polly was a young woman who had recently arrived from Scotland, and although she had no experience with the blind or deaf, she was hired to keep house. She was to become a life-long companion to Helen
- **Love**--A moment of love did come in Helen's life. In 1916, a young man named Peter Fagan had been hired to help while Anne Sullivan was ill and Polly was away. During a time when he and Helen were alone, he declared his love and told her she was beautiful. She had never been told she was beautiful and she fell for him. They agreed to keep their feelings secret for the moment, but eventually Helen's mother learned of the matter. A reporter had found an application for a marriage license by Peter and Helen in the city records. Helen's mother immediately took charge. She believed she saw flaws in the young man's character, and he was immediately relieved of his duties and sent away. Although there were a few follow-up letters between Helen and Peter (written in Braille), the romance died.
- **Hollywood**--In 1919, Helen starred in a movie (a silent movie) on her life. This was received well but was a failure financially. Helen had hoped to support herself from the profits, but it was not to be. However, the movie led to a vaudeville tour for four years in the early 1920s which was a financial success.
- **The American Foundation for the Blind**--In 1921, the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) was organized. Helen was invited to be a spokesperson for the organization. She traveled extensively with Anne and Polly, giving speeches and raising funds for the blind and for related causes. Along with her many books and other writings, this was to become her life's work.

- **Foreign travels**--Beginning in 1930, Helen, Anne and Polly began a series of overseas trips. At first they went to the British Isles for summer vacations, but soon there were invitations from many places. In 1932 she received the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws from the University of Glasgow. She met and visited the Queen at Buckingham Palace. There were visits to France, Yugoslavia, and Japan.
- **The loss of Anne**--However, throughout these years, Anne Sullivan Macy's health was failing. She lost her sight and there was an "internal disorder." In October, 1935, Helen's Teacher and her dearest friend died.

I wanted to be loved. I was lonesome--then Helen came into my life. I wanted her to love me and I loved her. Then later Polly came and I loved Polly and we were always so happy together--my Polly, my Helen...Thank God I gave up my life so that Helen might live. God help her to live without me when I go. --Anne Sullivan, from her deathbed

- **After Anne**--After Anne, Helen's work for the AFB and other worthy causes continued for many years. During the second World War, she visited disabled soldiers. After the war she went to Germany, Africa, Latin America, India and other places. Between trips she stayed at "Arcan Ridge" her home that was named after a favorite place in Scotland. She wrote volumes, including a book about Anne Sullivan Macy. Polly Thompson continued as her companion until Polly's death in 1960.

All my life I have tried to avoid ruts, such as doing things my ancestors did before me, or leaning on the crutches of other people's opinion, or losing my childhood sense of wonderment. I am glad to say I still have a vivid curiosity about the world I live in....t is as natural for me to believe that the richest harvest of happiness comes with age as to believe that true sight and hearing are within, not without.... --Helen Keller, on being asked about growing older

- **Retirement**--In her later years, Helen Keller lived on into retirement. She often walked the grounds of "Arcan Ridge," and could be seen talking to herself with her fingers. Her fingers, her windows to the world, would flutter with unspoken remembrances of her long and wonderful life. She died in the afternoon of June 1, 1968, during a nap, and just before her 88th birthday.

Anne Sullivan--Teacher

The story of Anne Sullivan as a child and as a young woman before her life was joined with Helen Keller has its own special interest.

- **Birth**--Anne Sullivan was born in April, 1866 in Feeding Hills, Massachusetts, a small village near Springfield, Massachusetts, to Irish immigrants who were very poor. This was a troubled family, because her father drank excessively and worked inconsistently, and her mother suffered from tuberculosis.
- **Trachoma**--Anne contracted trachoma, a disease of the eyes, when she was about 5. This disorder is not unusual where there is poor hygiene, and Anne's situation was not good. She was physically strong, but the disease was left untreated and she gradually lost her vision, although she was never totally blind.
- **Shaping her character**--The first 14 years of Anne Sullivan's life was the story of a young girl with a dream to escape an indescribable childhood of abandonment and loss. Her mother died while she was still a child. Because her father could not maintain a family, she lived with a series of relatives, and finally, just before her tenth birthday, she and her brother Jimmy were sent to the state "poorhouse" in Tewksbury, Massachusetts. This was a home for charity cases, and Anne roomed and boarded with the mentally ill, with prostitutes, and with people who could not maintain functioning lives in the society of that day. She fought for Jimmy and herself to be together, and they had beds next to each other, but Jimmy had a tubercular hip from birth and he died at Tewksbury, leaving her with no caring family. Despite these problems, Anne held to the dream that she would go to school. She had heard of schools for the blind.
- **The committee**--Her chance to go to school came when an investigating committee visited Tewksbury to inspect the institution. Heading the group was Mr. Frank B. Sanborn, Head of the Board of Charities. Anne followed them, and near the end of the tour, she threw herself at the mercy of Mr. Sanborn. She pleaded to be sent to a school for the blind. Soon thereafter, Anne learned she was to be sent to Perkins Institute for the Blind in Boston, unable to read, unable to see clearly, with a scarred childhood, but with her ambition to succeed.
- **Perkins School**--Perkins was a world-renowned institution for the blind. Anne's stay there was a process of softening--some would say taming--a highly intelligent young woman with a sharp questioning mind, but with an exceptionally strong will, a narrow point of view, and formative training from the school of hard and bitter experience. She started at the age of 14 at an elementary school level, but graduated at the age of 20 as class valedictorian. At first, she was mocked by her classmates for her lack of social skills, but over time she gained their respect through her perseverance and the strength of her personality.
- **Rebellion**--Anne was insecure about her background and excessively defensive toward ridicule, which she covered with rebelliousness. There were teachers who could not tolerate her quick mouth and ready challenge of authority, but a number of key teachers saw her potential and nourished her and shaped her.

....I know that gradually I began to accept things as they were, and rebel less and less. The realization came to me that I could not alter anything but myself. I must accept the conventional order of society if I were to succeed in anything. I must bend to the inevitable, and govern my life by experience, not by might-have-beens.
--Anne Sullivan

- **Valedictorian**--At the age of 20 she delivered the valedictory address for the school graduation. This was a great moment of triumph. Shortly after this the director of the school, Michael Anagnos, learned of a deaf blind student in Alabama who needed a teacher. Anne Sullivan was offered the position and her life then became entwined with that of Helen Keller.
- **Educational theorist**--Anne Sullivan developed her own philosophy of teaching as she worked with Helen. She reasoned that a child learns to talk by imitation. As the child is spoken to--typically in sentences or phrases--the child repeats what is said and begins to work out by himself or herself the interconnections and structure of the language. Thus Annie began to give Helen complete, although simple, sentences. Helen, on her own began to understand the nuances of subject, action and object.
- **Teacher**--Anne Sullivan came to be known as a great American teacher. Her gift was her dedication. Anne literally gave her life and career to make Helen Keller great. But Helen, in return, also gave to Anne a sense of family, a stability she had never had.

The sign of a great teacher is that the accomplishments of her students exceed her own. --Aristotle

More information about Anne Sullivan can be found at the [Anne Sullivan online museum](#).

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Disclaimer

The movie *Tragedy to Triumph* is a fictionalized account of historical events and persons. Some characters have been changed and others added for dramatic effect.

It is important to remember that the handbook and the video are part of interdisciplinary and multi-cultural studies of history, biography, literature, geography, tolerance, and intolerance and should be included in the broader scope of any curriculum.

Lessons from the Video

In this story the lead character, Felix, dealt with a number of important lessons about life. He had to learn to see with his heart rather than his eyes. Following are some of the lessons from the video that you may want to consider for a teaching situation. Be sensitive to how individual questions may affect individuals in your class.

- **The touch of a teacher**--In many ways the story about Helen Keller is a story about her teacher Anne Sullivan. The two cannot be separated. Teachers are so important. Who was the most important person in your life? More than likely it was a teacher or someone who taught you something directly or by their example.
 - Describe the most important teacher in your life.
 - What made Anne Sullivan a good teacher?
 - Is the librarian in the video a good teacher? Why or why not?
- **Kindness is the key**--What is the proper way to behave toward someone with a disability? "Kindness is the language that the blind can see and the deaf can hear." Accept them as they are and be upbeat, encouraging and kind. Behave as you would around anyone else you know.
 - How should you behave around someone who is visually impaired? Hearing impaired? Physically challenged?
 - How did it make you feel when the blind student was abused at the beginning of the video?
 - If you were to have been there watching the abuse, what would you have done?
 - When talking with a disabled person, should you ever discuss the disability with them? Why, when or how?
 - How do you respond to people who make bad jokes about people with disabilities? How should you respond?
- **Asking forgiveness**--Apologizing can be very hard. However, the teenager in the video, Felix, found it to be the natural thing--the important thing--to do after his experience with Helen.
 - Is it important to apologize for wrong that has been committed?
 - When should you apologize?
 - What should you do if someone doesn't accept your apology?
 - How should you behave if someone apologizes to you? What if they apologize for something that you find it hard to forgive?
 - When is it important to forgive?
 - What is the difference between forgiving and forgetting?
- **Everyone is imperfect**--When you think of a person with disabilities, do you think of yourself? Everyone is imperfect. Everyone has some limitations.
 - What are your personal strengths?
 - What are your limitations?
- **I can't speak the language**--There are great difficulties in being able to communicate without speech or the written word. Helen Keller was separated from others by a tremendous communication gap before her teacher came. Even if

we can see and hear well, there are often misunderstandings that we must overcome.

- In what ways do we communicate? How are our eyes and ears important in each form of communication?
- What are your limitations?
- **A handicap of the heart (Your Fun/Her Pain)**--The young man in the video knew how to talk tough, but he didn't know how to understand and be sensitive. He had a "handicap of the heart."
 - Why is it important to be sensitive to other people?
 - Is it important to be sensitive to people you don't like?
 - Who in the video had the worst handicap of the heart? Who was the most sensitive?

Essay Topics

- A history of Braille.
- The life of Louis Braille.
- American sign language.
- A history of finger spelling.
- A history of the treatment of the blind.
- A history of the treatment of the deaf.
- A comparison of the way in which sensory or mobility impaired individuals are treated in different cultures.
- Famous individuals who have overcome disabilities.
- The politics of the disabled in the United States.
- The Americans with Disabilities Act of July 26, 1990.
- Describe the treatment of the disabled at various times in history.
- What was Helen Keller's favorite type of dress?
- What was Helen Keller's favorite meal?
- The teaching methods of Anne Sullivan.
- Samuel Gridley Howe and the Perkins School for the Blind in Boston.
- Alexander Graham Bell and his efforts in education of the deaf.
- What are your own disabilities and how can you triumph over them?
- Helen Keller was 7 years old before she could ask for a glass of water and 9 before she could speak. What would it be like if you couldn't ask for a glass of water?
- The next time I meet a blind (deaf, physically challenged, etc.) person, I will . . .
- The next time I meet someone different from myself (whether they can't see, are a different color, can't walk, or have any other difference) I . . .

Finger Spelling

An ideal exercise for any age level is learning the manual alphabet. This can be done for an individual challenge or as a part of competition between students.



The Letters

In the following descriptions of each of the letters, the "speaker" is the individual performing the finger spelling, and the "viewer" is the person reading the spelling.

A -- Hand curled in a fist, but with the thumb across the index finger at the end of the curl.

B -- Palm facing the viewer with all four fingers pointing up and the thumb laid across the center of the palm.

C -- Fingers and thumb curled to the shape of the letter "C", the thumb forming the lower part of the curl, and the hand held to show the "C" to the viewer.

D -- A lower case "d" formed with the thumb and middle finger touching to form the circle at the lower end of the "d," the index finger extended upward to form the stem, and the other fingers curled out of the way.

E -- All four fingers curled downward, with the thumb across the center of the palm and the upper side of the thumb against the end of the fingers.

F -- The thumb and index finger touching, with the other three fingers pointing straight upward.

G -- Hand in a fist, but with the index finger and thumb pointing off to the side--thumb over index finger.

H -- As with the "G", but with three fingers--index, middle and thumb--pointed off to the side.

I -- Hand in a fist with the little finger pointed upward.

J -- As with the "I", but with the drawing of the hook of a "J" in the air with the little finger.

K -- Index and middle fingers pointed upward with the thumb positioned between them, and the other two fingers curled against the palm.

L -- Hand in a fist, but with the index finger pointed upward and the thumb pointing to the side to form the letter L.

M -- Three fingers--index, middle and ring--curled downward, with the thumb holding the little finger against the palm.

N -- As with the "M", but with only 2 fingers--index and middle--pointing downward.

O -- Fingers and thumb curled to form an "O", as in a "C" but with the end of the thumb and the fingers touching.

P -- Like a "K", but with the fingers pointed downward.

Q -- Hand in a fist, but with the index finger and thumb pointed downward and parallel.

R -- Hand in a fist, but with the middle and index fingers pointed and crossed.

S -- Hand in a fist, with the thumb across the curled fingers.

T -- Hand in a fist, but with the thumb between the middle and index fingers.

U -- Hand in a fist, but with the index and middle fingers pointing upward and together.

V -- Like a "U", but with the two pointing fingers separated to form a "V".

W -- Like a "V", but with three fingers pointing upward and separated--the index, middle and ring fingers.

X -- Hand in a fist, but with the index finger curled upward in a hook.

Y -- Hand in a fist, but with the index and little fingers pointed up and outward.

Z -- A "Z" is written in the air with the index finger that points outward from a hand in a fist position.

Finger Spelling Technique

- **Spelling patterns**--When you spell a word it is important to make the letters accurately and smoothly. Make the letters at a steady pace. Jerky spelling motions are difficult to read. Inaccurate letters make for confusion. Go slowly at first--very slowly. Go slowly enough that you can make each letter smoothly and at a regular frequency. Speed will come with practice.
- **Ending words**--To show the end of a word, hold the letter for an extra beat of the spelling rhythm.
- **Double letters**--Denote double letters by moving the hand to the side in a bumpy pattern, or by simply remaking the letter.

Finger Spelling Activities

- **Activity 1**--Have a classroom competition to see which student can learn all 26 finger letters first.
- **Activity 2**--Have each student learn to finger spell his or her name.
- **Activity 2**--Finger spell the following words: boy, girl, ear, nose, eat, cry, run, cat, dog, pot, hand, foot, zap, sun, etc. Make up additional words. Keep the words at three or four letters at the start.
- **Activity 4**--Finger spell the phrase "I want to be your friend."
- **Activity 5**--Finger spell M-U-G and W-A-T-E-R. These were the two words that Helen Keller was learning when she discovered the meaning of words. Anne ran water over Helen's hand at a well and suddenly Helen realized that the cool liquid had the name "water." Until then she thought the finger spell patterns were a game.
- **Hands and finger spelling**--Blindfold one student, and have another student finger spell a secret message into the blind folded person's hand. To create interest you can have two teams and a contest. Each correctly read message scores a point.
- **Learning numbers**--Numbers are a whole additional activity. The first 10 numbers are made as follows. For additional numbers, have interested class members do a research project.

1 -- Hand in a fist, with the index finger pointed upward.

- 2** -- Hand in a fist, with index and middle fingers pointed.
- 3** -- Hand in a fist, with the thumb, index, middle pointed (the ring finger is not used, because that gives a "W").
- 4** -- All fingers except thumb pointed up (thumb in palm).
- 5** -- All fingers pointed upward (thumb outward).
- 6** -- Thumb holding little finger with the other fingers (ring, middle, index) pointed upward.
- 7** -- Thumb holding ring finger with other fingers pointed.
- 8** -- Thumb holding middle finger with other fingers pointed.
- 9** -- Thumb holding index finger with other fingers pointed.
- 10** -- Hand in a fist, moved sideways (to tell from "A").

Classroom Activities

The following activities can be adapted to a range of age levels. The objective in these activities is to make students participants in their learning experiences rather than just being observers.

- **The life of Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan**--Both of these women were remarkable human beings who rose above seemingly insurmountable odds. Teachers are encouraged to allow their students to study the lives of these women through essays or library worksheets.
- **What is blindness**--Have your students give a definition of blindness. It's not as easy as they may think. Certainly being able to see no light at all would be blindness, but what if you can see light but can't make out shapes? What if you can make out shapes but can't see to read letters? There are actually more than 50 different definitions of blindness from various sources and agencies around the world. This is a great one for library research.
- **A song with sign language**--American Sign Language is a step beyond finger spelling. This is a language with the hands to convey words and concepts without spelling individual letters. If you do not know any of these signs, invite a visitor who knows the language. One of the best ways to learn some of the signs is to have the students interpret a song. The motions are done with the rhythm of the music to create a beautiful effect.
- **Essays**--Essay topics are included in a separate section in this guide. Try a short essay--one to three pages--on these and any other topics of your choice.
- **Living with blindness**--Have students try to imagine what it is like to be blind. A standard exercise is to have them blindfolded. This can last for as long as a class period. Partners can be assigned--one blindfolded and the other "seeing." The two have to spend part of a day together--perhaps for one hour or for a lunch period. However, take care for the personal safety of individuals. Anticipate how your students will respond, and adjust accordingly. Students can follow normal classroom exercises or some special activities can be developed.
- **Thirsty for a look**--Blindfolded, have your students get a drink of water from a water fountain.
- **Robbing the picture**--For another exercise in relating to the visually impaired, have your students "listen" to the segment in the Helen Keller video in which Felix tricks the robbers--listen, but no watching.
- **Lips**--Sitting across from a partner, have your students put their hands over their ears a try to read their partner's lips. Have them start with simple words or sentences and gradually get more difficult.
- **The sound free zone**--Create a "sound free zone" in your classroom to duplicate conditions for the deaf. In other words, students are not allowed to talk and otherwise there is an attempt to reduce the overall amount of sound in a classroom. Then have them write about their thoughts and feelings during the "silent" time. Note that duplicating the environment of the hearing impaired can be difficult. Students will find it almost impossible to be totally sound free. Ear

- plugs are not recommended for class use since these can be dangerous if used improperly, and in any event they do not totally block noise.
- **Life without the tube**--For another exercise in relating to the hearing impaired, have your students watch a TV show or video without the sound.
 - **Eye problems**--Have your students do research on various eye diseases and defects. Following is a list with short definitions for teacher reference.
 1. *Myopia*--The myopic eye is larger and longer. The condition is usually genetic and results in a focal point in front of the retina, and is corrected with glasses.
 2. *Cataracts*--A loss of transparency of the lens. Typically there is a large opaque spot in the central part of the vision.
 3. *Macular degeneration*--The most common type is disciform degeneration, which is a leakage of the vasculature that results in a loss of fine detail and distortion of vision.
 4. *Diabetic retinopathy*--An effect of diabetes, commonly from blood collecting in the vitreous, where it forms opaque fibrous masses that reduce or destroy vision.
 5. *Trachoma*--Most common in areas of the world with poor hygiene. It is spread by flies and causes a scarring of the cornea that distorts vision.
 6. *Glaucoma*--A loss of vision from increased pressure inside the eye. It is commonly caused by blockage of the aqueous drainage system in the eye.
 7. *Retinitis pigmentosa*--A group of disorders characterized by clumps of pigment appearing on the retina.
 8. *Hemianopia*--Also called "half-vision," this is caused by damage to the visual pathways (that is, the optic nerve and brain).
 - **Anatomy lesson (parts of the eye and ear)**--Obtain a model of an eye or an ear and have your students learn the key parts of each of these organs. The biology lab in your school may have a model. You can check your library or the office of a local eye specialist for an illustration of the eye and ear. Pharmaceutical companies often provide these to health professionals to give to patients for reference.
 - **Vision checks**--Invite your school nurse or a local health professional to give the students vision/hearing checks. The same can be done for the ears. Be sure to obtain the appropriate clearances and permission statements. The health professional can give a short talk on proper health habits and proper care of the eyes and ears. Have the students learn about such things as 20/20 vision, astigmatism, various ear problems, etc.
 - **The disability letter**--Have them write a letter to an imaginary friend who has just become disabled--the friend has become blind or deaf, or perhaps has lost some bodily function through an accident or illness. Have them express sympathy in a loving manner. This can be done with group work, with students sharing ideas for what is appropriate.
 - **Blind or deaf**--Have students discuss which is more important: sight or hearing. If they had to be either blind or deaf, which would they choose? They can write an essay about their feelings.

- **Cameo Interview/role playing**--Have a student take the part of one of the characters in the video, and be interviewed by others in the class. The student needs to prepare for the role, so give the assignment ahead of time--as much as a week in advance--so preparations can be made. Give the role player some specific questions that the class will ask (20 questions are appropriate); parents can help the students research the questions at home to help support the educational experience. Questions asked should reflect a knowledge of the historical events and attitudes of the times. On the day of the interview, younger students may want to dress in a costume of the period to add effect and otherwise enrich the performance. If a video recorder is available, try making a recording of the interview to play back to the class.
- **Draw a picture as a blind person**--Give each student a blank sheet of paper and blindfold them. Then have them draw a picture--of their home, of another person in the class of a tree or car, etc.
- **Classroom visitor**--Have a visit to the class by a person who is disabled. Talk with the class about the visit ahead of time, and discuss guidelines for relating to a disabled person. Ideally the visitor is a person who will speak honestly about their disability and be sensitive to student questions. Ask the visitor ahead of time about the questions they would like the students to ask and then prepare the students with these questions. These will help to build a dialogue and open the way for other questions.

Study Questions

Answer the following questions after viewing the video *Tragedy to Triumph: An Adventure with Helen Keller*.

1. When Felix first met the librarian, what type of book was the librarian reading?
How does a person read this type of book?
2. Why did Helen want to touch Felix's lips?
3. What was Helen able to feel in Felix's face?
4. Why do you think his face felt this way?
5. Why were Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan making motions in each other's hands?
6. What was the first word Helen learned?
7. If you lose your sight, what can happen to your other senses?
8. When did this adventure with Helen occur?
9. What was Helen's nickname for Anne Sullivan?
10. What kind of handicap did Felix have?

Essay Questions

1. What did Helen teach Felix?
2. When Felix returned to the school, the young girl did not accept his apology at first. Why do you think she behaved this way?

Answers to Study Questions

1. A book in Braille. Letters in the book are made with raised dots that can be felt with the fingers.
2. She could read lips (understand what they were saying) with her fingers.
3. He had a good face, but sad.
4. Answers will vary, but Felix was not a happy person. He had to build himself up by tearing down others.
5. They were using finger spelling. This is one way Helen spoke with people.
6. The word "water."
7. They can become magnified.
8. 1935.
9. Teacher.
10. A handicap of the heart

Answers to Essay Questions

1. Answers will vary, but in general, she taught him a lesson in acceptance and tolerance.
2. Answers will vary, but in general, she did not trust him.