

Helen's Big World: The Life of Helen Keller

Helen's Big World: The Life of Helen Keller

Written by Doreen Rappaport, Illustrated by Matt Tavares

Ages: 6-8; Grades 1-5

Themes: biography, deafness and blindness, perseverance

SUMMARY

From the author of Martin's Big Words comes another intimate and poetic biography, of Helen Keller. After losing her sight and hearing at a young age, Helen is plunged into a dark and silent world. Aggressively acting out her frustration at her inability to communicate her wants and needs, Helen's life changes when Annie Sullivan is hired as her teacher. With patience, love, and toughness, Annie teaches Helen to communicate with her hands. This story follows Helen and Annie's relationship through Helen's early education at home, her later education at the university, and into her adulthood as an activist and speaker. Helen's own words are interspersed with the text, giving the viewer a firsthand view into Helen's thoughts and feelings.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will compare and contrast different sources about Helen Keller and synthesize their learning in writing.
- Students will identify the important milestones in Helen's life.
- Students will explore the world using their different senses.

BEFORE VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Elicit students' background knowledge about blindness and deafness. Guiding questions:

- What does it mean to be blind? Deaf?
- How is the world different for blind people and deaf people?
- What kinds of things do blind people do to help them "see?"
- What kinds of things do deaf people do to help them "hear" and communicate?
- What extra challenges would a person have who was blind and deaf?

Build students' background knowledge of Helen Keller's life and work. Consider using the following resources:

- <http://www.biography.com/people/helen-keller-9361967?scrlbybrkr>: This website includes facts about the different part's of Helen's life, as well as a short video describing her accomplishments.
- http://braillebug.afb.org/helen_keller_bio.asp: This website is

a "Helen Keller Kids' Museum Online" with facts about Helen's life and links to other informational websites.

- http://www.ducksters.com/biography/women_leaders/helen_keller.php: Another website for kids that includes a basic biography of Helen's life.
- There are also many biographies of Helen Keller written for children that can be used to build their background knowledge.

Return to these resources after viewing to compare and contrast different sources of information.

Set the purpose for viewing. Suggested purpose statement:

- Today we will watch a movie about a woman named Helen Keller. When Helen Keller was very young she lost her eyesight and her hearing; she was blind and deaf! When Helen was seven, her parents hired a special teacher named Annie Sullivan to help her learn how to communicate. With Annie's help, Helen learned to communicate with others and she even went to college and wrote two books! As you watch today, pay attention to how Helen overcame the great challenges in her life and what she was able to accomplish in her lifetime.

AFTER VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Guide students through comparing and contrasting the information from the movie with the information that they learned from one of the other sources listed in the Before Viewing Activities. Guiding questions:

- What information did you learn from more than one source?
- How did the information differ between sources?
- What was the author's purpose for each different source? What evidence from the text or video suggests that purpose?

Consider having students record their ideas on a Venn diagram or table matrix, such as the one below:

	Info about early life	Info about work as a scientist	Info about stars
Helen's Big World			
Biography.com article			
Other Sources			

Culminate and assess students' learning with one of the following performance tasks:

- Students will write a "Helen Keller Quick Facts" book that includes information from the different texts and media that they studied.
- Students will write an essay that answers the following question: Explain how Annie Sullivan changed Helen Keller's life. What was Helen able to accomplish that wouldn't have been possible without Annie? Use information from Helen's Big World and at least one other source to support your answer.
- Students will create an annotated timeline including illustrations and 1-3 sentence descriptions of the major events in Helen Keller's life.

Guide students through an exploration of the world using their senses. Sensory experiences to try include:

- Go outside and give children blindfolds. Guide them through focusing on listening, smelling, and feeling the world around them. Record students' observations on chart with columns labeled: "Sounds, Smells, and Feelings."
- Set up sensory boxes. Fill boxes or containers with materials that feel different from each other. Include soft items such as cotton balls, smooth items such as marbles, and rough items such as sand paper. As students describe what they feel, list vocabulary words and phrases that could describe the textures and shapes they are feeling.
- Have students work in partners. One partner is blindfolded. The partner without a blindfold uses verbal directions to guide the blindfolded partner through challenges such as:
 - o Walking a path around obstacles
 - o Drawing a picture without being able to see it
 - o Making a sandwich (or performing another familiar process)

MORE RELATED TITLES FROM WESTON WOODS:

Coretta Scott written by Ntozake Shange, ill. by Kadir Nelson
Ella Fitzgerald: The Tale of Vocal Virtuosa written by Andrea Davis Pinkney, ill. by Brian Pinkney

I Could Do That! Esther Morris Gets Women the Vote written by Linda Arms White, ill. by Nancy Carpenter

Rosa written by Nikki Giovanni, ill. by Bryan Collier

That Book Woman written by Heather Henson, ill. by David Small

Who Says Women Can't Be Doctors? The Story of Elizabeth

Blackwell written by Tanya Lee Stone, ill. by Marjorie Priceman

To order other Weston Woods titles visit www.scholastic.com/westonwoods or call 800-243-5020

This guide may be photocopied for free distribution without restriction.