

0. THE MIRACLE WORKER - Story Preface

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This image depicts the cottage at Ivy Green—the name for the Keller home in Tuscumbia, Alabama—where Helen Keller and her teacher, Anne Sullivan, were living in April of 1877. Near the cottage is the now-famous pump where Anne helped Helen to understand that the letters she was signing into the child's palm stood for the liquid substance that was coming out of the pump. At that moment, Helen's world completely changed. She was able to learn thirty words that same day.

By the 5th of April, 1877, Annie Sullivan had made great progress with Helen. But the child was still incorrigible and particularly unruly when she was around her family.

While walking between the main house and the cottage, Anne spotted people at the water pump. Might this be a good time to teach Helen about water?

As water poured over one of Helen's hands, Anne fingerspelled the word "w-a-t-e-r" in the other. Suddenly ... a change came over Helen's face. She began to understand: What her teacher was spelling in the palm of one hand stood for what was pouring over the other.

Helen later wrote about that moment of awakening, when she first realized the meaning and power of language:

We walked down the path to the well-house, attracted by the fragrance of the honey-suckle with which it was covered. Someone 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 that that "w-a-t-e-r" meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand.

(Keller, My Life, 1905 edition, page 23.)

Sullivan's breakthrough utterly changed Helen's life. She learned many new words that day, including "Mother, Father, Sister, Teacher." Just before the episode at the water pump, she had destroyed her doll. When she returned to the cottage, she picked up its broken pieces. It was the first time she was sorry for her bad behavior:

I felt my way to the hearth and picked up the pieces. I tried vainly to put them together. Then my eyes filled with tears; for I realized what I had done, and for the first time I felt repentance and sorrow. (Keller, My Life, page 24.)

Helen experienced another new emotion that day - joy:

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. (Keller, My Life, page 24.)

There would be nearly eighty-two more years of new days for Helen Keller. During fifty of those years, Annie Sullivan was her teacher and companion.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/THE-MIRACLE-WORKER-Helen-Keller)

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See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

Media Stream



Helen Keller - 1887

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

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Helen Keller - The Water Pump

Water pump at Ivy Green, the Keller Plantation located in Tuscumbia, Alabama.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Helen-Keller-The-Water-Pump>



Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan

Photo online, courtesy Perkins School for the Blind.

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Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan - 1930

Photo online, courtesy Perkins School for the Blind.

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Helen Keller - Scene at the Water Pump

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