AWESOME stories

Helen Keller - Recreated Scene at the Water Pump

This clip is from the 1962 film, *The Miracle Worker*, based on the play by William Gibson. It stars Anne Bancroft (as Anne Sullivan) and Patty Duke (as Helen Keller).

The scene recreates the moment when Helen first realizes that the cool liquid on her hands is called "water." This recognition will quickly lead to a new, peaceful atmosphere in the Keller household (instead of the chaos which Helen's frustrations had often caused).

Keller - in her autobiography - describes what actually happened on April 5, 1877:

> *One day, while I was playing with my new doll, Miss Sullivan put my big rag doll into my lap also, spelled "d-o-l-l" and tried to make me understand that "d-o-l-l" applied to both. Earlier in the day we had had a tussle over the words "m-u-g" and "w-a-t-e-r." Miss Sullivan had tried to impress it upon me that "m-u-g" is mug and that "w-a-t-e-r" is water, but I persisted in confounding the two.*
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> *In despair she had dropped the subject for the time, only to renew it at the first opportunity. I became impatient at her repeated attempts and, seizing the new doll, I dashed it upon the floor. I was keenly delighted when I felt the fragments of the broken doll at my feet. Neither sorrow nor regret followed my passionate outburst. I had not loved the doll. In the still, dark world in which I lived there was no strong sentiment or tenderness.*
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> *I felt my teacher sweep the fragments to one side of the hearth, and I had a sense of satisfaction that the cause of my discomfort was removed. She brought me my hat, and I knew I was going out into the warm sunshine. This thought, if a wordless sensation may be called a thought, made me hop and skip with pleasure.*
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> *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.*
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> *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.*
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> *I knew then that "w-a-t-e-r" meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! There were barriers still, it is true, but barriers that could in time be swept away.**
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> *I left the well-house eager to learn. Everything had a name, and each name gave birth to a new thought. As we returned to the house every object which I touched seemed to quiver with life. That was because I saw everything with the strange, new sight that had come to me.*
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> *On entering the door I remembered the doll I had broken. 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.*
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> *I learned a great many new words that day. I do not remember what they all were; but I do know that mother, father, sister, teacher were among them--words that were to make the world blossom for me, "like Aaron's rod, with flowers."*
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> *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.*

In addition to the film, Ms. Bancroft and Patty Duke played the roles of Anne and Helen in the Broadway play. One can only imagine how exhausted they must have been after eight weekly performances.

Their award-winning work has been called the most moving double performance ever recorded on film. The entire movie is available for free streaming via Amazon Prime.

Credits:

Director: Arthur Penn

Writers: William Gibson (play and screenplay)
Helen Keller (uncredited, The Story of My Life)

Producer: Fred Coe

Studio: MGM (Video & DVD)

Run Time: 106 minutes

Release Date: 28 July 1962 (U.S.)

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Helen-Keller-Recreated-Scene-at-the-Water-Pump

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Helen-Keller-Recreated-Scene-at-the-Water-Pump