

Evaluating Text: Helen Keller's My Life

Helen Keller was born in Alabama in 1880. When she was less than 2 years old, she became very ill. While she recovered from her illness, she lost her eyesight and hearing. When Helen was 7, her parents hired a teacher for her. The teacher, Annie Sullivan, was able to bring Helen out of her dark, silent world by teaching her sign language. Helen would feel each sign with her fingers to determine the meaning. Helen Keller would go on to be a writer, lecturer and activist. Below is a passage from Chapter XI of her autobiography, My Life, published in 1903.

From the beginning of my education Miss Sullivan made it a practice to speak to me as she would speak to any hearing child; the only difference was that she spelled the sentences into my hand instead of speaking them. If I did not know the words and idioms necessary to express my thoughts she supplied them, even suggesting conversation when I was unable to keep up my end of the dialogue.

This process was continued for several years; for the deaf child does not learn in a month, or even in two or three years, the numberless idioms and expressions used in the simplest daily intercourse. The little hearing child learns these from constant repetition and imitation. The conversation he hears in his home stimulates his mind and suggests topics and calls forth the spontaneous expression of his own thoughts. This natural exchange of ideas

is denied to the deaf child. My teacher, realizing this, determined to supply the kinds of stimulus I lacked. This she did by repeating to me as far as possible, verbatim, what she heard, and by showing me how I could take part in the conversation. But it was a long time before I ventured to take the initiative, and still longer before I could find something appropriate to say at the right time.

The deaf and the blind find it very difficult to acquire the amenities of conversation. How much more this difficulty must be augmented in the case of those who are both deaf and blind! They cannot distinguish the tone of the voice or, without assistance, go up and down the gamut of tones that give significance to words; nor can they watch the expression of the speaker's face, and a look is often the very soul of what one says.

What Do You Think?

In the text, Helen Keller claims that it is more difficult for hearing impaired children to learn to converse with others. Do you think her claim is correct? Does she give good reasons for her statements? Explain your answer.

