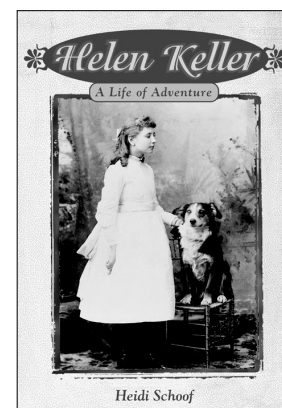


Helen Keller: A Life of Adventure

by Heidi Schoof



Book Summary

When she was a child, Helen Keller suffered an illness that left her deaf and blind. This is an account of her life.

Features of the Book

- Biography
- Theme of overcoming obstacles
- Specialised vocabulary – *mute, meningitis, poorhouse, lip-read*
- Use of adjectives to describe Helen's feelings – *frustrated, jealous, lonely*
- Different forms of communication
- Invention – *the Braille alphabet*

Purpose

Helen Keller: A Life of Adventure can be used to introduce and reinforce the following skills and understandings:

- S** recognising the features of a biography;
- S** using a glossary to clarify vocabulary;
- S** interpreting and analysing characters' feelings, relationships, and actions;
- S** exploring spelling patterns, such as adding *ies* to nouns ending with *y*;
- S** using graphic aids, such as timelines, to convey information;
- S** using a biography to gain an understanding of how people's lives have changed over time.

Investigation Tools

- Digging Deeper – Fever, page 6
- Weighing Both Sides – Bad Behaviour?, page 9
- Step-by-step – First Words, page 14
- Looking Closer – The Braille Alphabet, page 17
- What's the Background? – Being Blind in the 1800s, page 20–21
- What's the Background? – Women's Lives in the 1800s, page 28

The Guided Reading Lesson

- S** Recognising the features of a biography
- S** Using a glossary to clarify vocabulary
- S** Interpreting and analysing characters' feelings, relationships, and actions

You may need to spend extra time familiarising your students with the concepts and specialised vocabulary in this book. This lesson could be taken over two or more days.

Introducing the text

Ask the students what they know about biographies. If possible, look at a collection of biographies and discuss the features that they have in common. Tell the students that a biography is an account of someone's life written by another person.

Discuss the cover of the book and read the blurb on the back cover together.

- *What do you know about Helen Keller?*
- *What would life be like for someone who is deaf and blind?*
- *What do you think "A Life of Adventure" means?*

Read the contents page together. Discuss the fact that the chapters are chronological, that is, they tell the story of Helen's life over time.

Reading and discussing the text

Point out the word "inspired" on page 3.

- *Why is this word in bold?*

Explain to the students that they can use the glossary on page 31 to find the meaning of the words in bold. The students should use the context of the word to work out its meaning before checking the glossary. Remind the students that they should use the glossary independently when reading.

Read the introduction together. Ask one of the students to read the quote at the bottom of page 3 aloud.

- *What do you think Helen was like?*
- *Why do you think that?*
- *What was her attitude towards life?*

Ask the students to read chapters 1 and 2 silently, thinking about how Helen became deaf and blind and how her parents reacted to her condition.

When the students have finished reading, talk about the ways people helped Helen.

- *What was Helen like as a child?*
- *Why do you think she felt lonely and frustrated?*
- *How different would her life have been if her parents and Dr Bell had not helped her?*
- *What kind of teacher would have been good for Helen?*

The students can now read chapters 3 and 4. When they have finished reading, discuss what qualities Anne would need to teach Helen. Talk about how Anne made a difference to Helen's life. Discuss the fact that Helen had a lot of positive role models in her life and that she was surrounded by people who supported and believed in her.

- *What effect do kind and supportive people have on your behaviour?*
- *What influence do you think this would have on Helen's life?*

Ask the students to read the rest of the book independently, thinking about the ways Helen helped other people.

- *Why do you think she helped other people?*
- *What do you think people in the 1800s would have thought of Helen?*

Revisiting the Text

The activities below can be used immediately after the guided reading lesson, during later reading sessions as mini-lessons, or as independent activities.

S Exploring spelling patterns, such as adding *ies* to nouns ending with *y*

Write the words "countries", "opportunities", and "families" on the board.

- *What do the endings of these words have in common?*


Help the students to identify the root words. Write them underneath their plural.

- *What do the endings of these root words have in common?*

Explain to the students that when a noun ends with a consonant or blend followed by a *y*, we drop the *y* and add *ies* to make it plural. Brainstorm other words that are pluralised in this way and write them on the board.

S Using graphic aids, such as timelines, to convey information

Ask the students to skim through the text and identify significant events in Helen's life. Have them list each event and when it occurred. The list should start with the earliest event and proceed through time. It may include Helen's birth, becoming sick, meeting Dr Bell, being taught by Anne, and going to Radcliffe College.

 The students can use the blackline master on page 74 to draw a timeline of the significant events in Helen Keller's life.

S Using a biography to gain an understanding of how people's lives have changed over time

Discuss the fact that in the 1800s people had different attitudes towards women and blind people from those they have now. Use the information on pages 20–21 and page 28 to discuss how life is different for women and blind people now. Encourage the students to share their ideas and opinions about these issues.

- *Is life better for women and blind people now? How?*