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# Literature in Context Activity One

## TAKE IN A MOVIE

Several screen versions of *The Miracle Worker* have been made since the original 1957 presentation on live television in an episode of *Playhouse 90*. This version starred Teresa Wright and 11-year-old Patty McCormack as Helen Keller. On the Broadway stage and in the 1962 movie adaptation, the stars were Anne Bancroft as Annie Sullivan and Patty Duke as Helen Keller. Interestingly, Patty Duke also starred in a 1979 version of the movie, but this time as Annie Sullivan. Melissa Gilbert (of *Little House on the Prairie* fame) starred as Helen Keller. A more recent television release of the movie came in 2000 and starred Hallie Kate Eisenberg as Helen.

### Consider this...

Famed American humorist and author **Mark Twain**, an admirer of both Anne Sullivan and Hellen Keller, had called Sullivan a "Miracle Worker", providing the inspiration for the naming of Gibson's play.

Your task is to take in a viewing of one of the many adaptations of *The Miracle Worker*. Write a brief report (approximately one page in length) comparing the actual play with a movie adaptation. You might consider the following:

- How the film brought the play to life (or failed to).
- How suited were the actors to their roles?
- Were any "liberties" taken with the play's adaptation to the big screen?
- Do you think the media of film is superior to a live performance?
- Consider
  - costumes
  - lighting and sound
  - sets
- Are there any significant changes you would recommend to the producer of the film?

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Literature in Context  
**Activity Two**  
**PUTTING ON A PLAY**

**This activity needs to be done with students working in small groups.**

As a small group select a passage from the play. The passage should not be more than a page or two long and should contain interesting dialog and/or action. It is probably a good idea to select a passage that does not feature any long passages by a specific character. After some discussion, assign the roles featured in this section of the play. Practice reading it through once or twice with each actor reading his or her particular part. Remember to use "expression" as much as possible when performing each role. Finally, present the passage as a Readers Theater performance in front of another group or the entire class.

**Consider this...**

*Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.*

**Helen Keller**

Good luck and have fun.

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# Literature in Context

## Activity Three

### HELEN KELLER

Helen Keller was probably one of the most amazing people ever to have lived. Her accomplishments were simply astounding. Keller went on to become a world famous speaker and author and is remembered as an advocate for people with disabilities and numerous other causes.

#### Consider this...

Everything has its wonders, even darkness and silence, and I learn whatever state I am in, therein to be content

**Helen Keller**

Research the life of this great woman and write a one-page report highlighting her personal life and accomplishments. You might wish to consider:

- her birthplace, family, early life, close friends
- education and early training
- other interests
- inspirations
- struggles? critics?
- career
- fame and how it affected her
- political activities
- *the Akita dog*
- later life/death

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## Literature in Context

# Activity Four

### THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

Helen Keller was born in 1880, fifteen years after the great and devastating American Civil War ended. Helen's father, Arthur H. Keller, was a captain during this conflict, and Helen's mother, Kate, was a cousin to Robert E. Lee, the commanding general of the Confederate troops. Kate's father, Charles W. Adams, was a brigadier general in the Confederate army.

During the play there is much discussion (sometimes quite heated) between Captain Keller and his son, James, about the Civil War. The war seems to have had a tremendous impact on the life of Captain Keller, especially.

A number of personalities and events from the Civil War are mentioned in the play. These include:

- Robert E. Lee
- General *Stonewall* Jackson
- General John Pemberton
- General Braxton Bragg
- General Ulysses S. Grant
- Battle of Vicksburg
- Battle of Champion's Hill

Your task is to choose one of the above personalities or events and research its main points of interest. Your research should total between a half-page and a page in length.

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## Literature in Context

# Activity Five

### AN ALTERNATE ENDING

**This activity can be done individually or in small groups.**

The conclusion of *The Miracle Worker* is probably one of the most famous in English literature. It is dramatically presented, ties several “loose ends” together, and of course, most importantly it features the classic “happy ending” that readers love so much.

What if Helen hadn’t remembered the word “water” during this final scene? What if Annie had not enjoyed this major breakthrough at this most important time? What would have happened? Would Captain Keller have quickly tired of Annie’s stubborn ways and sent her back to Boston? Would Helen have become even more impossible to deal with around her family?

Although we will never know the answers to these questions, you will be given the opportunity of putting your imagination to work in coming up with what might have happened if this momentous event had not taken place when it did.

With your group brainstorm possible alternative endings to the play. Remember to consider all of the principal characters. From your list of ideas choose one ending to present to the class. Write a detailed synopsis of your alternate conclusion presenting as much detail as possible. After presenting it to the class, you may wish to get their input as to additional changes that might be made to further improve your alternative ending.

Have fun!

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Literature in Context

Activity Six

PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

This activity can be done individually or in small groups.

What if you, or someone you love, became blind and deaf through a serious illness! Fortunately, since the time of Helen Keller's youth, much has been done for the deaf and blind in North American society.

What can be done for people in North America today who are both deaf and blind? Research information that would help answer this question. Consider such things as technology, education, medical treatment, possible career choices, etc. You may wish to interview a health care professional for that person's input. If possible, include information on *modern day Helen Kellers* that have proved to be an inspiration.

Your report should be about a page in length.