

# Seeing Without Sight

## Lesson Starters



**Grade Level:** K–5      **Curriculum Focus:** Social Studies      **Content Collection:** Helen Keller  
**Instructional Strategy:** Step Inside

### Description

Meet Helen Keller, and learn what challenges and accomplishments made this woman extraordinary. Born in Tuscumbia, Alabama, in 1880, Keller was less than two years old when she contracted an illness that left her blind and deaf. This illness occurred during her early development, when most children are learning to speak and are busy exploring their worlds. Without sight or hearing, Keller had to rely on other senses to learn about the world around her, and she had very little ability to communicate with her family. That changed when she met her lifelong teacher and friend, Anne Sullivan. Sullivan helped Keller make sense of her environment and communicate with others through sign language. Eventually Keller went on to learn to communicate through speech and writing as well. Over time, she became an author and a teacher in her own right. Keller’s experiences demonstrate not only the powers of perseverance and empathy but also the ability of the human body to adapt.

### Learning Objectives

After viewing the program and participating in discussion, students will be able to

- identify Helen Keller, and describe aspects of her life.
- explain how blindness and deafness affected Keller.
- understand that Keller’s frustration came in part from being unable to communicate.
- describe how Anne Sullivan helped Keller learn to communicate.
- explain what it means to be blind or deaf.
- understand that the brain interprets information from the eyes and ears to enable people to see and hear.
- identify other senses that people use to learn about the world around them.
- describe technology and other aids that people who are visually or hearing impaired can use to learn, travel, and communicate more easily.
- determine the meaning of such key terms as *blind*, *deaf*, and *communicate*.

### Resources

- “A Fever Leaves Helen Deaf and Blind” from *Animated Hero Classics: Helen Keller* on Discovery Education Streaming
- “A Trial: Anne and Helen Move to the Garden House” from *Animated Hero Classics: Helen Keller* on Discovery Education Streaming
- “Helen Makes a Breakthrough” from *Animated Hero Classics: Helen Keller* on Discovery Education Streaming

- “Japan: 3-D Printer Helps Visually Impaired Children” from *Global Stories: 2014-01-09* on Discovery Education Streaming
- “Mexico: Smart Guide Glasses” from *Global Stories: 2014-01-09* on Discovery Education Streaming
- “Germany: Bionic Eye” from *Global Stories: 2014-01-09* on Discovery Education Streaming
- “Brazil: Deaf Students Find the Beat” from *Global Stories: 2014-01-09* on Discovery Education Streaming
- “A Guide Dog at Work” from *All About Guide Dogs* on Discovery Education Streaming
- *Helen Keller* image on Discovery Education Streaming

### Classroom Connections

- Who was Helen Keller?
- How did Keller’s fever affect her?
- What does it mean to be blind and deaf?
- Why do you think Keller became so easily frustrated and angry?
- What did Anne Sullivan help Keller do? How?
- What other senses did Keller use to learn about the world around her?
- In what ways did Keller learn to communicate?
- Why do you think being able to hear and see is so important to learning how to talk?
- What does the brain have to do with seeing, hearing, and other senses?
- How do technological devices and other aids help visually and hearing impaired people learn, travel, and communicate today?
- What do you learn from your eyes when you look around your classroom? If you close your eyes, what do you learn from your ears? If you could neither see nor hear, how would you learn about and move around the room?

### Classroom Activities

Select any or all of the following activities. Activities can be performed in any order.

1. **Step Inside:** Begin by displaying the *Helen Keller* image on Discovery Education Streaming. Write “Helen Keller” on the board. For older students, add her birth and death dates. Invite students to share what they know about Keller and write their ideas, if any, on the board. Ask students to describe what they see in the image. Then, draw attention to the flower and to Keller’s nose. Pose the questions: “Is she looking at the flower? Is she listening to the flower? Is she tasting the flower? Is she touching the flower? Is she smelling the flower?” Point out that Keller is touching and smelling the flower. Explain that Keller was blind and deaf, and discuss what those terms and related vocabulary mean. Pose the questions: “So, how does Keller know that what she’s holding is a flower? How do you think she learned that?” Discuss ideas. Provide students with a list of perspectives from the video (Helen, Anne, Helen’s mother or father, the doll, Helen’s spoon or napkin, the brush, and the water in the pump). Have students select a perspective (or assign each student a perspective). Inform students that they will watch

the following video segments from *Animated Hero Classics: Helen Keller*: “A Fever Leaves Helen Deaf and Blind,” “A Trial: Anne and Helen Move to the Garden House,” and “Helen Makes a Breakthrough.” As they watch, they should pay attention to the big ideas but also to their perspective. When they have finished viewing the video, display and read aloud the following questions: “What might this person or thing see, observe, feel, or notice in other ways? What might the person or thing know, understand, or believe? What might the person or thing care deeply about? What might the person or thing wonder about or question?” Give students several minutes to discuss their ideas with a partner. Ask students to write down their responses or share them orally. Use Classroom Connections questions to discuss the content of the video.

- 2. Four to One:** Invite students to identify and describe their five senses. Write the senses on the board, and review Target Vocabulary. Ask students how each sense contributes to their understanding of the world. Then point out that each sense works with their brains to communicate information. Guide students to understand that when a sense is impaired, the brain does not get the information that it needs from that sense. Often, a person’s other senses become sharper, or more developed, to make up for the challenges in the impaired sense. For example, a person who is visually impaired might have an especially keen sense of smell or hearing. Next, have students take out a blank sheet of paper and fold it into quarters. Explain that they will watch four video segments about modern aids that help people who have trouble seeing or hearing. Tell them to write a sentence in each quadrant to describe what they learn from each segment. For younger students, have them draw and label something important from the videos, such as a dog in a harness, labeled “guide dog.” As a class, view the video segments “Japan: 3-D Printer Helps Visually Impaired Children,” “Mexico: Smart Guide Glasses,” and “Brazil: Deaf Students Find the Beat” from *Global Stories: 2014-01-09*, as well as the segment “A Guide Dog at Work” from *All About Guide Dogs* on Discovery Education Streaming. You may also substitute the “Germany: Bionic Eye” video segment from *Global Stories: 2014-01-09* for one of the other segments. Call on students to share their drawings, words, and sentences, and discuss how each aid helps people adapt to visual or hearing impairment.
- 3. Sensory Descriptions Board:** Tell students to think about how Helen Keller learned about objects, people, and other things in the world around her. Review the five senses and the types of information that they provide. Advise students that they will make boards with Discovery Education’s Board Builder on which they post one to three images (depending on age group). Help them select (or draw and upload) images of common items, such as an apple, a bird, a car, and so on. For each image, they should describe the image using each of their five senses. What does the item look like? What sound might it make? How might it smell and taste? How would it feel to the touch? Have students share their boards in class. Discuss which descriptions might have been most helpful to Keller and why. To extend the activity, look up the American Sign Language sign for each item, or demonstrate to students how to spell the word for each item using American Sign Language.

## Target Vocabulary\*

- **aid** – help or assistance given to someone; something by which assistance is given
- **bionic** – of body parts: made stronger or more capable by special electronic devices
- **blind** – unable to see
- **brain** – the organ of the body in the head that controls functions, movements, sensations, and thoughts
- **communicate** – to give information about (something) to someone by speaking, writing, moving your hands, and so on; to get someone to understand your thoughts or feelings
- **deaf** – not able to hear
- **disability** – a condition (such as an illness or an injury) that damages or limits a person's physical or mental abilities
- **fever** – a body temperature that is higher than normal
- **glasses** – a device used to correct defects of vision or to protect the eyes that consists typically of a pair of glass or plastic lenses and the frame by which they are held in place
- **guide dog** – a dog that is specially trained to lead and help blind people
- **hear** – to be aware of (sound) through the ear
- **hearing** – the sense through which a person or animal is aware of sound; the ability to hear
- **impaired** – being in a less than perfect or whole condition
- **see** – to notice or become aware of (someone or something) by using your eyes
- **sense** – one of the five natural powers (touch, taste, smell, sight, and hearing) through which you receive information about the world around you
- **sign language** – a system of hand movements used for communication especially by people who are deaf
- **sound** – the sensation perceived by the sense of hearing
- **technology** – the use of science in industry, engineering, and so on, to invent useful things or to solve problems
- **vibration** – a continuous slight shaking movement
- **vision** – the ability to see; sight
- **visually** – relating to seeing or to the eyes

\* By permission. From the *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* by Merriam-Webster, Incorporated ([www.M-W.com](http://www.M-W.com)).