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# Symbols of Courage

WORKSHEET A

1. Read the story of the lives of Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan and then answer the questions on Worksheet 2.

**H**elen Keller was a scholar, linguist, campaigner for civil rights and world peace, philosopher, author and world traveller. But her most remarkable achievement was in overcoming the disability of not being able to hear or see. Born in Tuscumbia, Alabama on June 27, 1880, Helen was struck down by meningitis at the age of 18 months, which left her deaf and blind. For the next five years she was trapped inside her own silent world, unable to express herself to the outside world.

In 1887, a young woman named Anne Sullivan was employed to teach Helen. Anne had her own remarkable story; at the age of 5, Anne, born in Massachusetts to poor Irish immigrants, almost completely lost her eyesight. Worse still, she was taken into care after her mother died. When she was 14 she fought hard to be accepted into a special school, the Perkins Institute for the Blind. She succeeded and spent the next six years there, graduating in 1886. When she was 18, Anne had an operation which partially restored her eyesight. When she was just 21, in 1887, she met the girl who would become the focus of her life, Helen Keller, a child of 7.

Anne was strict but patient. She taught Helen how to spell words with her hands using the Manual Alphabet, part of the sign language that deaf people use. Helen didn't understand though, until one morning at the water pump. Anne held Helen's hand under the water. Then she spelled *W-A-T-E-R* into Helen's other hand. It was a special moment. The feeling turned into a word. Helen immediately bent down and touched the ground; Anne spelt *earth*. Helen didn't look back from that moment on.

Helen learned to understand speech when she was 10 by feeling her teacher's mouth when she talked. She learned to read French, German, Greek, and Latin in Braille. When she was 20, she entered Radcliffe College, the sister college of the prestigious Harvard University. Anne Sullivan stayed by Helen's side to help her, acting as her eyes and ears and helping to spell books and lectures into her pupil's hand. During her time at college Helen wrote her first book, an autobiography called *The Story of My Life*. Her editor, John Albert Macy, fell in love with Anne and they married on May 2, 1905. Helen later wrote eleven more books and many more articles.

After graduating Helen enjoyed a new status as a symbol of hope and source of inspiration to all the disadvantaged people of the world. She worked tirelessly for the rights of others and Anne worked tirelessly to help her. Anne was as famous as Helen and her biography, *Anne Sullivan Macy*, was published in 1933. Sadly, Anne's health deteriorated and she died in 1936 after almost 50 years as Helen's constant companion.

Helen continued to give speeches and helped raise money for many organizations. From 1946 to 1957, she went around the world speaking about her experiences and the rights of people who are blind. She visited 39 countries on five different continents. Helen also inspired many works of art, including two Oscar-winning movies, and received dozens of awards. She died in her sleep in 1968, aged 87.

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WORKSHEET **B**

2. Look at the statements about Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan. If a statement is true, write **T** next to it. If a statement is false, write **F** next to it.

- a) Both Anne and Helen were born in the United States of America.
- b) Helen couldn't hear or see.
- c) Anne was 14 years older than Helen.
- d) Both Anne and Helen attended special schools for the blind.
- e) Anne taught Helen how to 'experience' words.
- f) Anne was totally blind.
- g) The Manual Alphabet is part of the sign language that deaf people use.
- h) Helen learned to 'listen' to people using her hands.
- i) Helen attended one of the top colleges in the United States.
- j) Only Helen had a book published about her life while she was still alive.
- k) Helen travelled the world and talked about her life.
- l) Helen died before Anne.
- m) The two women spent nearly 50 years of their lives together.
- n) Neither Helen nor Anne ever got married.