

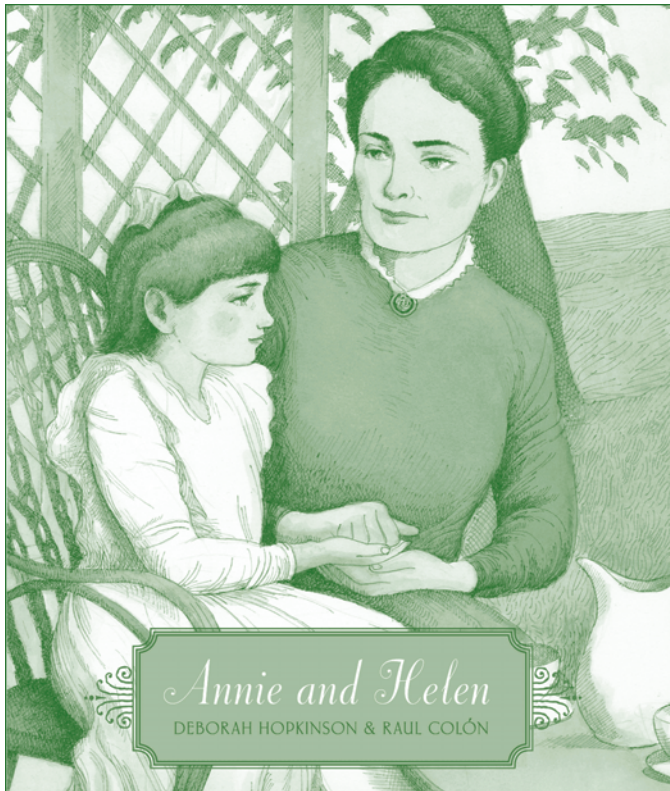
# *Annie and Helen*

DEBORAH HOPKINSON & RAUL COLÓN



# BOOKNOTES

## educators guide



Schwartz & Wade Books HC: 978-0-375-85706-5  
GLB: 978-0-375-95706-2

### THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

Perseverance & Courage  
Language & Communication  
Disabilities & Illness  
Family

GRADES 4-8

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Focusing on the relationship between Helen Keller and her teacher, Annie Sullivan, *Annie and Helen* shows how slowly, but with devotion and determination, Annie teaches Helen finger spelling and braille, letters, and sentences. As Helen comes to understand language and starts to communicate, she connects for the first time with her family and the world around her.

Helen Keller was born a happy, healthy baby in 1880. But when she was not even two years old, she had a very serious illness that left her both deaf and blind. As Helen grew up, she became increasingly frustrated about not being able to communicate with her family. She would throw terrible violent tantrums until she got her way. When Helen was not quite seven years old, Annie Sullivan, a teacher who was herself partially blind, came to live with Helen and her family. After a tumultuous start, Annie reached Helen in a way that no one else could before and taught her how to communicate. Annie taught Helen that objects have names and how to spell those names and finally gave Helen an outlet for her energy. The relationship between Annie and Helen soon became the defining one in each of their lives. Annie stayed with Helen for almost 50 years, helping Helen graduate from college, write an autobiography, travel the world, and advocate for people with disabilities, including blindness.

**"It is a rare privilege to watch the birth, growth, and first feeble struggles of a living mind; and moreover, it is given me to rouse and guide this bright intelligence."**

—Annie Sullivan

**"At the beginning I was only a little mass of possibilities. It was my teacher who unfolded and developed them."**

—Helen Keller

## PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Ask students to think about all that they see and hear in any given day. Write a list of things on the board that they've seen or heard just today or in the very moment that they're sitting in the classroom. Examples include the classroom lights, the computer screen, the whirr of the air-conditioner, the school bell, the desks, the pencils, car engines outside, etc. Now ask them to write a list of things they've experienced with their other senses today, things they've tasted, smelled, and touched. Examples include the pencil in their hand, the smell of school lunch, the taste of breakfast, etc. Talk about the differences between the things they saw/heard from the things they touched/tasted/smelled. What objects made it easier to find out about the world around them? Ask them to imagine closing their eyes and plugging their ears. How would this impact their ability to take information in and communicate information out?



## THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

### QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

#### FAMILY

By the time Annie Sullivan was a young teenager, she had no parents and no siblings. She grew up in a poorhouse and then lived at the Perkins Institute for the Blind in Boston, Massachusetts. How do you think she felt as a young 20-year-old teacher arriving at the Keller's house for the first time? What do you think she thought of the Keller family? Annie writes to her friend, Mrs. Sophia C. Hopkins, "[Helen] has tyrannized over everybody." How has Helen become tyrannical over her family? Eventually, Annie and Helen move into a small cottage away from Helen's parents. Why do you think Annie insisted on moving Helen away from her parents? How were her parents a negative influence on Helen?

#### OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Discuss the obstacles that Annie had to overcome in teaching Helen. Annie describes "using force" to work with Helen. What other obstacles were in her way? How does Annie's own sight impairment impact her teaching of Helen? What obstacles had she already overcome in her life? Discuss the obstacles that Helen had to overcome, beyond just her deafness and blindness. Think about Helen's relationship with her parents. Can this be considered an obstacle?



#### LANGUAGE

Above all else, Annie needed to teach Helen to understand that objects had names and the ability to communicate these names. As Annie writes, "The word coming so close upon the sensation of cold water rushing over her hand seemed to startle her. She dropped the mug and stood as one transfixed. A new light came into her face." Why is language so important for Helen? What does understanding language do for Helen? Once Helen learns to finger spell, she "hardly ever lost her temper." Why do you think this is?

#### COMMUNICATION

Annie taught Helen Braille, the raised alphabet for people with vision impairments that they can feel with their fingers. Why was it important for Annie to teach Helen to read with Braille?

What did Helen gain when she could type with the Braille typewriter or write with the block alphabet letters? Re-read Helen's first letter home to her family on July 12, 1887. What does she tell her mother in the letter? How does Helen experience the world on her first trip away from home and how does she convey that to her mother?

# CONNECTING TO THE CURRICULUM

## SCIENCE

Helen Keller was born with normal sight and hearing, but as a small child, she got sick and was left blind and deaf. It is not known exactly what disease Helen had, but a common suggestion is scarlet fever. Using resources in the library, research what causes scarlet fever and how it might leave a child blind and deaf. Is there any medicine available today that would have helped Helen Keller in 1881?

## SOCIAL STUDIES

In the Author's Note at the beginning of the book, author Deborah Hopkinson states that Annie and Helen became advocates for people with disabilities around the world, including working with the American Federation for the Blind. Research what kind of advocacy work they did. Think about advocacy work that students might be able to do in their own communities. Help students discover a cause they think worth advocating for. This can be something related to health issues like blindness or something like saving endangered animals or even planting trees in their own neighborhoods. Students should think about why this cause is important to them. Using research, students should draft persuasive arguments for their cause that can be used to help gain support from other students in the class. Brainstorm different ways of advocating for their cause. These can include writing letters to government officials, starting a website, Facebook page, or Twitter feed, or hanging posters in public places.

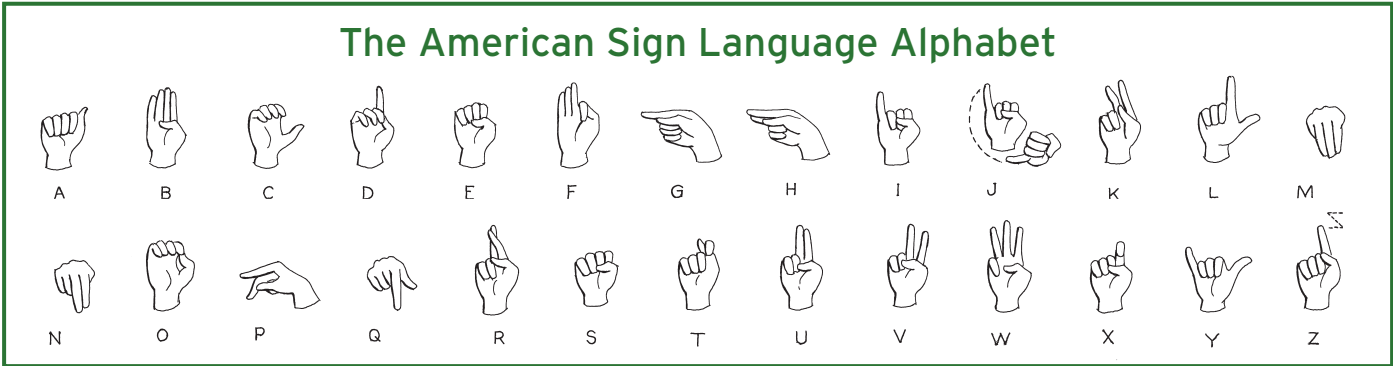
## LANGUAGE ARTS

Small excerpts of letters that Annie Sullivan wrote to her friend, Mrs. Sophia C. Hopkins, can be found throughout *Annie and Helen*. First person accounts of historical events are called primary sources. Over the course of a week, ask students to write a series of letters, at least five, about a particular event in their lives and exchange letters with another student in the class. Practice proper letter-writing techniques and be sure they include things like dates, salutations, and closings. After students receive their letters, ask them to tell the story of the event that the letter-writer described in an essay. Essays can quote the letters directly or simply summarize the story. Make sure if the essay writer uses quotes that proper quotation marks and citations are used.


## WRITING

Helen Keller was a prolific reader and writer, thanks to the Braille alphabet. Translating the written word into Braille is difficult enough, but reading back the Braille with one's fingers is an even greater challenge. Give every student in the class a printed sample of the Braille alphabet. Have them write out a short message and, on a large sheet of paper, translate the message into Braille by drawing the dots. To make the Braille message tactile, or easily felt by someone else's fingers, use glue to make raised dots over the drawn dots. When the glue dries, students should trade messages with each other and take turns using their fingers to try to read the Braille messages.

### The American Sign Language Alphabet



### The Braille Alphabet



Capital Sign

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a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m
⠁	⠃	⠉	⠙	⠑	⠋	⠗	⠄	⠠	⠵	⠅	⠇	⠓
n	o	p	q	r	s	t	u	v	w	x	y	z
⠎	⠏	⠕	⠖	⠗	⠚	⠞	⠸	⠹	⠺	⠻	⠽	⠼



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Deborah Hopkinson** is the author of numerous books for children, including *A Boy Called Dickens*, *Sky Boys: How They Built the Empire State Building*, an ALA Notable Book and a *Boston Globe-Horn Book* Honor Book; *Abe Lincoln Crosses a*

*Creek*, an ALA Notable Book and a Junior Library Guild Selection; and the ALA Notable *Apples to Oregon*. Visit her at [DeborahHopkinson.com](http://DeborahHopkinson.com)

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR



**Raul Colón** is the acclaimed illustrator of *Child of the Civil Rights Movement*, which was nominated for an NAACP Image Award and included on the New York Public Library's 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing list. His other titles include

*As Good as Anybody*, recipient of the Sydney Taylor Book Award, and *Doña Flor*, winner of the Pura Belpré Award.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

### Helen Keller Kids Museum

[www.braillebug.org/hkmuseum.asp](http://www.braillebug.org/hkmuseum.asp)

### Braille Bug

[www.braillebug.org/](http://www.braillebug.org/)

### National Federation for the Blind

[www.nfb.org/](http://www.nfb.org/)

### American Sign Language—Fingerspelling

[www.lifeprint.com/asl101/fingerspelling/fingerspelling.htm](http://www.lifeprint.com/asl101/fingerspelling/fingerspelling.htm)

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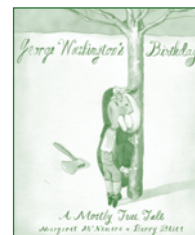
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Bonnie Christensen

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### George Washington's Birthday

A Mostly True Tale

Margaret McNamara

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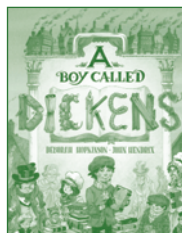
Alicia Potter

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### A Boy Called Dickens

Deborah Hopkinson

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Ages 4-9

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GLB: 978-0-375-96732-0



### Harlem's Little Blackbird

The Story of Florence Mills

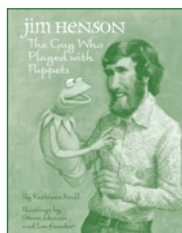
Renée Watson

Illustrated by Christian Robinson

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### Jim Henson

The Guy Who Played with Puppets

Kathleen Krull

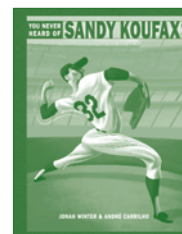
Illustrated by Steve Johnson

and Lou Fancher

Ages 5-7

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GLB: 978-0-375-95721-5



### You Never Heard of Sandy Koufax?!

Jonah Winter

Illustrated by André Carrilho

Ages 4-9

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