

2 COACHED EXAMPLE

Read the passage.

The Life of Helen Keller

The story of Helen Keller's life shows how language and education can change a person's life. Helen was born in 1880 in Tuscumbia, Alabama. When she was only nineteen months old, she became both blind and deaf as the result of an illness. The young child struggled to understand her world through the senses of touch, smell, and taste alone. This made it almost impossible for her to communicate with others. She did not have words for the people in her life or the things she experienced.

By age six, Helen had received little in the way of an education. At the time, few people knew how to educate a child with those kinds of physical challenges. Even Helen's parents had difficulties coping with Helen's disabilities. Frustrated with the struggle to communicate, Helen often acted out and had temper tantrums. She later wrote in her autobiography, ". . . the need of some means of communication became so urgent that these outbursts occurred daily, sometimes hourly."

So, Helen's parents hired a teacher named Anne Sullivan, who was partly vision-impaired herself and had an idea about how to teach their daughter. Sullivan arrived at the Keller home on March 3, 1887. She worked tirelessly to help her student acquire language. She taught Helen a form of sign language and showed her how to spell words with her fingers into someone's hand.

At first, it took some time for the young girl to understand what Sullivan was trying to teach. Helen didn't realize that the gestures she was making stood for letters and words. In fact, she had no concept of letters and words at all. But after making a major breakthrough and understanding the word *water*, she soon learned how to read and write.

By the age of ten, Helen was also able to read lips by placing her hand over the other person's mouth. This technique helped her learn how to talk, too. People often had a difficult time understanding Helen's speech, but that didn't stop her. She was determined to communicate with the world and to speak her mind. She was also determined to gain an education. At the age of 20, Helen enrolled in Radcliffe College with her teacher Anne Sullivan by her side. Four years later, she graduated with honors.

After she graduated from college, Helen Keller became an advocate¹ for people with physical disabilities. She met with government officials and traveled around the world to talk about the challenges of being blind and deaf. She also visited areas with a high incidence² of blindness and wrote articles and books on the subject.

¹ **advocate:** person who supports and promotes the cause of others

² **incidence:** rate that something occurs

Throughout her life, Helen faced many challenges and struggles. She encountered many people who judged her unfairly because of her disabilities. But her strong will, courage, and determination helped her to succeed despite these obstacles. She received many honors and awards for her work, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom, which was awarded in 1964. Many people consider Helen Keller one of the most inspiring people who have ever lived.

Answer the following questions.

- 1 A student is writing an informative essay about Helen Keller. The student needs to add a thesis statement to her introduction. Read the paragraph and follow the directions below.

Helen Keller was born in 1880 in Tuscumbia, Alabama. She became both blind and deaf at nineteen months old, after suffering an illness. These physical challenges made it very difficult for her to express herself.

Based on information in her introductory paragraph, select the **best** thesis statement for the essay.

- A. Tuscumbia is a small city in the northwestern region of Alabama.
- B. Anne Sullivan helped Helen Keller learn language.
- C. She later met many famous people, including several U.S. presidents.
- D. Helen Keller worked hard to acquire language and learn to communicate.

Hint Remember that a thesis statement states the main idea of the essay. Select the thesis statement above that best relates to what this essay will likely be about.

- 2 Explain how the author uses facts and details to tell how Anne Sullivan worked with Helen. Quote evidence from the passage to explain your answer.

- 3 The following question has two parts. First, answer Part A. Then, answer Part B.

Part A

Which of the following **best** describes how the author has organized this passage?

- A. cause and effect
- B. chronological order
- C. compare and contrast
- D. problem and solution

Part B

Underline the transitions in paragraphs 4–6 that show the organization you chose in Part A.

Hint Think about how the ideas in the passage are organized and how they relate to each other. How does the author transition from paragraph to paragraph? How can this information help you determine the overall structure of the passage?

- 4 A student is writing a biography of Helen Keller. Which of these sentences from the biography has the most precise language?

- A. Helen Keller wrote a book about her life some time ago.
- B. Helen Keller's parents did not know what to do with their child.
- C. Helen Keller met with world leaders to talk about different things.
- D. Helen Keller was also an activist who fought for women's right to vote.

Hint Precise language uses exact nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs to convey the writer's meaning clearly.

Use the Reading Guide to help you understand the passage.

excerpted from

The Story of My Life

by Helen Keller

Reading Guide

What is the central idea of this passage? Reread the introduction to help you identify the main idea.

How did Anne Sullivan begin to teach Helen language?

What did Helen think of words at first?

The most important day I remember in all my life is the one on which my teacher, Anne Mansfield Sullivan, came to me. I am filled with wonder when I consider the immeasurable contrasts between the two lives which it connects. It was the third of March, 1887, three months before I was seven years old . . .

Have you ever been at sea in a dense fog, when it seemed as if a tangible¹ white darkness shut you in, and the great ship, tense and anxious, groped her way toward the shore with plummet and sounding-line,² and you waited with beating heart for something to happen? I was like that ship before my education began, only I was without compass or sounding-line, and had no way of knowing how near the harbour was. "Light! Give me light!" was the wordless cry of my soul, and the light of love shone on me in that very hour.

I felt approaching footsteps. I stretched out my hand as I supposed to my mother. Someone took it, and I was caught up and held close in the arms of her who had come to reveal all things to me, and, more than all things else, to love me.

The morning after my teacher came she led me into her room and gave me a doll. When I had played with it a little while, Miss Sullivan slowly spelled into my hand the word "d-o-l-l." I was at once interested in this finger play and tried to imitate it. When I finally succeeded in making the letters correctly I was flushed with childish pleasure and pride. Running downstairs to my mother I held up my hand and made the letters for doll. I did not know that I was spelling a word or even that words existed; I was simply making my fingers go in monkey-like imitation. In the days that followed I learned to spell in this uncomprehending way a great many words, among them pin, hat, cup and a few verbs like sit, stand and walk. But my teacher had been with me several weeks before I understood that everything has a name.

¹ **tangible:** something that is real; able to be touched

² **plummet and sounding-line:** a marked line with a plummet (or weight) attached that is dropped from a ship to find the water's depth

Reading Guide

Does this passage use a formal or informal style?

Underline words or phrases that describe Helen's emotions.

How does the writer connect ideas within the text?

One day, while I was playing with my new doll, Miss Sullivan put my big rag doll into my lap also, spelled "d-o-l-l" and tried to make me understand that "d-o-l-l" applied to both. In despair she had dropped the subject for the time, only to renew it at the first opportunity. I became impatient at her repeated attempts and, seizing the new doll, I dashed it upon the floor. I was keenly delighted when I felt the fragments of the broken doll at my feet. Neither sorrow nor regret followed my passionate outburst. I had not loved the doll. In the still, dark world in which I lived there was no strong sentiment or tenderness. I felt my teacher sweep the fragments to one side of the hearth, and I had a sense of satisfaction that the cause of my discomfort was removed. She brought me my hat, and I knew I was going out into the warm sunshine. This thought, if a wordless sensation may be called a thought, made me hop and skip with pleasure.

We walked down the path to the well-house, attracted by the fragrance of the honeysuckle with which it was covered. Someone was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over one hand she spelled into the other the word *water*, first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness³ as of something forgotten—a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that "w-a-t-e-r" meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! There were barriers still, it is true, but barriers that could in time be swept away.

³ **consciousness:** awareness

Reading Guide

How does the conclusion of this passage leave readers with a final thought to consider?

What does the author mean by "strange, new sight"?

Contrast Helen's feelings at the end of this passage with how she felt before Anne arrived.

I left the well-house eager to learn. Everything had a name, and each name gave birth to a new thought. As we returned to the house every object which I touched seemed to quiver with life. That was because I saw everything with the strange, new sight that had come to me. On entering the door I remembered the doll I had broken. I felt my way to the hearth and picked up the pieces. I tried vainly to put them together. Then my eyes filled with tears; for I realized what I had done, and for the first time I felt repentance and sorrow.

I learned a great many new words that day. I do not remember what they all were; but I do know that *mother*, *father*, *sister*, *teacher* were among them—words that were to make the world blossom for me, "like Aaron's rod, with flowers." It would have been difficult to find a happier child than I was as I lay in my crib at the close of that eventful day and lived over the joys it had brought me, and for the first time longed for a new day to come.

Answer the following questions.

- 1 The following question has two parts. First, answer Part A. Then, answer Part B.

Part A

What is Helen Keller's central idea in this passage?

- A. She was resistant to learning sign language.
- B. Anne Sullivan made a tremendous impact on her life.
- C. Anne Sullivan taught her how to spell the word *doll* using a form of sign language.
- D. *Mother* and *father* were among the first words she learned how to spell.

Part B

Which **two** sentences from the text best support the central idea you chose in Part A?

- A. I am filled with wonder when I consider the immeasurable contrasts between the two lives which it connects.
- B. I felt approaching footsteps. I stretched out my hand as I supposed to my mother.
- C. . . . I was caught up and held close in the arms of her who had come to reveal all things to me, and, more than all things else, to love me.
- D. I became impatient at her repeated attempts and, seizing the new doll, I dashed it upon the floor.
- E. I learned a great many new words that day.

4 A student is writing an informative text about how Helen Keller learned language. Which sentence would be too informal to include in the text?

- A. Anne taught Helen to sign letters into a person's hand.
- B. Anne Sullivan was an awesome teacher!
- C. Helen was proud to show her mother what she had learned.
- D. *Water* was the first word that Helen understood.

5 Why is the last paragraph in the passage an example of a well-written conclusion? Use details from the passage to support your answer.
