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The Miracle Worker
William Gibson



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Response Journal

To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

The Miracle Worker

ACT I
Pages 1 – 7

1. Before Act I, Gibson provides a detailed description of the stage including the Keller house, and a neutral area that will be changed to represent the Keller yard, and other locations necessary for the play. Based on this description, think about how the first floor of your home is laid out. Make a small drawing of the rooms on this floor. Then write a paragraph that briefly describes the furnishings in the room as if you were going to use it for the performance of a play.

2. Kate talks quietly to her baby. She is cooing to the baby Helen about the wonders of modern medicine. When the events of this play took place in Alabama in the 1880's, actually very little was known about many diseases for which there are cures today. Choose one of the following medical topics to research and write a ten sentence report about it which you could report to your class if your teacher asked you to:
 - Is Measles a Disease of the Past? •What's So Bad About fast Food?
 - What is Autism? •What is Juvenile Diabetes?

3. Kate is obviously heartsick to learn that her baby, Helen, is deaf and blind. She is trying to keep her unhappiness to herself, but obviously finds this difficult. Pretend you are Kate and decide to keep a secret journal in which to write about your deepest feelings and fears. Write how you, as Kate, must have felt when you learned about Helen's blindness and deafness. Your entries should follow the format below:

Date: May 10, 1882
Today I learned that...

Response Journal

10. The children who come to say good-bye to Annie are all blind. They give her a pair of smoked glasses for a gift. Imagine that you are the blind child who is chosen to make the goodbye speech to Annie as you give her the gift that all the children at Perkins have bought for her, the smoked glasses. Begin the speech you would give as follows:

Annie, I am so nervous. And I don't want to cry! But...

11. One technique an author uses to maintain the reader's interest is by creating anticipation in the minds of the audience. For example, we know that Mr. Keller is a demanding man who is accustomed to obedient women and that Annie is strong willed and independent. The audience is, therefore, anticipating the forthcoming interaction between these two characters.

Leaf back through the scenes of dialogue between Captain Keller and Annie. Copy down five different sets of dialogue which show how they clash. Across from each dialogue, write a sentence that explains the conflict.

12. Write a conversation between two students discussing the blind children in Annie's school and Helen. Include some ways they are different from Helen, even though they share one of the same disabilities.

The dialogue might begin as follows:

First Student: Helen is alone, but at the school there are many other blind children. Helen must feel more isolated than the others.

Second Student: I agree. The children at the school also...

The Miracle Worker

18. Annie mentions Dr. Howe when she is talking to Mrs. Keller. The reader assumes that he is the author of the Perkins report Annie has tucked under her arm and that he wrote a book about how to educate the blind. Annie seems to admire his work, but she also seems to disagree with his ideas. Assume that Annie and Dr. Howe meet at a conference for educators of the blind. Write a dialogue between Annie and Dr. Howe. In the dialogue, Annie praises Dr. Howe, but she also questions some of his theories. The dialogue might begin as follows:

Annie: It is a pleasure to meet you Dr. Howe.

Dr. Howe: [*He looks at her dark glasses.*] Are you one of my students?

Annie: Do I look that young? I am a teacher. Mr. Anagnos trained me. If you have a moment, I have some questions to ask you about some of your teaching theories?

Dr. Howe: [*Like he would talk to a child.*] You do? Well, ask your questions.

Annie:

19. On page 18, Mr. Anagnos suggests that Annie reveal some of her history to the Kellers, but Annie, afraid of pity, prefers to keep her past private. Then, on her first meeting with Mrs. Keller, Annie tells her that at one time she was blind. Write a letter from Annie to Mr. Anagnos explaining to him why she decided to reveal this information after all.
20. We know that Helen is an intelligent child. Try to imagine that you are Helen's age when she first meets with Annie. Make a list of eight different things she might think about at that age, keeping in mind that she cannot see or hear. Your list of eight things should be in complete sentences; try to write as if you had Helen's problems. The first one below is an example:

There seems to be a lot of things happening around here. Why so much?

Response Journal

26. One of the main ideas of this play is to explore the extent to which a disabled person should be pitied or, in other words, whether pity is in the best interest of the disabled person. In the following excerpt from the play, Kate explains why she gives Helen a sweet to persuade her to go to bed.

We catch our flies with honey, I'm afraid. We haven't the heart for much else, and so many times she simply cannot be compelled.

Helen is only six years old, so giving her a sweet to get her to bed works. What does the flies and honey comment mean? Explain this allusion to the classmate who doesn't understand.

Page 53 – top of page 59

27. James and his father are discussing the Civil War and the reasons why General Grant defeated the Confederate army at Vicksburg. You may not be familiar with the main facts about the Civil War. Research and answer the following questions about this war, which will help you better understand the characters in the play.

Who was president during the Civil War?

In what year did the Civil War begin and when did it end?

Name three leading generals in that war.

Name three of the most important battles and who won them.

What were the forces on each side of the Civil War called?

How many were killed during the Civil War?

Which side won the war?

Write two reasons you feel the war was won by the winning side.