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The Story of My Life
Helen Keller



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Helen Keller



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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 Story of My Life

Chapter 1

1. In this chapter, Helen Keller thinks back to her childhood and relates her earliest memories. Some of these memories are stories she has been told about her baby years from her family, and some of these memories she believes are true recollections of events. For example, Helen has been told that she was talking at six months of age. She could say “How d’ye” and “Tea, tea, tea.” Even after she loses her hearing, she continues to say “wah-wah.” Helen also believes that she remembers part of her illness. She remembers the light becoming dimmer each day.

Write two paragraphs relating events from your early years. In the first paragraph, relate the stories about your baby years that are part of your family history. In the second paragraph, describe your earliest memory.

Chapter 2

2. Helen writes,

I do not remember when I first realized that I was different from other people;
but I knew it before my teacher came to me.

In this passage, Helen is referring to her blindness and deafness. In what sense could the above statement relate to your life? Write a letter to Helen letting her know that even though you have not experienced the loss of two important senses, you also feel that you are different from other people.

Chapter 3

7. As the train conductor, write a diary entry describing Helen and her behavior on the trip. How do you think he felt about having her on his train?

The Story of My Life

9. In this chapter, Helen describes her feelings when she first makes the connection between finger spelling and the meaning of words. She realizes that her teacher is spelling the word “water” in her hand and that this finger game is a way for her to communicate with others.

Most of us have trouble understanding some ideas or concepts. For example, a student in Algebra class does not understand the word problem. The student reads it over and over again. He or she tries to solve it in different ways, and then suddenly, after much effort, the solution becomes clear. Think about something difficult you have had to learn. Write a letter to Helen describing the problem and the process you went through to finally understand.

10. As Miss Sullivan, write a diary entry describing how you feel when you realize that Helen understands the finger game.

Chapter 5

11. In this chapter, Helen describes a time when she was alone in a tree during a thunderstorm. She writes, “I had learned a new lesson – that nature ‘wages open war against her children, and under softest touch hides treacherous claws.’” Then later in the chapter, Helen smells the spring fragrance of the mimosa tree. She is drawn to the beauty of nature and once again climbs the tree.

What do you think Helen might be saying about life in this chapter? Write a dialogue between two students discussing Helen’s views on nature and what she learns about life from her closeness to nature.

First Student: I think it is normal for Helen to be frightened by thunderstorms. After all, many children are.

Second Student: Yes, but I think there is more to this chapter than just a scary childhood memory. Helen connects with nature. She...

Chapter 16

33. At first Helen thinks analyzing Latin words is a waste of time. However, as she learns more of the language, she comes to appreciate the beauty of the language. Think about something in your life that at first you disliked but then came to appreciate as you learned more about it. This can be something you hear, taste, do, etc.
34. At the beginning of this chapter, Helen writes about the ways she entertains herself on a rainy day. Suppose you need to entertain yourself, but you cannot watch television, listen to music, interact with a friend, or do any of these kinds of activities. What might you do with your time? What kinds of books would you read?

Write a paragraph, similar to the first paragraph in this chapter, describing how you might spend a rainy day if you had to spend it all alone without any electrical devices or people to provide you with entertainment.

Chapter 17

35. In this chapter, Helen is sixteen years old and already learning both French and German. She is able to read works written in these languages. Helen's French tutor, Miss Olivier, does not know the manual alphabet, so Helen holds her hand to Miss Olivier's mouth to read her lips. Try to imagine how difficult it must have been to learn a foreign language this way.

As Helen, write a letter to Miss Olivier describing the difficulties she is having reading her lips. Suggest in the letter that Miss Oliver, who is not physically challenged, might consider learning the manual alphabet.