Ms. McLeod

ELA A10

Challenges

***The Miracle Worker***

-William Gibson-

**Playwright:**

**William Gibson** is an American playwright. He was born on November 13th, 1914, in Bronx, N.Y. He died on November 25, 2008, in [Stockbridge](https://www.britannica.com/place/Stockbridge), Massachusets, U.S.A. He wrote the [play](https://www.britannica.com/art/dramatic-literature) The Miracle Worker in 1959, which was based on the life of [Helen Keller](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Helen-Keller), a deaf and blind child whose determined teacher, [Annie Sullivan](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Anne-Sullivan-Macy), taught her to communicate by using [sign language](https://www.britannica.com/topic/sign-language). The Miracle Worker opened on Broadway on October 19th, 1959. It ran 719 performances and received four [Tony Awards](https://www.britannica.com/art/Tony-Awards), including one for best play. Gibson’s screenplay for the 1962 film [adaptation](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/adaptation) received an Oscar nomination.

**Important points to consider about the play:**

**The play was inspired by…**

* The remarkable true story of Helen Keller and her teacher Annie Sullivan.

**Background History**

1. **Life in Institutions in the 1800’s:**

* **People were neglected**
* **Cruel treatment: people confined in cages, cellars, beaten, chained and lashed into obedience**
* **Filthy conditions causing many diseases.**

**In the words of Annie Sullivan…**

***I grew up in an asylum. The state almshouse. Rats…my brother, Jimmy and I used to play with rats because we didn’t have toys…one ward was full of old women, crippled, blind… some younger ones with epilepsy, mentally challenged, mentally ill….***

*-The Miracle Worker-*

1. **The American Civil War: 1861-1865**

* War between the United States and 11 Southern states that withdrew from the Union and formed the Confederate States of America.
* **Yankee**: A Northerner; someone loyal to the Federal government of the United States. Also, Union, Federal, or Northern.
* **Confederate**: Loyal to the Confederacy. Also Southern or Rebel.

**Type of play**

* Three Act Play

**Setting**

* The Miracle Worker is set in the 1880’s in and around the Keller homestead in Tuscumbia, Alabama. There are brief scenes at the Perkins Institution for the Blind at Boston, Massachusetts.

**Cast of Characters**

* Helen Keller
* Annie Sullivan- Helen’s teacher
* Captain Arthur Keller- Helen’s father
* Kate Keller-Helen’s mother
* James Keller-Helen’s brother
* Aunt Ev
* Viney
* A doctor
* Martha
* Percy
* Anagnos
* Blind Girls
* Offstage Voices

**Plot**

Young Helen Keller, blind, deaf, and mute since infancy, is in danger of being sent to an institution because her inability to communicate has left her frustrated and violent. In desperation, her parents seek help from the Perkins Institute, which sends them a "half-blind Yankee schoolgirl" named Annie Sullivan to tutor their daughter. Despite the Kellers' resistance and the belief that Helen "is like a little safe, locked, that no one can open," Annie suspects that within Helen lies the potential for more, if only she can reach her. Through persistence, love, and sheer stubbornness, Annie breaks through Helen's walls of silence and darkness and teaches her to communicate, bringing her into the world at last.

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| ***Vocabulary*** | |
| Many of the words are unique to the time period and the life described in the play. | |
| 1. Affliction- 2. Constitution- 3. Desiccated- 4. Disheveled - 5. Facetiously- 6. Famished- 7. Governess- 8. Groping- 9. Inexorably 10. Indolent- 11. Iota- 12. Morosely- 13. Oculist- 14. Obstinate- 15. Placating- 16. Precocious- 17. Resurrection- 18. Tantrum- 19. Vivacious- | Suffering  The physical makeup of the individual especially with respect to their health, and strength  Dried up  Appearance that is not tidy and disorderly  A remark meant to be humorous  Starving  Private Teacher  Searching  Not to be persuaded    Habitually lazy  Bit  Having a gloomy disposition  Eye doctor  A person that is not flexible, stubborn  Appease someone  Exhibiting mature qualities at a young age  Rebirth  Outburst  Lively |

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Act One Questions

1. Give a description for each of the following characters and describe how they react to Helen:

**Character Description and Reaction to Helen**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * Kate Keller |  |
| * Captain Arthur Keller |  |
| * Annie Sullivan |  |
| * Helen (character description only) |  |
| * James Keller |  |

1. What causes Helen’s blindness and deafness?
2. How does Mrs. Keller realize what has happened to Helen?
3. What stage devices are used to show the passage of time between the opening scene the first scene with Helen as a six-year-old?
4. Describe Helen, both her positive and negative qualities.
   * Positive:
   * Negative:
5. What causes Helen to become so frustrated in the scene with Percy and Martha? What does Helen want to be able to do? (4-5)
6. In dealing with Helen as she grows up, whose approach do you think is better, Kate’s or Captain Keller’s? Why do you feel this way?
7. How does the playwright show Helen’s intelligence and her difficulty in

communicating at the same time? (8-9)

1. Why is Annie glad that Helen is given to tantrums?
2. Identify the three gifts that the children at the Perkins Institute for the Blind and

And Mr. Anagnos give to Helen and Annie. (p. 16 and 17)

1. Who is Jimmy? What has happened to him? (p. 17-18)
2. What does Annie believe are three advantages that she has for teaching Helen?
3. When Annie first arrives at the train station, how does Kate feel about her? Why

does her attitude change?

1. What will Annie try to teach Helen first, last, and in between (p. 24)?
2. What flaw has Annie found with Dr. Howe’s methods? (24)
3. What do we learn about Annie’s past through the flashback? (p. 34)
4. Why does Annie not show up for dinner on time during her first day with the

Kellers?

1. How does Captain Keller feel about Annie? Use lines from the first act to support

your answer.

1. Describe which four people bribed Helen with food and what their purpose was for giving her the food:
2. Where do the Kellers live?
3. There is a hint of foreshadowing on p. 24 about the great achievement that Anne will make. Find the quotation and explain what this achievement will be.
4. Explain the quotation, “language to the mind is more than light to the eye”

(p. 24)

1. Imagine that you are James Keller. How do you feel about your half- sister? Be

specific.

1. Consider the problems Annie faces at the end of Act I. Which do you think will be the hardest to overcome? Explain why.
2. How would Helen’s life have been different if she had not been born into a privileged family? Do you think she is better off in any way than a child who was born without sight or hearing?

**Act Two Questions**

1. In her letter, what does Annie say is her greatest problem with Helen?
2. How does Annie try to communicate with Helen? Does Helen understand that objects have names?
3. What does Kate do after Helen stabs Annie with the needle?
4. After the fight at breakfast, Annie mentions three things that Helen did for the first time. What are these things?
5. According to Kate, what word did Helen know at six months old?
6. What does Annie consider to be Helen’s worst handicap?
7. Annie tells the Kellers about her experiences in the state almshouse. Why does she do

this?

1. How much time does Captain Keller grant Annie to live with Helen in the garden house?
2. What “miracle” does Annie have to accomplish in two weeks?
3. James says that what he wants of Keller is “everything you forgot when you forgot my

mother.” What does he mean? Why doesn’t James stand up to his father?

1. How does Annie convince Helen to let her touch her?
2. Annie stresses the importance of disciplining Helen. Why is discipline important for

learning?

1. Annie regards pity as a harmful attitude to take toward a person with a disability. What makes pity so harmful? What would be more constructive?
2. Stage Directions:

Stage directions are notes included in plays to tell how actors should

move and speak and to explain what the audience should see and hear. Reread the stage directions at the end of Act Two.

When Annie sits in the rocker with the doll. How do the stage directions suggest that each character is locked in a world of his or her own?

1. Theme:

The theme is the main idea of a work of literature. One important theme of this

play is that it can be difficult for family members to communicate well with one another.

Although all members of the Keller household except Helen can speak, do they really

communicate? Give examples to support your answer.

1. Humour:

Humour expresses what is funny or amusing. Both Annie and James speak humorous

lines. Identify one humorous line said by each character. How has a sense of humour helped both characters cope with difficult problems?

**Act Three Questions**

1.  What event is being anticipated by the Keller household at the beginning of Act Three?

2.  Why does James say that it has been a “short” two weeks while Kate says that it has

    been “interminable”?

3.  What is Kate’s advice to James on getting along better with his father?

4.  Why are Annie and Kate spelling to each other rather than speaking?

5.  What does Annie request from Kate at the end of her two weeks with Helen?

6. How do the Kellers react to Annie’s request from Kate?

7.  Do you think the Kellers’ decision to bring Helen home is wise?  Explain.

8.  List four things Annie has taught Helen during the two weeks in the garden house.

9.  Why isn’t Annie pleased with her success with Helen?

10.  What does Annie ask Captain Keller to promise in regards to Helen?

11.  What does Helen give to her mother to keep?

12. What is Helen’s motivation in giving her mother this object?

13.  What action of Helen’s starts an argument between Annie and the Keller’s at the

      homecoming dinner?

14. Why does Annie say that Helen is “testing you”?

15.  How does James resolve his conflict with his father?

16.  Where does the miracle take place?

17.  What is the first word Helen really understands?

18.  How can you tell that Helen is eager to learn more words, after the first?

19.  What does Helen call Annie?

20. What is the significance of what Helen calls Annie?

21.  What does Helen give to Annie before kissing her?

22. What is the significance of what Helen gives Annie?

23.  What does Annie spell into Helen’s hand after the others have gone into the house?

24. What is the theme of the play?

25. Identify the conflict in the play:

Internal-

External-