

Anne Sullivan

 **beanstack** originals





Anne Sullivan

Anne Sullivan was a revolutionary teacher who helped change education for deaf and blind people.



Many people have heard of Helen Keller. After becoming deaf and blind at a young age, Keller overcame many difficulties to become an author and activist. However, not as many people have heard of her teacher: Anne Sullivan. Read on to find out more about Sullivan and her amazing work.

Early Life

Anne Sullivan was born in Massachusetts in 1866. When she was 5 years old, she suffered from an eye disease called trachoma. The disease damaged her eyes, leaving her almost blind. Then, a few years later, her mother died. Sullivan and her brother were sent to live at a house meant to help people in need, called an almshouse. There, Sullivan met a resident who was fully blind. They told her that there were special schools for blind children. This interested Sullivan greatly; she decided that she would go to one of these schools, too.

In 1880, Sullivan began studying at the Perkins Institution for the Blind. At first, Sullivan struggled. She came from a very different background than most of the other students, who were often rich. Sullivan had not received much education before, and was behind in her studies. However, Sullivan was determined to work hard. She studied often, and became friends with some of her teachers. Over the years, Sullivan also received several eye surgeries.



Anne Sullivan



This improved her sight, and helped her to be able to read printed text. In 1886, Sullivan graduated as the top of her class.



A statue depicts “miracle worker” Anne Sullivan showing her pupil Helen Keller how to sign.

Becoming a Teacher

Shortly after Sullivan graduated, a family contacted her about a child who needed a special teacher. The child was Helen Keller. When she was almost 2 years old, Keller had become very sick. This illness left her completely blind and deaf. It also made it very difficult for Keller to communicate with people—or for them to communicate with her. When she was 6 years old, Keller’s family decided they needed extra help. The following year, in 1887, Sullivan became Keller’s live-in teacher and caretaker, called a governess.

DID YOU KNOW?

Sullivan helped Keller through college by attending lectures with her and spelling out what the teacher was saying.

Sullivan worked with Keller for months. Because she could not communicate clearly with other people, Keller was often upset. She threw many tantrums. But Sullivan was patient. After a few months, she was able to teach Keller that things—and peo-

ple—had names! To do so, Sullivan helped Keller use her hands to sign the American Sign Language (ASL) alphabet. The ASL alphabet does not use sounds like a spoken language does. Instead, ASL relies on hand positions and movements for communication.



Anne Sullivan



Soon, Keller was eager to learn more. Sullivan was an excellent teacher, and taught Keller many things. The pair traveled back to the Perkins Institution, where Sullivan helped Keller learn Braille. Braille is a writing system often used by blind people. It uses different groups of raised dots for its alphabet, so that people who cannot see can read it by feeling the letters with their fingertips. Over time, Sullivan helped Keller learn much more. She even stayed with Keller while she attended college!

Legacy

As Keller continued her education, she became known around the world. She began writing books on her experience as a blind and deaf person. She also helped raise money for educating other blind people as well. Sullivan remained Keller's close friend, and joined her to give lectures around the United States. However, in the early 1900s, Sullivan's health began to fail. It was Keller's turn to help care for her.

Sullivan passed away in 1936, but her legacy continues. Sullivan helped change education for blind and deaf people across the U.S.

FUN FACT

In 1919, Sullivan played herself in a movie.