

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

The Story of My Life

by Hellen Keller

written by Emily Lloyd

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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.

Response Journal

3. Helen writes that she knew when she was being naughty:

...for I knew that it hurt Ella, my nurse, to kick her, and when my fit of temper was over I had a feeling akin to regret. But I cannot remember any instance in which this feeling prevented me from repeating the naughtiness when I failed to get what I wanted.

As Ella, write a letter to Helen expressing your feelings about her behavior as a baby. Consider whether or not Ella forgives Helen. Perhaps Ella wants to tell Helen how she felt as a servant who was forced to endure Helen's poor behavior.

4. In this chapter, Helen describes her earliest recollections about her father. Imitating Helen's style of writing, write about the earliest memory you have of your parent or guardian. Try to paint a written picture of how you felt to be near this person.

5. Helen was 16 years old when her father died. She writes,

He had had a short illness, there had been a brief time of acute suffering, then all was over. This was my first great sorrow – my first personal experience with death.

Write a letter to Helen describing for her your first experience with the death of someone close to you.

Chapter 3

6. The last paragraph in Chapter 3 is a metaphor. A metaphor describes something as though it were actually something else. Assume that you are an English teacher who is explaining the meaning of this metaphor to the class. In one or two paragraphs, discuss Helen's description of traveling out of Egypt and standing before Mount Sinai as a metaphor for her own journey toward knowledge. Also discuss what this metaphor says about Miss Sullivan's impact on Helen's life.

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?

Chapter 4

8. In the following excerpt, Helen describes how she feels before Miss Sullivan arrives. Helen senses that something important is going to happen.

Have you ever been at sea in a dense fog, when it seemed as if a tangible white darkness shut you in, and the great ship, tense and anxious, groped her way toward the shore with plummet and sounding-line, and you waited with beating heart for something to happen?

Write a dialogue between yourself and Helen. In the conversation, tell Helen that you understand her metaphor because you have had a similar feeling of expectation.

The dialogue might begin as follows:

Helen: Can you understand how I felt? I knew that something important was going to happen.

You: How did you know that something was going to happen?

Helen: Everyone in the house was racing around, just like they do when we are going to have company. But somehow, I knew this was different. I knew that it was going to somehow change me life.

You: Did you sense it?

Helen: Yes, I think I did. Can you understand that?

You: Yes, it has happened...

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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...