The Beginnings of a Miracle

Introducing students to the strong character of Helen Keller, who started life with blind and deaf and ended up changing the world. The Beginnings of a miracle is based on the classic movie "The Miracle Worker," which depicts Anne Sullivan's struggle to teach Helen how to communicate.

**Time Allotment:** Approximately 6 class periods.

**Objectives**
At the end of the lesson plan students will have
- improved their understanding of what Helen Keller felt like when she experienced her disabilities
- practiced their analytical and evaluative skills,
- thought deeply about Anne Sullivan's methods of helping Helen
- Students will be able to describe several of the obstacles overcome by Helen Keller.
- Students will be able to identify adversity in their own lives and think about their views of dealing with it and/or ways of overcoming it.
- Students will demonstrate an ability to work with others to overcome adversity and attain goals.
- Students will demonstrate an awareness and willingness to work to improve something in the world around them.
- Students will write and give speeches on issues in the world today; giving reasons the issue needs support and ideas for solutions.

**Procedures:**
- 1. **Think-Pair-Share.** Individually have students think of the adversities or obstacles they have come across in their own lives or seen in others. In pairs have students share the obstacles they have come up with. In large group have students build a class list of all of the various adversities that people in the class have had or seen in the lives of others around them.
- 2. **Mini-Lecture.** Using the class list, talk about adversity as being conquerable, and actually making us stronger. Share that a person named Helen Keller had major obstacles in her life. She became deaf and blind at 19 months old from an illness. She not only conquered her adversity, but she went on to help others as well. Using the background information, give a brief overview of Helen Keller's life, adversities and contributions.
Day-1

**Introduction**

Students are divided into pairs. Member A of each pair is blindfolded, and Member B of the pair is not allowed to talk. (In this way, the pair is like Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan.) A task is written on the board that Member B has to try to get Member A to do, such as "sit down on a chair and clap hands." Member B of each pair must try to get Member A to understand what to do within thirty seconds, without talking at all. The two then switch places and repeat the activity with a different, more complex prompt, such as "Say 'hello.'" After the activity, discuss with students how it felt to be unable to hear or see the directions, as well as how it felt to try to give directions to someone else without being able to talk to them or show them what to do.

Giving some basic background on Helen Keller's life:

- She was born in 1880 and died in 1968.
- She was born able to hear and see.
- She became deaf and blind when she was a year and a half old.
- At age seven, Helen was extremely hard to discipline. Her parents felt bad about disciplining her, so she ran wild.
- Anne Sullivan, who had been blind herself, came to help teach Helen to communicate at age seven.
- Helen eventually became a famous speaker who opposed war, promoted women's suffrage, fought for equal rights for blacks, and campaigned against segregating people with disabilities.

**Day -2**

**Watch and Discuss**

Showing students the” kitchen scene" in the movie. This scene shows Anne Sullivan in one of her earliest struggles with teaching Helen, and it has virtually no speech in it. When the scene finishes, discuss with students what they saw. At first, leave your questions open-ended (e.g., "What did you think about that scene?"). but eventually, discuss Anne Sullivan's teaching methods. Do they think those methods were correct? Can they think of other educational techniques to teach deaf-blind students that she could have used to teach Helen effectively? Why do they think Anne chose the methods that she did? In addition, discuss with students the similarity between the scene that they saw and the introductory activity. Did the activity help them better understand how Helen felt? How Anne felt?
• **Assessment**

Students should be able to relate to both Helen and Anne, and they should offer coherent arguments either for or against Anne's teaching methods. You may want to encourage them to write a short paragraph in response to the lesson as a means of assessment.

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**Famous Person: Helen Keller**

**Background:**

Helen Keller was born on June 27th, 1880 in Tuscumbia, Alabama. She was a bright infant, interested in everything around her, and imitating adults at a very young age. In February of 1882, she was struck with an illness which left her deaf and blind. For several years, Helen had very little communication with the rest of the world, except for a few signs which she used with her family. When she was six, her parents wanted desperately to do something to help their strong-willed, half-wild, child. They were far from any deaf or blind schools, and doubted that anyone would come to the little town to educate their deaf and blind child. They heard of a doctor in Baltimore who had helped many seemingly hopeless cases of blindness, but when he examined Helen, there was nothing he could do for her. However, he referred them to Dr. Alexander Graham Bell who recommended Anne Sullivan to teach Helen.

On March 3, 1887 Helen met "the Miracle Worker," Anne Mansfield Sullivan. Then, about a month later on April 5, Helen associated the water running over her hand with the letters w-a-t-e r that Anne was spelling into her hand. That day she learned thirty words and proved to be a very intelligent, fast learner from then on. She quickly learned the finger-tip alphabet and shortly thereafter, to write. Helen had mastered Braille and learned how to use a typewriter by the age of 10. When she was 16, she could speak well enough to attend preparatory school and college. In 1904 she graduated from Radcliffe College with Anne Sullivan by her side interpreting lectures and class discussion to her.

Helen then dedicated her life to improving the world. She delivered many lectures to improve the conditions for the blind and deaf-blind. She spoke out for women's rights and pacifism. She spoke in over 25 countries bringing new hope to many people. She spoke against World War I and her pay from lectures declined because of her stand. During World War II she visited military personnel who had become blind and/or deaf because of injuries. She also spent a lot of time raising funds for organizations working with the deaf and blind. Helen also wrote several books concerning her life, her religious beliefs, and her teacher Anne Sullivan. Helen said this of her teacher, she "is so near to me that I
scarcely think of myself apart from her...I feel that her being is inseparable from my own, and that the footsteps of my life are in hers...all the best of me belongs to her" (Keller, p.53, 1976).

Helen Keller was a strong, intelligent woman. She overcame many obstacles in her own life to go on and improve the lives of others. She died June 1, 1968 in Westport, Connecticut and will go down in history as "America's First Lady of Courage."

References:


Hawk, David. (No Date Given) dhawk's web page/part of the WELL community.[On-line]. Available: http://www.well.com/user/dhawk/keller.html


Assessment:

1. Participation in Think-Pair-Share and group list obstacle contributions will be assessed informally through observation.

2. Amount and depth of reflection from the literature will be assessed anecdotally.

3. Speeches given will be assessed on how well the issue was supported and the legitimacy of solutions.

Quotes from Helen Keller:

"Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature... Life is either a daring adventure or nothing."

"When one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us."

"Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. The fearful are caught as often as the bold."

"Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it."

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Q(01). What was the unusual activity that Helen could sense? What were her reasons for sensing it? Ans: Helen sensed the arrival of her teacher Anne Sullivan. She could also sense it from her mother’s hurried movements.

Q(02). How does Helen describe her life before the arrival of her teacher? Ans: She compares herself to a groping ship in a dense fog before the arrival of her teacher. In the utter confusion of her life, she craved for light.

Q(03).