



Worksheet 1. Reading: A Speech by Helen Keller

Read the biographical note about Helen Keller and her speech that follows. Then review the glossary and complete the exercises that follow it.

Helen Keller (1880-1968) was an exceptional woman who lost her sight and hearing as the result of an illness at 18 months old. When she was seven, a tutor, Anne Sullivan, began teaching Helen how to communicate by touching her hand in a special kind of sign language. The first word she learned to "write" on her tutor's hand was "water." Helen's learning was rapid, she studied many subjects and graduated from Radcliffe College. She wrote ten books and became famous for her intelligence and for overcoming her extreme handicaps. She worked for many charitable organizations for the blind, giving speeches in order to gain support for the blind, and she traveled all over the world. Although she was severely handicapped, she was not too handicapped to live a full life and to do good works.

The following speech was given at the 1925 International Convention of Lions Clubs, a civic organization. (At the time, membership was restricted to men.) In the speech, she is asking for donations and moral support on behalf of the American Foundation for the Blind.

- 1 Dear Lions and Ladies:
- 2 I suppose you have heard the legend that represents opportunity as a capricious lady, who
- 3 knocks at every door but once, and if the door isn't opened quickly, she passes on, never to
- 4 return. And that is as it should be. Lovely, desirable ladies won't wait. You have to go out
- 5 and grab 'em
- 6 I am your opportunity. I am knocking at your door. I want to be adopted. The legend
- 7 doesn't say what you are to do when several beautiful opportunities present themselves at
- 8 the same door. I guess you have to choose the one you love best. I hope you will adopt me.
- 9 I am the youngest here, and what I offer you is full of splendid opportunities for service.
- 10 The American Foundation for the Blind is only four years old. It grew out of the imperative
- 11 needs of the blind and was called into existence by the sightless themselves. It is national
- 12 and international in scope and in importance. It represents the best and most enlightened
- 13 thought on our subject that has been reached so far. Its object is to make the lives of the
- 14 blind more worthwhile everywhere by increasing their economic value and giving them the
- 15 joy of normal activity.



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- 16 Try to imagine how you would feel if you were suddenly stricken blind today. Picture
17 yourself stumbling and groping at noonday as in the night; your work, your independence,
18 gone. In that dark world wouldn't you be glad if a friend took you by the hand and said,
19 "Come with me and I will teach you how to do some of the things you used to do when you
20 could see"? That is just the kind of friend the American Foundation is going to be to all the
21 blind in this country if seeing people will give it the support it must have.
- 22 You have heard how through a little word dropped from the fingers of another, a ray of light
23 from another soul touched the darkness of my mind and I found myself, found the world,
24 found God. It is because my teacher learned about me and broke through the dark, silent
25 imprisonment which held me that I am able to work for myself and for others. It is your caring
26 we want more than money. The gift without the sympathy and interest of the giver is
27 empty. If you care, if we can make the people of this great country care, the blind will
28 indeed triumph over blindness.
- 29 The opportunity I bring to you, Lions, is this: To foster and sponsor the work of the
30 American Foundation for the Blind. Will you not help me hasten the day when there shall be
31 no preventable blindness; no little deaf, blind child untaught; no blind man or woman
32 unaided? I appeal to you Lions, you who have your sight, your hearing, you who are strong
33 and brave and kind...
- 34 I thank you.

Glossary

- Line 2 *capricious* — frequently changing one's mind
Line 3 *but* — In this context *but* means *only*.
Line 5 *grab 'em* — *grab them*; *The ladies* represents the word *opportunity*, described in the next paragraph.
Line 6 *adopted* — become someone's child legally
Line 16 *stricken* — the past participle of *strike*
Line 17 *stumbling* — walking with difficulty and falling often
Line 17 *groping* — feeling for what things may be in your way because you can't see them
Line 21 *seeing people* — people who can see



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Comprehension practice

Check all the statements that are true, according to Helen Keller's speech.

1. Helen Keller is asking the audience to help the blind.
2. The American Foundation for the Blind was begun by the U.S. government.
3. The object of the Foundation is to provide good hospital care for blind people.
4. The object of the Foundation is to help blind people lead normal lives.
5. Everyone in the audience is blind too.
6. Helen appreciates having had a wonderful and caring teacher.
7. She says that it's more important to give money than to be a caring person.
8. She is looking forward to finding a cure for blindness.

