

Helen and Alexander

You probably know that Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone. But did you know that he was a teacher for people with hearing loss as well? Inspired by his father and grandfather's careers in speech therapy, as well as his mother's own hearing loss, Alexander came to the United States in 1871 to teach at the Boston School for the Deaf.

Alexander was well respected in the field of deaf education. People often asked him to help their family members who had experienced hearing loss. In 1887, Arthur Keller met with Alexander to seek help for his daughter Helen. Helen Keller was only six years old at the time. She had lost her sight and hearing at the age of 19 months after being ill with scarlet fever.

Alexander connected the Keller family with Annie Sullivan, who became Helen's teacher. Helen said, "[Alexander] held out a warm hand to me in the dark... I did not dream that that interview would be the door through which I should pass from darkness into light."

These interactions sparked a lifelong friendship between Alexander and Helen. As Helen grew up and studied with Annie, Alexander wrote her letters and encouraged her learning. He took her to Niagara Falls and helped her feel the power of the water by placing her hand on a window.



Alexander advocated for Helen to study with hearing children instead of only with other deaf children. This suggestion prepared her well for attending college at Radcliff. She graduated in 1904 at the age of 24.

When others saw Helen's limitations, Alexander saw her possibility. He especially encouraged her to write. He said, "with her gifts of mind and imagination, there should be a great future open to her in literature." Grateful for his belief in her, Helen wrote twelve books and traveled the world giving lectures. When she wrote her autobiography in 1903, she dedicated it to Alexander, her friend and mentor.



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NAME: _____ DATE: _____

1. Why did Helen's father ask Alexander for help?
 - a. Because he invented the telephone
 - b. Because he was a respected teacher for the deaf
 - c. Because his mother had hearing loss
 - d. Because he took her to Niagara Falls

2. Why did Alexander think Helen should be a writer?
 - a. Because she was gifted in mind and imagination
 - b. Because she went to Radcliff
 - c. Because he connected her with Annie Sullivan
 - d. Because she dedicated a book to him

3. Which of the following was NOT mentioned as a way that Alexander mentored Helen?
 - a. He wrote her letters
 - b. He took her to Niagara Falls
 - c. He connected her with Annie Sullivan
 - d. He read to her

4. According to the passage, what prepared Helen for attending college at Radcliff?
 - a. Writing her autobiography
 - b. Being educated with hearing children
 - c. Meeting Annie Sullivan
 - d. Going to Niagara Falls

Instructions for teachers:

These questions can be used to assess understanding of the reading passage.

The item in bold is the correct answer for each question.

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