

EXPLORERS' CORNER

How Do You Hear & Talk Without Sound? How Do You Read Without Sight?

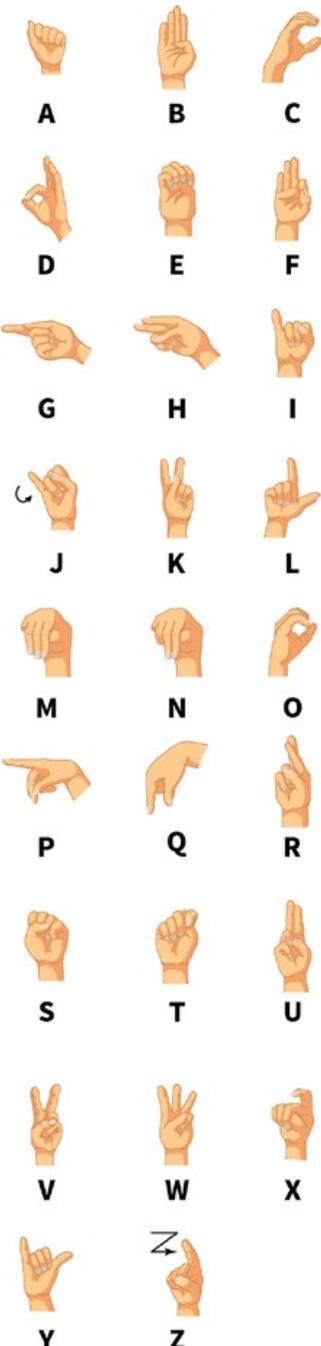
Helen Keller was born June 27, 1880 in Tuscumbia, Alabama. When she was only 19 months old, she became very ill with a high fever, leaving her totally deaf and blind. Can you imagine trying to live and communicate in a world in which you can't see, hear or speak?

When Helen was seven years old, a woman named Anne Sullivan moved to Tuscumbia to become her teacher. Helen considered that day her "soul's birthday."



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Helen Keller (L) "listening" to Anne Sullivan read a book through fingerspelling.



How did Helen learn to "hear" and "talk"?

One of the first things Anne did was teach Helen the manual alphabet, in which each letter of the alphabet is formed with a different hand sign. People would "speak" to Helen by fingerspelling the letters into Helen's palm, and Helen would "listen" to the letters and words by feeling them with her hand. She would "speak" to them the same way.

WATCH THIS: <https://youtu.be/aEYcmNhz7Uc> An entertaining video of a woman fingerspelling the manual alphabet (about 1 minute)

TRY THIS: The first word Anne taught Helen was the word "doll." Close your eyes and have your parent "speak" to you by making the shape of each letter with their hand and placing it in your palm. "Listen" to the word by feeling each letter with your hand. Can you "hear" it through touch?

How did Helen learn to read and write?

Helen learned Braille, a tactile system of raised dots that represent letters of the alphabet. Braille is read by touch, usually using the first finger on one or both hands.

TRY THIS: Grab a piece of paper and a pencil and write a word in Braille. To make the tactile bumps, put a spot of glue onto each dot and let it dry or use a needle and toothpick to create a hole for each dot. Ask a member of your family to try and read your word.

