

## Deep Thoughts Questions – Anne Sullivan

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Anne Sullivan is best known as Helen Keller's teacher. Her own story, however, is equally as inspirational. Anne overcame incredible obstacles in her life to impact history.

Anne Sullivan was born on April 14, 1866, in Massachusetts. At the age of five, Anne was stricken with a painful bacterial eye infection known as trachoma, which rendered her blind. Three years later her mother died of tuberculosis and her father, who was said to be abusive, abandoned her. Anne and her brother were sent to an overcrowded orphanage in Tewksbury, Massachusetts, where she'd live for four years. Anne's brother died shortly after arriving at the orphanage. In 1880, however, Anne was allowed to leave the orphanage and enroll in the Perkins School for the Blind. At Perkins, Anne was combative with both teachers and students. Nevertheless, her brilliance was obvious and she graduated at the age of 20 as the school's valedictorian, or, highest achiever.

Following her graduation, Anne left for Tuscumbia, Alabama, to work with Helen Keller, who was blind and deaf. Like Anne, Helen was combative and uncooperative with her former teachers. At first, Anne's fiery personality caused problems in the Keller household. According to legend, Anne argued with Mr. Keller about his status as a former slave owner. Anne and Helen, however, bonded immediately. Unlike Helen's teachers of the past, Anne adapted to Helen's personality and learning style. Anne taught Helen words by spelling them out in Helen's palm. In one famous example, Anne ran water over Helen's hands while spelling out "w-a-t-e-r" in her palm. Within six months, Anne had taught Helen hundreds of words, basic math, and even braille. Anne next accompanied Helen to the Perkins School, where Helen's progress drew the attention of the national media. Helen quickly became a celebrity and the public face of the Perkins School. Helen would be accepted to Radcliffe College. At Radcliffe, Sullivan continued to help Keller understand lectures by spelling words into Helen's palm. With Anne's help, Helen Keller became the first blind and deaf person to graduate from college.

Following Helen's graduation, the two toured the country giving speeches and lectures. Anne even starred in a movie about herself entitled *Deliverance* in 1919. Helen and Anne remained close friends and companions throughout the rest of Anne's life. By 1936, Anne's health was in decline and Helen was helping to take care of her. On October 15, 1936, Anne suffered a heart attack. With Helen holding her hand, Anne Sullivan died five days later, on October 20, 1936.

## Questions

1. Describe how Anne Sullivan's childhood was equally as hard as Helen Keller's.
2. How was Anne different than Helen Keller's previous teachers?
3. Helen Keller is one of the most famous women in history. Do you think Anne Sullivan gets enough credit in history? Why or why not?

This passage contains the following words. What do you think each word means? Write your definition and then use a dictionary or the internet to find the actual definition.

Word	Your Definition	Actual Definition
lectured		
combative		
rendered		

## Answers

1. Answers will vary, but Sullivan had her own health problems as a child. Furthermore, her mother died when she was a child and her father was abusive. She stayed at an orphanage for four years. During that time, her brother died.
2. Anne adapted well to Helen's personality and learning style. She found new strategies to teach Helen words.
3. Answers will vary, but Anne Sullivan clearly had much to do with Keller's astonishing success. It is quite possible that Helen Keller's amazing accomplishments would have been impossible without Sullivan.

## Vocabulary

lectured – discussed at length.

combative – prone to fights or arguments.

rendered – caused