



TRAGEDY TO TRIMUPH

GRACE PRODUCTS CORPORATION

1995

Grade Levels: 7-12

35 minutes

DESCRIPTION

Felix harasses a blind girl in his high school. Through a series of mysterious events, he finds himself blind and sent back to 1935, where he meets Helen Keller and Annie Sullivan. Felix lives with them and learns about blindness, "seeing" with his heart, and kindness. Sight restored, he applies the lessons learned. Stars deaf actress Phyllis Frelich.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

Subject Area: Life Skills

1. Standard: Displays effective interpersonal communication skills.
2. Benchmark: Displays empathy with others.
3. Benchmark: Displays friendliness with others.
4. Benchmark: Displays politeness with others.

INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS

1. To recognize that each individual is a person with feelings and needs.
2. To understand that no one is perfect and each person has limitations.
3. To recognize the value of kindness.

VOCABULARY

1. tragedy
2. triumph
3. Braille
4. gimpy
5. disability

BEFORE SHOWING

1. Discuss attitudes of the general population toward the following:
 - a. People who are deaf or hard of hearing.
 - b. People who are blind or visually impaired.
 - c. People with mobility impairments.
 - d. People with other disabilities.
2. Discuss the difference between a *handicap* and a *disability*.
3. Discuss brief biographical sketches of Helen Keller and her teacher, Annie Sullivan.
4. Define *gimp*. List other, more correct terms for this disability.
5. At times, students can be cruel to one another.
 - a. Role-play examples
 - b. Describe what it feels like to be picked on
6. Define *empathy*. Differentiate it from *sympathy*. Discuss how true kindness develops from a sense of empathy with fellow humans.

DURING SHOWING

Discussion Items and Questions

1. View the video more than once, with one showing uninterrupted.
2. Pause as Felix and his friends say that they are going to have some fun. Predict what they will do.
3. Note how the librarian is using his fingers to read Braille.
4. Pause to discuss why the librarian asks Felix if he's been cutting English class.
5. Note the changes in his clothes, the cars, and the environment when Felix becomes blind. Clarify that he has been transported back in time.
6. Note the peace and serenity about Helen Keller as she first appears.
7. Pause as the women call for help while being robbed. Predict how Felix can foil the robbery.
8. Note that only after Felix displays empathy for Helen and Annie by asking if they are all right, does he regain his sight.
9. Pause as Felix returns to school. In view of his experiences, predict what he will do.



AFTER SHOWING

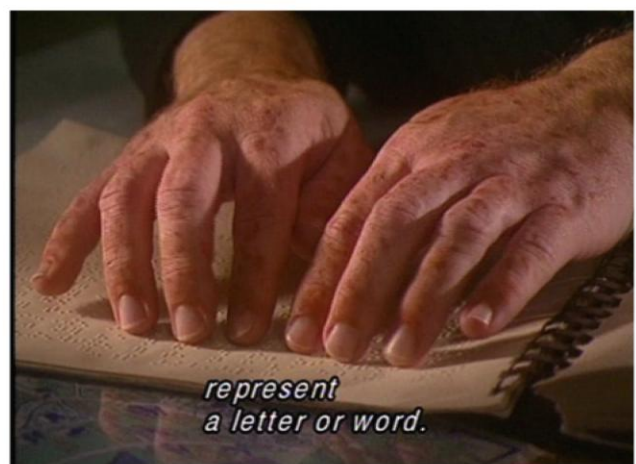
Discussion Items and Questions

1. Explain the title of the video, *Tragedy to Triumph*.
2. Discuss why Felix and his father were arguing.
3. Describe how DeLana must have felt when the boys were harassing her. Explain how observing this behavior makes most people feel.
4. Debate what sort of action people who observe this kind of behavior should take.
5. Discuss the role of the librarian in the video.
6. Explain how and why Felix became temporarily blind.
7. What is exploitation? Discuss how Mr. Hunn and Mr. Graff were planning to exploit Felix. Were there other instances of exploitation?
8. The librarian states that life can sneak up without warning at any time. Give real-life examples of illnesses or accidents changing the lives of people.
9. In view of the kinds of people Helen and Annie were, explain why they invited young Felix to stay with them.
10. Explain why Felix was so agitated at Helen's first attempts to communicate with him. Discuss what the reaction of most people would be.
11. Felix tells the librarian that he won't be messing "with blind freaks" anymore. Explain what is insensitive and inappropriate about this statement.
12. Relate the breakthrough that Helen had in learning to communicate.
13. Discuss how Helen taught Felix to feel with his heart.
14. Explain how persons who are deaf and blind can still understand the language of kindness.
15. After this experience, Felix was a changed person. Describe how his life and actions were different.
16. Discuss which parts of the story are probably true and which are embellishments.

APPLICATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. View *The Miracle Worker*, the story of Helen Keller's life.
 - a. Discuss ways in which children learn manners and proper behavior.
 - b. Relate to Helen's unruly behavior before Annie Sullivan's arrival.
2. Dramatize the early part of Helen's life when she dramatically begins to relate handshapes to meanings. Use period costumes.
3. Share examples of how fear can make a person act like a child.
4. Draw a mural depicting the language of kindness.
5. Without a strong and inspiring teacher, the story of Helen Keller may have been very different. Generate ideas on what her life may have been like without her "Teacher."
6. Discuss the qualities of a good teacher. Write a thank-you letter to a teacher who has lifted spirits and served as an inspiration to others to achieve.

7. Not all disabilities are physical.
 - a. Generate ideas of other kinds of disabilities.
 - b. Write personal descriptions of strengths and weaknesses.
8. List examples of the joys in experiencing each of the five senses: sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell.
9. Helen Keller considered deafness a greater disability than blindness. Write an essay explaining personal viewpoints on this issue.
10. Research the Americans with Disabilities Act of July 26, 1990. Discuss its implications.
11. Explore causes and degrees of vision impairment.
 - a. Interview a panel of people with visual impairments to gain a better understanding of degrees and types of visual impairments.
 - b. Examine a model of the eye and learn the function of each part.
 - c. Research the causes of visual impairment.
12. Learn to read Braille.
 - a. Visit a local Commission for the Blind.
 - b. Observe a machine that produces Braille.
 - c. Have someone hide a surprise nearby.
 - d. Ask a person familiar with the Braille machine to type a clue to find the treasure.
 - e. Read the Braille clue to find it.
13. Experience blindness. Use a blindfold.
 - a. Get a drink of water from the water fountain.
 - b. Navigate the school with a cane.
 - c. Pair up students. One student will be blind and one sighted. The guide helps the blind student to the cafeteria and through lunchtime.
 - d. Place an uncommon object in a bag. Using the sense of touch as the only sensory input, describe the object.



14. Investigate laws and fines regarding giving the right of way to persons using white canes with red tips.
15. Wash hands thoroughly and attempt to read simple common phrases from touching the lips of a partner. Wash hands again after the activity.
16. Research the different methods of communication used by American people who are deaf. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each.
17. Create guidelines for hearing people on how to communicate with people who are deaf or hard of hearing, or who are also blind.
18. Use fingerspelling to play "Gossip."
 - a. Pass a message along in a circle from person to person by feeling the handshapes in the palm only. Do not look at the hands. Use blindfolds if necessary.
 - b. Compare the original message to the final one, after the gossip has been passed around.
19. It can be frustrating when able-bodied people block wheelchair ramps or park in spaces designated for people who are mobility-impaired.
 - a. Investigate fines for breaking the law.
 - b. Conduct a poster contest creating awareness of the need to reserve special parking places for persons with disabilities.

RELATED RESOURCES

DCMP

[The DCMP Helen Keller Webpage](#)

[The Miracle Worker](#) (with Melissa Gilbert as Keller)

[The Miracle Worker](#) (based on the play by William Gibson)

[Helen Keller In Her Story](#)

[Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan \(1928 Newsreel Footage\) & Helen Keller Meeting First Lady Grace Coolidge \(1926 Newsreel Footage\)](#)



Video

The World at His Fingertips. Library, Inc., New York. 1987.

Pamphlet

"Facts About Deaf-Blindness." Washington. D.C.: Hearing-Vision Impaired Programs. Gallaudet University, 1985.

Websites

The following websites complement the contents of this guide; they were selected by professionals who have experience in teaching deaf and hard of hearing students. Every effort was made to select accurate, educationally relevant, and "kid-safe" sites. However, teachers should preview them before use. The U.S. Department of Education, the National Association of the Deaf, and the DCMP do not endorse the sites and are not responsible for their content.

[Helen Keller Kids Museum](#)

[Helen Keller Services for the Blind](#)

[The Time 100 profile for Helen Keller](#)

[Google timeline results for Helen Keller](#)

[Helen Keller Foundation for Research and Education](#)