

Reading 1

LETTERS FROM HELEN

In many ways Helen had an idyllic childhood—loving and indulgent parents, a beautiful home, many friends—despite what she called her “infirmity.” Even as a child she loved to write, and she wrote hundreds of letters. Here’s one she wrote home after a journey to Boston. She was eight years old.



To Kate Keller
September 4, 1888

My dear Mother,

I think you will be very glad to know all about my visit to West Newton. Teacher and I had a lovely time with many kind friends. West Newton is not far from Boston and we went there in the steam cars very quickly.

Mrs. Freeman and Carrie and Ethel and Frank and Helen came to station to meet us in a huge carriage. I was delighted to see my dear little friends and I hugged and kissed them.

Then we rode for a long time to see all the beautiful things in West Newton. Many very handsome houses and large soft green lawns around them and trees and bright flowers and fountains. The horse’s name was Prince and he was gentle and liked to trot very fast. When we went home we saw eight rabbits and two fat puppies, and a nice little white pony, and two wee kittens and a pretty curly dog named

Don. Pony's name was Mollie and I had a nice ride on her back; I was not afraid. I hope my uncle will get me a dear little pony and a little cart very soon.

Clifton did not kiss me because he does not like to kiss little girls. He is shy. I am very glad that Frank and Clarence and Robbie and Eddie and Charles and George were not very shy. I played with many little girls and we had fun. I rode on Carrie's tricicle and picked flowers and ate fruit and hopped and skipped and danced and went to ride.

Many ladies and gentlemen came to see us. Lucy and Dora and Charles were born in China. I was born in America, and Mr. Anagnos was born in Greece. Mr. Drew says little girls in China cannot talk on their fingers but I think when I go to China I will teach them. . . .

Will you please ask my father to come to train to meet Teacher and me? I am very sorry that Eva and Bessie are sick. I hope I can have a nice party my birthday, and I do want Carrie and Ethel and Frank and Helen to come to Alabama to visit me. Will Mildred sleep with me when I come home?

From your dear little girl
Helen Keller



When she was attending the Perkins School for the Blind in Boston, Helen heard of an impoverished six-year-old boy, both blind and deaf. His parents had died, and he had no one to take care of him. She decided immediately that the boy, Tommy, should come to Perkins, and she wrote dozens of letters to raise enough money to do so. She was ten years old.

To the Editor of The Boston Herald
May 13, 1891

My Dear Mr. Holmes,

Will you kindly print, in the Herald, the enclosed list? I think the readers of your paper will be glad to know that so much has been done for dear little Tommy, and that they will all wish to share in the pleasure of helping him. He is very happy indeed at the kindergarten and is learning something every day. He has found out that doors have locks, and that little sticks and bits of paper can be got into the key-hole quite easily; but he does not seem very eager to get them out after they are in. He loves to climb the bed-posts and unscrew the steam valves much better than to spell, but that is because he does not understand that words would help him to make new and interesting discoveries. I hope that good people will continue to work for Tommy until his fund is completed, and education has brought light and music into his little life.

From your little friend,
Helen Keller



Many people were drawn to Helen because they wanted to help the child who was deaf and blind. They became her friends because she was good-natured, lively, and eager to learn. This letter tells of a trip to Niagara arranged for her by Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor, who was also an educator of the deaf. She was twelve years old.

April 13, 1993

To Kate Keller

. . . When the reception was over, we went back to the hotel and Teacher slept quite unconscious of the surprise which was in store for her. Mr. Bell and I planned it together, and Mr. Bell made all the arrangements before we told teacher anything about it. This was the surprise—I was to have the pleasure of taking my dear teacher to see Niagara Falls!

The hotel was so near the river that I could feel it rushing past by putting my hand on the window. The next morning the sun rose bright and warm, and we got up quickly for our hearts were full of pleasant expectation. . . .

You can never imagine how I felt when I stood in the presence of Niagara until you have the same mysterious sensations yourself. I could hardly realize that it was water that I felt rushing and plunging with impetuous fury at my feet. It seemed as if it were some living thing rushing on to some terrible fate. I wish I could describe the cataract as it is, its beauty and awful grandeur, and the fearful and irresistible plunge of its waters over the brow of the precipice. One feels helpless and overwhelmed in the presence of such a vast force. I had the same feeling once before when I first stood by the great ocean and felt its waves beating against the shore. I suppose you feel so, too, when



you gaze up to the stars in the stillness of the night, do you not? . . . We went down a hundred and twenty feet in an elevator that we might see the violent eddies and whirlpools in the deep gorge below the Falls.

Within two miles of the Falls is a wonderful suspension bridge. It is thrown across the gorge at a height of two hundred and fifty-eight feet above the water and is supported on each bank by towers

of solid rock, which are eight hundred feet apart. When we crossed over to the Canadian side, I cried, "God save the Queen!" Teacher said I was a little traitor. But I do not think so. I was only doing as the Canadians do, while I was in their country, and besides I honor England's good queen.

You can read more of Helen's letters here.



THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU'VE READ

1. What proof can you find in the letters for the following statements about Helen?

She was warmhearted and tender.

She threw tantrums.

She was very determined.

She had a good sense of humor.

She loved to learn.

She liked helping people.

2. Pick one sentence that shows Helen's talent as a writer.
3. Helen writes that "we saw eight rabbits and two fat puppies." What does she mean by the word "saw"? Pick another sentence that surprised you and explain why.