



## Helen Keller

**General Instructions:** This task has three parts: **Part 1** has three questions; **Part 2** has two questions and **Part 3** has one question.

You will read a passage from Helen Keller's autobiography, titled *The Story of My Life*. As you read the text, be sure to write down the important points. This information will help you to answer the questions about Helen Keller so you can write a narrative description.



Helen Keller (1880-1968) is famous for overcoming a childhood disease that left her blind, deaf and unable to speak. She eventually learned to read and speak, graduated from college, and became a supporter of people with disabilities. This passage is the beginning of her autobiography.

Read the passage from *The Story of My Life*, collect the important points and answer the questions that follows.



## The Story of My Life by Helen Keller

The beginning of my life was simple and much like every other little life. I came, I saw, I conquered, as the first baby in the family always does. There was the usual amount of discussion as to a name for me. The first baby in the family was not to be lightly named, everyone was emphatic about that. My father suggested the name of Mildred Campbell, an ancestor whom he highly esteemed, and he declined to take any further part in the discussion. My mother solved the problem by giving it as her wish that I should be called after her mother, whose maiden name was Helen Everett. But in the excitement of carrying me to church my father lost the name on the way, very naturally, since it was one in which he had declined to have a part. When the minister asked him for it, he just remembered that it had been decided to call me after my grandmother, and he gave her name as Helen Adams.

I am told that while I was still in long dresses I showed many signs of an eager, self-asserting disposition. Everything that I saw other people do I insisted upon imitating. At six months I could pipe out "How d'ye," and one day I attracted every one's attention by saying "Tea, tea, tea" quite plainly. Even after my illness I remembered one of the words I had learned in these early months. It was the word "water," and I continued to make some sound for that word after all other speech was lost. I ceased making the sound "wah-wah" only when I learned to spell the word.

They tell me I walked the day I was a year old. My mother had just taken me out of the bath-tub and was holding me in her lap, when I was suddenly attracted by the flickering shadows of leaves that danced in the sunlight on the smooth floor. I slipped from my mother's lap and almost ran toward them. The impulse gone, I fell down and cried for her to take me up in her arms.

These happy days did not last long. One brief spring, musical with the song of robin and mockingbird, one summer rich in fruit and roses, one autumn of gold and crimson sped by and left their gifts at the feet of an eager, delighted child. Then, in the dreary month of February, came the illness which closed my eyes and ears and plunged me into the unconsciousness of a new-born baby. They called it acute congestion of the stomach and brain.<sup>1</sup> The doctor thought I could not live. Early one morning, however, the fever left me as suddenly and mysteriously as it had come. There was great rejoicing in the family that morning, but no one, not even the doctor, knew that I should never see or hear again.



Write down the important points from the passage.

**Part 1**

1. What is the meaning of the word unconsciousness as it is used in paragraph 4? Give the phrase from the passage which helps the reader to understand the meaning of unconsciousness.



## Language Arts - Performance Task

2. Would you say that the text presented the information in a sequential way? Explain how the end of the passage supports or did not this organisation.

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3. In your opinion, what was Helen Keller's overall purpose for writing paragraph 1? Give the phrase from paragraph 1 which **best** supports your answer.

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Part 2

4. "The doctor thought I could not live." What did this sentence from paragraph 4, suggest?

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From the quoted sentence which word best supports your answer and why?

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5. Underline two details from paragraph 4 that support the central idea that Helen Keller's childhood was a time of great highs and lows.

These happy days did not last long. One brief spring, musical with the song of robin and mockingbird, one summer rich in fruit and roses, one autumn of gold and crimson sped by and left their gifts at the feet of an eager, delighted child. Then, in the dreary month of February, came the illness which closed my eyes and ears and plunged me into the unconsciousness of a new-born baby. They called it acute congestion of the stomach and brain.<sup>1</sup> The doctor thought I could not live. Early one morning, however, the fever left me as suddenly and mysteriously as it had come. There was great rejoicing in the family that morning, but no one, not even the doctor, knew that I should never see or hear again.



- ✓ Use relevant, concrete and enough details from the autobiography to support your description of Keller's childhood and how it impacted her and her family. Any inferences you draw show be based on evidence from the text.
- ✓ Organize the narrative to make important connections between Keller's life events and the descriptive details you include.
- ✓ Use narrative techniques where appropriate, such as flash backs and pacing, to make sure that readers understand the contrasts between the highs and lows of Keller's early life.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on its right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.