The Miracle Worker Study Guide

The Miracle Worker by William Gibson

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Initially written for television, *The Miracle Worker* by William Gibson first aired in 1957. After it was warmly received by television audiences, it was rewritten for the stage and opened on Broadway in 1959 at the Playhouse Theatre. Although some of the reviews were mixed, the audience response was very favorable and during its run the first production of *The Miracle Worker* rarely failed to fill the 1,000 seat theatre.

Drawing heavily from letters written by Anne Sullivan in 1887, as well as from Helen Keller's autobiography, William Gibson constructed a drama around the events that took place when Helen Keller and her teacher, Anne Sullivan, first met in the 1880s. The exchanges that take place in *The Miracle Worker* are all derived from factual events that Gibson has woven together to construct a fluid, emotionally real, depiction of the "miracle" Anne Sullivan was able to work: teaching Helen Keller language.

Audiences and critics alike were most drawn to *The Miracle Worker's* honest and emotionally vivid portrayal of the relationship between Annie (as she is called in the play) and Helen. The actors' intense energy and commitment to truth in the scenes of physical struggle between Annie and Helen were held as the most memorable moments of the play when it first opened on Broadway. Audiences found the story of Annie's struggle to teach Helen language and her eventual success life affirming and uplifting. Surrounding the major themes of change and transformation and language and meaning is basic integrity and emotional honesty. These two elements are the strongest reasons that *The Miracle Worker* is so popular among audiences and has been called an American Theatre classic.

Author Biography

William Gibson was born in the Bronx, New York, on November 13,1914, the son of George Irving, a bank clerk, and Florence (Dore) Gibson. Gibson spent his childhood in New York City and eventually attended the City College of New York, where he studied from 1930 until 1932. After graduation, Gibson moved to Kansas, supporting himself as a piano teacher while pursuing his interest in theatre. It was in Topeka, Kansas, that Gibson had his earliest plays produced. Most of these early works were light comedies; two of them were later revised and restaged: *A Cry Of The Players* and *Dinny and the Witches*, both in 1948. Shortly after his time in Kansas, Gibson met a psychoanalyst named Margaret Brenman; the two were married on September 6, 1940, and eventually had two sons, Thomas and David.

Gibson's first major critical and popular success in New York was *Two for The Seesaw*, which opened on Broadway in 1958. He was praised for the play's brisk dialogue and the compassion with which he endowed the characters. However, it is Gibson's second Broadway production, *The Miracle Worker*, for which he is best known.

Gibson first became fascinated with Anne Sullivan and her triumph as Helen Keller's teacher while reading the letters that Anne Sullivan wrote in 1887 describing her experiences in the Keller household. It was these letters and also Nella Brady's biography, *Anne Sullivan Macy*, that inspired Gibson to write about Anne Sullivan's accomplishments. Gibson first attempted to write *The Miracle Worker* as a solo dance piece but wrote it as a television play for the series *Playhouse 90*, which was produced by CBS. After *The Miracle Worker* was warmly received when it aired on CBS on February 7,1957, Gibson received offers to adapt it for stage and film. He decided to write it for the stage because he wished to have more artistic control over the production. Although it opened to mixed reviews, positive press and word-of-mouth led to *The Miracle Worker's* success on Broadway. *The Miracle Worker* was adapted as a feature-length film starring Anne Bancroft as Annie and Patty Duke as Helen in 1962, and was again produced for television in 1979 with Patty Duke playing the role of Annie and Melissa Gilbert as Helen.

After *The Miracle Worker*, Gibson continued to write for the theatre and became a member of the Dramatists Guild. However, after *Golden Boy* (1964), which was a musical adaptation of Clifford Odets's play of the same name, Gibson largely withdrew from the New York theatre scene. It was during this time in the 1960s and 1970s that he founded and became president of the Berkshire Theatre Festival in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Gibson did return to the New York stage, however, during the 1980s; *The Monday after the Miracle*, his sequel to *The Miracle Worker* opened on Broadway on December 14, 1982, at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre. *The Monday after The Miracle* was a much darker piece than its predecessor and garnered poor reviews and attendance; it closed after a short run. *The Miracle Worker* continues to be Gibson's best known work and is the drama on which his reputation rests.

Plot Summary

Act One

The Miracle Worker is set in the 1880s and begins at the Keller home in Tuscumbia, Alabama. It is night, and three adults stand around the lamplit crib of the infant Helen Keller: her parents, Kate and Captain Arthur Keller, and a doctor. They are discussing a serious ailment which Helen has just barely survived. While the Captain sees the doctor out, Kate makes the horrifying discovery that because of the illness, the child can no longer see nor hear. The next scene introduces Helen's Aunt Ev and unsympathetic half-brother James, and reveals that in the five-and-a-half years since the first scene Helen has become a willful, feral child, indulged in everything because denial brings tantrums and no one knows how to teach her decent behavior. The Captain and Kate argue about Helen, he saying that after so many doctors have failed it is a waste of money to hire more, while she is unwilling to give up. The Captain relents, and a desperate inquiry leads eventually to "a suitable governess" from Boston, a young woman named Annie Sullivan.

The next scene shows Annie in Boston, preparing to leave the Perkins Institute for the Blind, where as a patient she moved from blindness to partial vision. She is 20, stubborn, humorous, and haunted by the loss of her younger brother, Jimmie, who died after they were separated at an orphanage. Arriving in Alabama, Annie is met at the station by Kate and the sarcastic James. Kate is apprehensive because of Annie's youth, but Annie assures her that youthful energy will help in the task ahead, and says she has another asset as well: "I've been blind." The women begin to warm to each other. Back at the Keller home, Annie irks the Captain by refusing to let him take her suitcase. She meets Helen, and immediately makes Helen understand that the suitcase is to go "up." Together, Annie and Helen get it upstairs to Annie's room while Kate, appreciating what she has just seen, placates the Captain. Upstairs, Annie teaches Helen to hand-spell "doll" and "cake" to get each, then is outsmarted when Helen hits her in the face with the doll and runs out the door, locking Annie in. Unable to find the key, Annie must be humiliatingly "rescued" with a ladder brought to her window. After dinner, Annie finds Helen at her favorite place, the water pump in the yard. Thinking she is alone, Helen brings forth the "vanished" bedroom key from her mouth and gleefully drops it down the well. Annie smiles, with "great respect, humor, and acceptance of challenge," and enters the house, leaving Helen alone as the lights dim to end Act One.

Act Two

As Act Two begins, Helen is spilling and breaking things in Annie's room. Annie, using sign language, stubbornly spells the name of each broken item into Helen's hand. Entering, Kate asks Annie if this has any meaning for Helen. Annie says it will have none until Helen understands what a word a name is. Asked why she then persists in the silent struggle, Annie shows her resilience and humor by replying, "I like to hear

myself talk!" Alone that night, Annie experiences one of her frequent memory-trips back to the orphanage, the crones who made life there hateful, and her forced and final parting with her brother.

At breakfast, Helen's improper behavior (she runs about the table, placing her hands on the others' food) sparks a confrontation between the Captain whose practice is to ignore Helen so that the family (mainly him) can converse and Annie, who insists that all such indulgence of Helen must stop. Annie asks to be left alone wilh Helen. There follows the longest and most famous onstage fight in American theatre, unresolved even after several scripted pages of battle because the lights change from the dining-room to the yard, where the family awaits the outcome. Eventually, Helen staggers from the house, bumps into her mother's knees, and clutches them. Then comes Annie, battered but smiling, to report her victory. Helen has eaten from her own plate. With a spoon. And folded her napkin.

The Captain, angry at Annie and her treatment of his daughter, wants to fire the young teacher but is persuaded by Kate and Aunt Ev to grant Annie's request to isolate herself and Helen in the garden house for an entire week. Annie's plan is to make Helen dependent upon her for everything, thus forcing Helen to communicate with her, thus opening the only way for her to truly become Helen's teacher. While the Kellers take Helen on a long drive so she won't know on returning that she is at home, the "Garden House" theatrically appears in the back yard before the eyes of the audience, through the use of lighting, props, and furniture. Helen throws a fit at being left alone with Annie, then subsides exhausted. She won't let Annie touch her, but Annie gets hercuriosity by hand-spelling to a servant child, and communication is re-established. That done, Helen is put to bed, and a striking stage setting ends Act Two: each of the Kellers is picked out by a shaft of moonlight, listening as Annie sings a lullaby to the unheanng Helen.

Act Three

Act Three begins as the deadline for the end of the "Garden House" experiment approaches. Helen is clean and disciplined and has learned to hand-spell many words to get treats, but Annie frustratedly feels that she has accomplished IMe more than "fingergames no meaning." Helen has gestures and concepts she touches her cheek to signify her mother but has yet to connect these with the movements of Annie's fingers in her palm. Annie begs for another week, but the Kellers, seeing the improvements but not the gap left to close, refuse. Annie insists on keeping Helen until six, the official deadline, but as the time dwindles we see the harrowing effect of the ordeal on Annie. Helen will not give or receive affection and shows no signs, even as Annie desperately spells more words into her hands, of moving past fingergames to the universe of language and communication. At the stroke of six, the Garden House disappears before our eyes, Kate claims Helen and carries her out of sight, and Annie, alone at the end of her struggle, remembers again the loss of Jimmie and repeats a line often heard in that connection, "God owes me a resurrection."

Returned to her family, Helen acts up at dinner, and the family indulges her despite their assurances to Annie that they would not. Helen throws a pitcher of water on Annie, and Annie grabs up Helen and the pitcher and stalks out, vowing to make Helen refill the pitcher. The Captain angrily rises to go out and fire Annie, but James, the sarcastic idler, shows he has understood Annie by going to the door and resolutely standing up to his father, who despite his anger is finally impressed with his son.

In the yard, Annie is forcing Helen to pump water, meanwhile spelling w-a-t-e-r into Helen's hand, and "Now," as Gibson says, "the miracle happens." Helen has the breakthrough Annie has prayed for, and runs around the yard touching, and learning from Annie the names of the pump, the stoop, the trellis, and more. Annie calls out, and the scene is joined by the Kellers, the servants, and their children. Helen learns to spell "Mother" and "Papa," and the family kneels to her in tears. Then Helen gropes her way across the yard to Annie, to learn what her "name" is. Annie spells it to Helen, who spells it back: "Teacher." Helen shows the depth of the miracle of her understanding by getting from her mother the keys Annie had used to lock her out or in, and bringing and giving them to Annie. The onlookers withdraw, leaving Annie and Helen alone onstage. Annie, who had sworn never to love again after the loss of Jimmie, spells into Helen's hand, "I love Helen," adding verbally her last words to Jimmie: "Forever and ever." Then she and Helen, hand in hand, cross the yard to go in to dinner.

Stage Setting

Stage Setting Summary

The stage is cut diagonally. In the back right triangle is the interior of the Kellers' house and in the front left is an area used for alternate settings. The structures and furnishings are minimal so that actors can move in and out of places and specific times. A few important props, however, do remain onstage: a pump, a window and a door.

Stage Setting Analysis

The minimal stage settings are for the conveyance of movement in time and place. They also allow for focus on characterization and symbols.

Act 1

Act 1 Summary

Three exhausted adults crowd around a crib after a long watch. Kate Keller, a young woman of gentility, her husband, Captain Arthur Keller, a fit gentleman in his forties, and an older doctor converse. The doctor tells Kate that the girl child will live. He tells the parent that they're fortunate because he didn't think the child would survive. The captain is not surprised at all since she is of his blood.

The doctor tells Katie Keller to rest, followed by that order from her husband. He has been through two other children but this is Katie's first. After a moment of levity with the doctor, the doctor reassures the parents that their child will get well from her "acute congestion of the stomach and brain." Mr. Keller sees the doctor to his buggy and Mrs. Keller talks to her baby. It is after she sarcastically tells the recuperating child that her father will have to write an editorial about "the wonders of modern medicine" that she realizes her baby girl is not following the mother's finger.

Katie screams for her husband and notices the baby Helen doesn't respond to that sound. She screams again and the child doesn't respond again. When the captain arrives, Katie informs him of her suspicions. Her husband tries to reassure Katie that it is just a matter of time, but the lamp held close to Helen's face and the lack of response to the couple's shoutings validate the mother's fears that their child is both blind and deaf.

Time advances, as heard through chimes, to a period five years later. Three children and an old dog hover around a pump. Helen is now six and a half years old, and two African-American children, Martha and Percy, accompany her. Of the dog, an Irish setter named Belle, and all the characters surrounding the pump, Helen is by far the most disheveled. She is rather attractive but one eye is larger and protrudes, signifying her blindness. She moves in quick, crude gestures and appears stoically. As her companions speak, she jabs her fingers in and around their moving mouths. Percy bites Helen's finger, and Helen, in turn, moves her fingers to her own mimicking mouth. Helen, like her model, then bites her own fingers that send her into a rage. Percy laughs but Martha is concerned. Martha pulls down Helen's hands, hands down and Helen wrestles Martha. Helen grabs scissors and Percy runs to the porch to sound an alarm bell.

The bell alerts the rest of the Keller family. Kate is rocking a cradle, the captain is working on the newspaper, James Keller, a lazy young man, is watching the children, and Aunt Ev is sewing alongside of Kate, who, like her name, has lost her childish quality. Kate runs to her daughter and releases Martha who runs away with Percy. The remaining family, with the exception of Captain Keller, watch from the window.

Kate tries to take the scissors from Helen but the child refuses to surrender them. Kate then tries to get Helen to cradle the scissors like a doll, and when Helen does so, the child is now docile enough to be encouraged to enter the house. Helen gives up the scissors as she trips into her home.

Aunt Ev questions why the family hasn't seen a Baltimore oculist she wrote them about, and James responds that she'd better talk to his father. Aunt Ev heard he has cured several blind people, but the captain has lost hope after being disappointed by so many other specialists, whereas his wife still clings to it, encouraging her husband to write to the oculist.

While the family is discussing this, Helen feels the featureless face of a doll Aunt Ev threw to her upon entering the room. When Helen feels the absence of eyes, she circles the room frantically trying to get anyone to explain to her why there are no eyes. She gets to the captain's desk and "paws the papers to the floor." Mr. Keller is outraged and disgusted. He does not want his wife to write to the newest specialist, and he is responsive to James's suggestion that his daughter be placed in an asylum.

Aunt Ev reminds James that Helen is his sister, but he turns it on his aunt saying that she is only his half sister and she is "half-mentally defective." Helen's mother is hurt at these words and the captain yells an end to the discussion. He is tired of Helen being the focus of the family and wishes it now to focus on Mildred, the sleeping baby.

While this is gong on, Helen continues to convey the absence of the doll's eyes. She completes her circle around the room to everyone and returns to Aunt Ev. She rips two buttons off her aunt's dress and places them on the doll's face. Her mother immediately understands the meaning of this and places Helen's hands on Kate's eyes, winning a nod from Helen. Kate sews the buttons on the doll's face.

Aunt Ev realizes she is somewhat exposed now and Kate promises to sew the buttons back on later. James sees this whole episode as indulging a spoiled child and interestingly enough the captain supports Helen in her actions as he sees her as deprived enough. James leaves rather dejectedly.

Helen is overjoyed, as she loves her sighted doll, and Aunt Ev comments on the blind child's intelligence. It is then that Helen overturns her sister's cradle, sending Mildred to the diving Captain Keller trying to intercept the baby's fall. Naturally, Kate is flustered and frustrated; she doesn't know how to communicate to her daughter the gravity of her action.

The captain wants to see Helen confined and Kate refuses. While the parents discuss this, Helen feels her mother's lips, trying to understand at least the tone of the conversation through lip movement and mouth configuration. Kate defends Helen as a child who needs to exercise, and Mr. Keller sees Helen as a threat to Mildred. Kate asks her husband if he's "willing to put her away?"

As Helen's hands move over her mother's lips, Helen, too, feels the anger and her face takes on that rage. She starts hitting her mother's lips and Kate catches her hand. Helen

lashes out at her mother. Captain Keller can't understand this, but Kate explains that Helen's behavior is simply her frustration at not being able to talk, at being different from the rest of her family.

Kate holds her older daughter and an animal-like sound comes from her. Kate lets her daughter go, and Helen runs into a chair, falls and cries. Kate consoles her daughter through her motherly embrace and shares with Helen's father the fact that Helen is slipping away from her more and more. Realizing his wife's state of mind, the captain agrees to write to the man in Baltimore.

The focus now shifts to a man with a Greek accent, Anagnos, and a young woman, Annie Sullivan. It seems that the Boston doctor could do nothing for Helen, so the doctor thought a good governess might help with the situation. Anagnos talks to Annie regarding this position. Annie appears serious, stubborn, but full of life.

Anagnos recalls to Annie her combative background, making light of her Irish heritage and her own fight for independence. He highlights her stubbornness and lack of tact. He recalls how she couldn't even spell her name when she first arrived at the Perkins Institute. It is at this point that Annie reveals her irritated and hazed over eyes. She closes them against the light.

After cautioning Annie on her behavior at this new assignment, Anagnos describes the child with whom she is about to work. No one knows how bright the child is, and Anagnos advises Annie to try to get along with not only the child but also the parents. It is then, however, that he says his good bye. He presents Annie with a garnet ring and a loan for traveling expenses. Annie is to earn twenty-five dollars a month, and once she's has started saving, she can pay her teacher back. Annie's eyes tear up at Anagnos's generosity and thoughtfulness, and the prospect of saying farewell to her friends at the Institute.

Anagnos lets her fellow students into the room, and they give Annie shaded glasses as her eyes are light sensitive since her surgery. They also send a doll with moving eyelids and a momma cry to Helen. Annie is extremely moved by her friends and some call out to have her stay. This is impressive since Annie recently recalled to Anagnos her loss of someone named Jimmy and her refusal to love again.

As Annie and the children leave the room, a flashback occurs. Annie is nine and Jimmy is seven; they are brother and sister. Annie, who is "virtually blind," promises to take care of Jimmy, who has something wrong with his leg. They are in some home or hospital and Jimmy is told to go to the Men's Ward. He cries for Annie.

The sound of a railroad rhythm plays through the transition back to the Keller household. Helen is exploring, feeling and smelling, the belongings in a room soon to be Annie's. Her mother is talking to the African-American servant Viney regarding the arrival of the new teacher. Kate hopes Annie will be on this train, but Viney doesn't not want her to be disappointed again.

Dinner will again be delayed as Kate goes to the station to meet Annie. As Kate says her good byes, her husband shows his disappointment about another late supper, and father and son have another harsh exchange of words. James calls his stepmother "Mrs. Keller" and the captain takes umbrage to it.

Sensing her mother gone, Helen makes a gesture on her cheek. Viney realizes it indicates her mother, so she gives Helen a snack to calm her down. The captain senses the same thing and gives her another treat. These are on top of the candy her mother gave her before leaving. After being chastised by Viney for ruining Helen's appetite, the captain tries to take the food away from his daughter. She struggles for it and kicks her father. He relinquishes control, throws his paper and leaves his daughter.

At the train station, Annie finally arrives and introductions are made. . The Kellers have met every train for two days, and Annie has stopped in every train station from the east cost. After exchanging frustrations, Annie and Kate try to assess each other. Kate sees a very young woman of twenty in front of her and doubts her competency. Annie will not be deterred, and she explains to Helen's mother that youth is in her favor, as are her knowledge of the work of Dr. Howe and the fact that she was once blind herself. Annie passes the test, and the women accept each other. Now it is up to Annie to get Helen's acceptance.

At his home, Ivy Green, the captain welcomes Annie and tries to take her suitcase. Wanting to get the doll out for Helen, Annie struggles with Keller to carry it. Upon seeing Helen, Annie drags it to the porch where a disheveled, dirty young girl is groping for the setter Belle.

Annie drops her suitcase heavily on the porch floor and immediately wins Helen's attention. The child feels the suitcase, then Annie Sullivan, pushing away the visitor's glasses. Annie draws Helen's attention to her raised arm, and after two attempts to keep this focus, the child realizes, after an affirmative nod from Annie, that the suitcase goes upstairs. The two trudge it up the stairs to Annie's room.

Annie's new employer questions the girl's methods and credentials. When Kate tells Keller that Annie has had nine operations on her eyes, he very much doubts Annie can be successful given her limited sight and Yankee origins. . Meanwhile, upstairs, Annie gives Helen the key to her suitcase and Helen unlocks it. She pulls out a shawl, puts on Annie's bonnet and glasses, and mimics how an adult stands before the mirror in a room.

Helen goes back to Annie's suitcase and unearths the doll. She mimes as if to ask if it's hers and Annie nods into Helen's hand. Annie sees this as a starting point and begins to sign d-o-l-l into Helen's hand. James, who has carried up Annie's trunk, sees this and teases Annie about being able to spell. James inquires as to what the teacher's doing, and she tells him it's is the alphabet for the deaf. James then calls his half-sister a "monkey," and Annie adds, "a very bright" to that monkey after seeing Helen replicate the letters exactly in the air.

Helen wants her doll again and Annie refuses to give it to her until she can spell it. James continues to watch and tells Annie that Helen has no idea of what she's spelling, but Annie refuses the doll to Helen. Incensed when Annie shakes her head no into Helen's hand, the child slaps Annie and tries to wrestle her. Annie restrains Helen in a chair, and when she finally releases the child, Helen tries again to grope for her doll. Annie kicks it out of the way and baits Helen with cake and its the spelling.

Helen responds and wins the cake, but Annie has to address the issue of the doll. She again introduces it to Helen who spells all but the last letter. Once Helen again has the doll, she swings it at Annie's face causing the teacher to bleed. As Annie checks the damages, Helen and her doll dart for the door, locking it on their exit.

James passes Helen on the way down the stairs and surmises the situation. He goes outside and sings a song to Annie's window, "Buffalo girl, are you coming out tonight, Coming out tonight, Coming out." While awaiting rescue, Annie tries to clean herself up and again remembers her brother who is being yelled at by crones. This flashback ends with a doctor just about to tell Annie something, but she refuses to continue remembering.

When dinner is called, Annie is still prisoner in her room. In a comical scene, James lets the recent events unfold at the dinner table when the teacher fails to join the family. The captain is disgusted with the recent turn of events and lets his new employee know when he goes upstairs to free her. James brings the ladder around the house, is told to return it by his father, and then summoned to return with it when the key can't be found.

Captain Keller carries Annie down the ladder to a crowd of entertained spectators. Martha, Percy, Belle and the family watch as the captain rescues Annie and admonishes her. Annie promises to try to find the key, and when safely on the ground, James teases her with the idea that the ladder should remain, spelling l-a-d-d-e-r as he says it.

When the family re-enters the house, Helen and Annie are alone in the yard. Annie dodges Helen's probing arms, and observes that when Helen is convinced she's alone, she takes the key from her mouth. Helen then buries it under a loose board in the well. Annie marvels at the girl's cleverness and decides to accept the challenge of this "devil." After all, Annie knows she's is equally stubborn and has nowhere else to go.

Act 1 Analysis

Relieved their child will live, the captain boasts of the strength of his family's genes. He compares the child to a goat. In creating this simile, the playwright conveys that there is stubbornness in the family, which will later both hurt and help the child. More characterization is shared when we learn that Captain Keller owns a newspaper, a prosperous and intelligent man. The time aspect of setting is inferred with the presence of a buggy and lamp, and the captain's military title.

When Katie Keller and her husband realize that their child is in fact hearing and vision impaired, the lights dim in the room quickly, symbolizing the dying of the light for Helen and the impact on the child. In similar fashion, chimes are used to depict the passage of time yet they fade away, such as Helen's hearing.

Five years after the opening scene, Helen is seen in her yard with two "Negroes," a term indicating setting and year of publication, the end of the 1800's and the 1950's, respectively. This should be considered a historical term and used appropriately. It should also be noted that stage directions are extremely important since the character of Helen is incapable of dialogue. Her characterization will be established through her deeds, the play's descriptions and the dialogue among family members regarding the handicapped child.

With the passage of time comes an unkempt, spoiled child, and the family discusses her situation after she attacks one of the family's domestic help with scissors. The family is frustrated after repeatedly being disappointed in specialists. Aunt Ev tried to encourage them to write to a Baltimore oculist as his reputation is outstanding, but they are at wit's end. Putting Helen in a home is an option that seems more real to the men in the family with each passing day. James's remark that Helen is "half-mentally defective" mirrors a popular belief in 1887. The lack of any sensory perception was oftentimes seen as a lack of wit, yet Helen's awareness of the doll's missing eyes and her resolution to the problem, taking buttons off her Aunt Ev's dress, demonstrate this is not the case. Helen is a bright girl who has found a way in a darkened, silent world how to learn and how to communicate on some level.

James's comments and his obvious lack of respect and love for his father convey his characterization and exacerbate the household situation surrounding Helen. Likewise, the dialogue from Captain Keller helps establish his characterization. He speaks authoritatively to his family and has little tolerance for Helen. He is a Civil War veteran, and the battle over his daughter seems a losing one. He is also extremely proud of his Southern heritage and his family's name. The truth is, however, that the Kellers were not well to do after the war, and, even though Captain Keller ran a newspaper, each family member needed to contribute in running the house and working the farmlands. James was not a hard worker, and this is one reason why the captain is extremely aggravated with his lazy son.

The interaction between James and his father particularly help define the captain's characterization. James uses a "weather" metaphor, implying a sense of heat and unpredictability in referring to his father. James believes his father to be hotheaded, much like the weather that surrounds them in Tuscumbia, Alabama. James also implies that it is a matter of money why his father has not contacted Aunt Ev's specialist. James further helps define his father when he comments that the captain's standing during a disagreement concludes any discussion. He sees his father as authoritative and controlling.

Kate, on the other hand, appears endlessly patient with her handicapped daughter. She knows how to calm the panicked child and instruct the confused daughter. She does not

give up on seeking help for Helen and deftly keeps suggesting to her husband that he write the oculist. Helen's mother does have a weakness, however. She claims that Helen's affliction is not her daughter's fault so she is not disciplined.

As the family discusses Helen, she "paws his papers to the floor." The use of the word "paws" implies a mindless movement of some animal. This conveys a perception of Helen and her development within her family. This becomes very apparent when the captain admonishes his family to stop focusing on Helen but rather her baby sister. He complains how much he has had to put up with, and his wife turns it on him to realize that it is Helen's suffering. This substantiates some of James's implications regarding his father.

The father, however, is not depicted as completely self-serving. When Helen tears the buttons off Aunt Ev's dress, the captain defends his daughter. He sees her as unfortunate and will indulge her in some instances. Helen's tirade over the missing eyes is not simply a manifestation of a recalcitrant child; it demonstrates her sharpness. As Aunt Ev says, "This child has more sense than all these men Kellers, if there's any way to reach that mind of hers." This attests to Helen's intelligence and propels the action forward with the suggestion of how to reach that mind.

After Helen's outburst at not being sighted and the captain's acquiescence to his wife's wishes he write the oculist, the Kellers disperse, all but Helen and her mother, on whom a light shines. This light gives emphasis to these two women working desperately to communicate with each other. The light continues to shine on the next bit of action, and it also serves to symbolize the light that will eventually shine for Helen with the introduction of Annie Sullivan, the principal character in the next sequence of events.

When Anagnos talks to Annie regarding her new employment, the stage lights remain on Annie and her Greek mentor is in the shadows, drawing attention to a central character in this play. Audiences are able to study the solidity of body and character that Annie possesses, especially in contrast to the stocky Anagnos when he eventually enters the light.

Her teacher-mentor Anagnos tries to impact Annie with the importance of toning down her resistance to ideas and people. She has a fearsome temper and a strong will, and Anagnos wants her to remember that in dealing with Helen and her family. He also tries to appraise her of Helen's situation, of which little is known. No one knows Helen's abilities at this point and, as Anagnos tells her, "No one expects you to work miracles." This is obviously the origin of the play's title.

The scene shifts to the Keller household and they are waiting for Annie. Apparently, they have met a few trains and their new teacher was on none. James drives Kate to the station and, in saying goodbye to the family, more of the relationship between James and his father is unveiled. James uses a formal name for his father's wife, indicating that he has not accepted this marriage. Captain Keller tries to correct his son, after reprimanding him for his laziness. After son and wife have left, the characterization of

Keller is further revealed through his interaction with Helen. He shares with the child his loneliness: wife gone, son angry, daughter distant and food late.

When James and Kate reach the train station, and Kate and Annie meet, the two women size each other up. Kate sees a low-class Irish working girl. The fact that Annie is young and the fact that she is Irish both work against the teacher. Kate, as the wife of Captain Keller, considers herself southern "nobility," or so she is trained, and as such, she adheres to rigid class structure and prejudices. She has little faith in Annie until this young woman presents her credentials.

When they arrive at the Keller home, Keller scrutinizes Annie. He does not believe a young, blind Yankee can teach his daughter. His southern bias clouds his judgment, but Annie moves forward. In her first lesson with Helen, she tries to teach the girl to spell and identify "doll" and "cake," but James watches and questions her continually. When Annie physically restrains Helen, James tells the teacher that Helen has no knowledge of anything, to which Annie responds, "Of course not, who expects her to, now?" Annie has already seen that no one in the household expected anything from Helen and she gave nothing in return. It is clear Annie's expectations for Helen will be high.

When, in the course of their lesson, Helen locks Annie in the room, a wonderfully comical scene follows. It is almost vaudevillian in James's exchange with his father at the dinner table and the rescue scene- James getting the ladder twice. James finishes this comic relief when he spells l-a-d-d-e-r for Annie. This scene breaks the tension of most of the first act. A child is handicapped and her parents do not know how to deal with her and reach her. It is an overbearing situation, yet Gibson brings humor into the playplay, as it is necessary in the theater and life. It also implies that not everything in the Keller home is without humor.

The concluding scene in the first act is of Helen and Annie in the yard. They face each other as adversaries and comrades, paradoxically. Annie sees herself in the stubborn child and is equally obstinate. Annie also knows she has no other place to go so she has to succeed in this assignment. She accepts the challenge of the undisciplined and uneducated Helen Keller.

Act 2

Act 2 Summary

It is now evening, and the focus is on Annie and Helen in Annie's room. Annie is writing a letter, saying each work aloud, and Helen is mothering her doll in an emptied drawer. Annie writes that the lack of discipline has had a negative effect on her student, and she hopes she can control this child without Helen losing some of her spirit.

It is while Annie is writing that Helen explores her desk and knocks over the inkwell. Annie seizes this opportunity to spell "ink" into Helen's hand. The first time she spells it Helen resists, but the second time Helen offers her hand. Then Annie tries to occupy her student with a sewing card, teaching her the motions of stitching. When Helen pricks her finger, the child hurls the doll's head to the floor, only to be intercepted by the diving Annie. Annie mimes knocking the doll's head on the floor, scowls into Helen's hand and then spells "Bad, girl." Then Annie acts out loving the doll, smiles into Helen's hand and spells "Good, girl." Helen imitates these facial expressions, cares for her doll and then intentionally drops a pitcher to the floor. Annie is very angry and studies Helen. Helen goes back to the sewing card, and Annie acts out the movements of stitching for the girl again. It is now that Mrs. Keller joins teacher and student.

Kate Keller inquires as to what Annie does in Helen's hand. Annie tells her that she is "just making conversation." Annie tells the child's mother that she knows Helen does not understand but compares Helen's language development to that of Mildred, a baby who, after millions of sounds and words, will master the language. Kate shares her husband's skepticism of Annie and her techniques but ultimately asks Annie to teach her the letters.

Kate then tells Annie it's time for Helen to go to bed. When the teacher tries to take away the sewing card from Helen, the child stabs her. Kate immediately offers her daughter a sweet and Annie is angered, commenting to the parent that her child was rewarded for such bad behavior. Kate, not apologizing, simply explains that they often have to bribe the stubborn child.

Viney enters the ray of light on the pump, and, after filling the pitcher, transitions into the dining room where the family eats breakfast. Keller and his son discuss the Civil War and the loss of the south. The captain defends the south because it is his opinion that the battle at Vicksburg was lost due to poor defense by "a half-breed Yankee traitor like Pemberton."

As the men talk, Helen circles the table putting her hands into everyone's food. Annie watches this pattern, as the family doesn't even seem to notice. When Helen gets to Annie's plate, the teacher removes Helen's hand. The overindulged child cannot accept this; she goes to the plate a second time. Annie restrains her and the pattern continues. Finally, Helen acts out, and Keller explains to Annie that letting Helen take off their

plates is the only way the family can enjoy a meal. He orders Viney to bring another plate for Annie, but Annie refuses, bringing a remark by James regarding that Yankee victory at Vicksburg.

Annie continues to restrain Helen, and Keller becomes increasingly outraged at the situation. He asks his employee to back down, but Annie asks them all to leave the room. While holding onto the struggling Helen, Annie shares with them the fact that giving Helen everything she wants does not get her ready for a real life, a real world. She calls Helen "a badly spoiled child," and James agrees.

When Annie manages to get them all out of the dining room, the outraged Keller tells his wife to warn this teacher that she will be discharged if she does not heed the wishes of her employer. Kate resents the fact that her husband leaves for work and makes this message her responsibility. James again adds levity when he addresses Annie from behind the door with, "If it takes all summer, general," and he supports the teacher in his discussion with Kate.

In the dining room, Annie prepares for battle. She puts the door keys just our of Helen's reach and clears the table of plates of all but the two who are about to confront each other. Helen throws a tantrum on the floor and eventually reaches up to find no one in Annie's chair. Helen's hand dives for Annie's place, only to be intercepted by Annie's hand. The teacher then places Helen's hand on her own plate. Helen responds with the hammering of her heels while on the floor. Annie moves into her chair, Helen, still on the floor, feels for Annie in her chair, and waits for something to happen. When nothing does, Helen resumes kicking, waits again, and kicks again.

Annie tries to eat and, after toasting Helen with the now unwanted food, makes herself chew it. Helen grabs Annie's chair and tries to pull it out from under the teacher. Annie slaps the chair down with her bottom and throws all her weight into the chair. Helen again tries to tip over Annie, and when she fails, she starts a series of pinches on her teacher. The young woman is initially taken aback by this tactic, but then she continues with the eating motions as Helen follows the teacher with those movements. The child then tries to grab Annie's food again only to have her teacher move Helen's hand repeatedly to her own plate. The incensed Helen responds with brutal pinches, incurring the anger of Annie who slaps Helen's hand away. This sends the pupil into a punching frenzy. Helen punches Annie's ear, Annie retaliates with a slap on Helen's face,face and the process repeats until Helen calls a stalemate, realizing she has met a worthy adversary.

Helen backs down and tries to find any remaining family members in their chairs. She begins at her mother's chair and ends there, eventually making the cheek sign so often used before to identify Kate. The only response Annie gives Helen is to spell in the girl's hand, but that is not what the child wants. She gropes to both doors, and finding them locked, she bangs on one. Annie grabs the girl and brings her back to the child's place at the table.

Eleven times Helen tries to escape from her chair. She dodges left, right, over and under the table, but each time Annie grabs her and returns her to her place. Helen tries to fake out the teacher, but Annie will not let the child escape. As her last attempt, Helen extends appendages and Annie immediately makes contact. Helen finally acquiesces to the teacher as the pupil slumps in her chair.

Annie returns to her meal, and Helen feels Annie's movements. The child then reaches for her own plate and Annie retrieves it and some of its food from the floor, where it had been pushed earlier. Annie touches Helen's fist to the plate, and neither Helen nor Annie move. Suddenly, though, Helen grabs at her food and cleans up the plate. Annie enjoys one moment of victory.

When Helen is done with her meal, she holds her plate up for seconds. Annie takes food from the other plates in the room, and after a moment of hesitation, decides to introduce the spoon to Helen. Annie puts Helen's plate in front of the child, and then places a spoon in the girl's hand. Helen drops it twice and Annie replaces it twice. Helen then throws it on the floor, and Annie whisks the child out of the chair and wrestles her on the floor until Helen has the spoon again in her grasp. This is repeated a second time, but this time Annie loses grasp of Helen, and the stubborn child firmly anchors herself on the chair with her hands. Annie eventually loosens Helen's grasp and topples the chair but manages to get the girl back in the now upright chair. Helen throws the spoon again.

Annie will not be beaten, so she removes the plate of food before Helen and collects all the spoons in the room. Helen, who was pounding on the table, stops banging when the smell of food reaches her. Annie tempts the child with the aroma of the plate's contents, and after she returns the plate to Helen, Annie places a spoon in the girl's hand. Annie throws each spoon away. With the last spoon, Annie tries to make Helen take in food from it, but the child closes her lips. Eventually Helen accepts the food but spits it out in Annie's face. Annie, in turn, throws a pitcher of water at Helen who gasps. Annie then forces another spoonful into Helen's mouth from the directed spoon in hand.

While Helen eats, Annie spells "g-o-o-d g-i-r-l" into Helen's palm. Annie then lifts Helen's hand to the teacher's nodding head, but the recalcitrant child grabs the young woman's hair. Annie is brought down with the pain and Helen beats at her, the two women rolling under the table. The lights fade on the fighting twosome.

The passage of time is conveyed through the noon tolling of the bell. Viney, Martha, Percy, Kate and Aunt Ev are in the yard looking toward the house. Kate and Viney send the two children on their way, and Aunt Ev reminds Kate of the Keller lineage. Apparently Gen. Robert E. Lee and the Kellers are cousins, and the only Sullivan from Boston Aunt Ev ever heard of is the boxer John L., discrediting Annie.

As Viney is taking Mildred from her mother's arms, Helen darts awkwardly down the porch steps, and, when she recognizes her mother, grabs onto her legs. An equally disheveled Annie stands on the porch, battle wearied. Annie tells Kate that Helen ate with a spoon from her plate and folded her napkin. This news takes astounds Kate. She

repeats it to savor its impact. Annie leaves the family to go to her room, and Viney tells her it won't be long until dinner.

Kate staggers up to her room, and Kate keeps repeating Helen's accomplishment. The mother caresses her daughter's gnarled hair and tears fill her eyes. She does not weep aloud, but "Kate for the first time that we see loses her protracted war with grief."

Annie, likewise, continues to fight her war with grief. In her room she recalls a professional sounding voice relating to the Perkins report she holds in her hand talk about helping a blind, deaf and mute woman with her soul, but through that voice comes the sound of her brother asking her if it hurts to be dead. Annie tries to shake his voice by returning to the report, but the voices of old women tell her there are schools elsewhere that teach the blind. The boy's voice returns begging reassurance from Annie that she won't go to school but will stay to take care of him. The words "forever and ever and ever" are added to that request. This phrase is often repeated through the play in regard to her memories of Jimmy and his need for her care. Annie's memory now goes back to completed statement of a doctor, a half-remembered statement from earlier in the play. The doctor informs Annie that her brother would soon be going on a journey. The boy screams in terror, calls Annie's name, and the teacher drops her book. She sees her suitcase but the voices still grip her. She is leaving some place and the old women tell her never to tell anyone where she has been. Her brother tells her that it does in fact hurt to be dead. Annie is overwhelmed, and buries her head in the bed.

Annie remembers the professional sounding man again. He makes his point that people would help someone buried alive in a cave, even if she were handicapped, so why wouldn't people save that same woman's soul. Returning to the present, Annie sees her suitcase again, and, after a moment's hesitation, begins to fill it with her belongings from the drawers.

The focus now shifts from Annie to Captain Keller in the garden house. He is yelling at his wife about Annie's behavior. He believes this teacher is ineffective because Helen runs from her now. Kate is still relishing in the fact that Helen folded her napkin, but her husband will not yield in his decision to terminate Annie Sullivan's employment with them.

Annie joins the couple and the captain expects Kate to carry out his verdict, but the wife turns it right back on her husband. He staggers through phrases of how discontented he is with Annie's behavior while Annie peruses the garden house. The captain is annoyed that she wears her glasses while he's speaking to her, and she tells him that she is extremely light sensitive, but she removes them for his comfort. Seeing Annie's eye sensitivity as she looks toward the lamp, Keller tells her to put them back on. At this point, he reconsiders firing her, and tells her she may stay under two conditions. She will respect and obey him, and she must convince him there is hope for Helen.

Annie cannot agree with the captain's second stipulation. She does not believe Helen can learn given the people who surround her. Mrs. Keller begs Annie to have faith in her daughter; she was very bright before her illness. Annie, however, does not see any

handicapping condition as Helen's biggest drawback to learning. She tells the parents that, "I think it's your love. And pity," that keeps Helen from learning. She believes Helen has been treated like a pet and Kate informs the teacher that before she arrived, they considered sending Helen to an asylum. Kate, having visited one, and recalls the filth and poor treatment in it. She is desperate to have Annie stay.

Annie then explains why she appears to have lost faith in her pupil. The teacher believes that Helen's growth cannot occur unless Annie has complete charge of her; no family members are to be around or interfere. Helen must be completely dependent upon Annie for everything, and Annie has already packed some of her things to move out with Helen. Annie tells the captain and Kate that she will take as long as necessary, and by removing herself from the captain's house, Annie will no longer have the opportunity to be rude to him.

Keller is skeptical and asks Annie if he denies her this request, will she leave them. Annie asks if Helen would then be sent to an asylum. In a rare moment, Annie engages in a high degree of disclosure and tells the Kellers about her stay in an almshouse. She then goes into detail about the filth and disease that surrounded her brother Jimmie and her. The two Sullivans were put with women of communicable diseases. They watched seventy out of the eighty illegitimate children die in the first year after their birth. They played with rats instead of toys and played in the deadhouse. Annie taunts the Kellers with the reassurance that Helen will do well there since she is strong.

After hearing the disgusting and depressing details of Annie's experiences, the Kellers ask where the teacher would take their daughter. Humorously the teacher tells them to Italy, but she really wants to use the garden house they are in now in. It should be furnished and Percy could stay with them to run errands. After a long ride, Helen is to be brought there. The captain agrees to two weeks, and Annie agrees to get Helen to tolerate her in that time.

After Keller leaves the garden house, Kate questions Annie's motives for staying. Kate no longer believes what Annie said earlier about not loving; she sees Annie as loving her daughter. But Annie throws it in Kate's face, saying she is doing it for the money, but Kate extends her hand to Annie who throws her fist in the shape of a letter into Kate's palm, her first letter. Kate follows her husband out of the garden house.

Activity flourishes in and around the garden house. Furniture, supplies and toys are moved into this temporary home, and James appears with Annie's suitcase. James implies that Annie will use force to tame and teach his half-sister, but Annie assures him that it is Helen's curiosity that will ensure the teacher's success. James, however, believes that Helen may have lost hope and will not be able to learn. James implores pity for Helen, but Annie does not relent.

Now it is time for the Kellers to arrive. Keller, Kate and Helen arrive at the house in riding apparel. Kate assures Annie that Helen has no idea where she is after riding for two hours. Helen is urged into the room, and she stumbles over a box but finds her dolls

and other toys. She is then concerned as to her whereabouts and makes the sign for her mother, but Annie intercepts. Helen retracts and again signs for her mother.

Annie asks the parents to leave, and Kate requests kindness for her daughter in their absence. Helen is panic stricken and flails at everything in the room, signing for her mother repeatedly. Annie tries to calm the frightened child, but Helen will have nothing to do with the teacher. Helen tries to escape through the doors but finds every exit locked and has no sense of orientation. Annie questions her mission.

Back at the Keller home, the captain and his son have words. James throws up the fact that Annie gets whatever she wants, and he wonders what he has to do for the same indulgence. Keller brutally grabs James's wrist and twists it until James is almost to his knees. The father asks what it is that James wants, and James simply wants his father to remember this son's mother, Keller's first wife. James leaves Kate and Keller, and Keller eventually comes to the realization that his treatment of James is similar to Annie's treatment of Helen, both trying to instill respect.

Action now returns to the garden house where Annie is plagued by her brother's voice from the past. She will not let any pity get in her way, so she quickly shakes the memory off and tries to get close to Helen. The child recoils at Annie's touch and Helen hides under the bed.

Unable to get the child out with a pound on the floor, Annie solicits the sleeping Percy's help. She wakes him up and asks if he wants to play a game with Helen. The servant agrees, and Annie asks him to reach under the bed and touch Helen's hand. At first, Helen retracts from Percy, but the second attempt is met with recognition. She scurries out from under the bed and hugs her playmate.

Percy is afraid Helen might hit him, but Annie continues her "game." She makes a "c" in Percy's hand. Helen gropes to find out what Percy's other hand is doing and encounters Annie's cupped fingers. Helen backs away, but eventually returns to find out what else these hands are doing. She grabs Percy's other hand and spells out "c-a-k-e" in it. She and Percy are both rewarded by milk and cake, but Helen will not accept it from Annie. Annie then decides to continue spelling into Percy's hand the word "m-i-l-k."

Helen tries to move Percy's hand so she can be spelled to, but Annie pushes the child away. This happens repeatedly until Helen finally knocks Percy away and Annie spells in Helen's hand. Helen spells it back to Annie, and Annie quietly rejoices in the fact she can again touch Helen. Helen drinks her milk and goes to bed. Annie, forever the realist, does not enjoy this small victory long;, she realizes that, "Now all I have to teach you in□ one word. Everything."

While Helen sleeps, Annie takes Helen's doll to the rocking chair and begins to mother the toy, singing *Mockingbird* to it. Annie's verse draws attention to a mockingbird that doesn't sing, while each subsequent verse highlights another item that isn't working properly and with each verse a light falls upon James, Keller and Kate.

Act 2 Analysis

Important information is shared regarding Helen's background in this act. Earlier in the play, Helen is offered sweets three times before dinner to be placated. Her mother actually rewards the stabbing child with a sweet. In addition to her being spoiled, this scene conveys the fact that Helen has had no moral training. Annie has to convey the concepts of good and bad to the child in this act, yet she cannot be held responsible for what she does not know. Furthermore, this scene reveals the need of the family, the mother, in particular, to compensate for Helen's handicap. In all likelihood, Kate Keller feels responsible for Helen's condition.

The passage of time is shown in a shaft of light and a cockcrow. The simulated beam of first light hits the water pump in the yard. This is highly symbolic of what will happen later in the play. In non-verbal language, it foreshadows future events, keeping in mind the image of first light, and water as the source of life.

From that pump, Viney returns with a full pitcher, and father and son argue the war. James asserts that Vicksburg was lost because of Grant's abstinence. This parallels what has been going on in their own house. It is Helen's abstinence that has ruled that house and led to its current defeat. It is also the family's stubbornness that has really impaired Helen.

In lengthy stage directions, the war referred to at the beginning of this act parallels the battle that unfolds between two stubborn women. They wrestle, toss water, grab hair, and slap. When they finally emerge, reference is made to the battle at Vicksburg discussed at the opening of this act. Kate Keller, as well, is said to be at war with grief as she finally succumbs to her daughter's ongoing struggle for normalcy. Kate is brought down in her war by the knowledge that Helen folded her napkin, a simple yet deeply symbolic accomplishment. In a culture of social structure and its accompanying appropriate behaviors, such as pervades the post-bellum South, the folding of the napkin represents Helen's introduction into humanity and that society. Helen no longer simply eats; she folds her napkin- she is a human of refinement, if only for this mother.

Kate is not the only one facing a war; Annie is also in one. She not only battles Helen and the girl's family, but also the memory of her background. Her memories inform readers that her brother relied on her for his safety and well being, and Annie promised to do that, but at some point, her brother died and she feels responsible. The words "forever and ever" repeat in her memories. She will forever and ever be haunted by her memories and guilt.

When the focus shifts to Keller, he tells his wife to fire Annie. He is concerned that Kate will have more work now. She is already overworked with children and household responsibilities. The Kellers are not very wealthy and Kate has to help with farm chores in addition to her household responsibilities. Helen's father sees Annie as simply a woman from the North, and those are definitely two strikes against her. He is "not accustomed to rudeness in servants or women," joining the two in social position and intelligence. His patriarchal southern prejudice is obvious.

In the discussion about Annie's requested control over Helen, the captain seems to soften to the idea after the young woman's account of the almshouse. He listens to the stipulations of the proposed arrangement, and then asks the teacher if she loves Helen. Annie, in turn, asks the captain the same. It is a poignant moment when a secondary theme to the play becomes evident. In addition to the triumph of the human spirit, this play is also about tough love, as we have come to call it today. It is about the need to teach what is right at all costs.

After the decision has been made to let Annie have complete control over Helen for two weeks in the garden house, furniture is moved in from all sides into the area seen as the garden house. There is no recognition of walls, just as Helen knows no physical boundaries other than through touch.

After Helen and Annie's first encounter and lesson in the garden house, Annie settles in to give her love to Helen's doll. The song she sings to this surrogate child tells of broken items and Momma's replacement of each one. Lights accent Helen, Annie, James, Keller and Kate, the latter three who connect to the music while faintly hearing the melody. Symbolically this is very powerful because all of the characters highlighted are broken and no one has yet found a way to get something fixed, so the pattern, or in this case verses, continue.

Act 3

Act 3 Summary

A weary Annie Sullivan continues spelling into Helen's hand. She remarks that a chick will eventually come out of its shell and Helen must too. While Annie spells to Helen, Viney freshens up a bedroom in the Keller house. Downstairs James is sharing with his father and stepmother how normal and enjoyable the house has been for the past two weeks. His father reprimands him for his lack of sensitivity in front of Kate. Keller tells James that the separation of child and mother is difficult, but so is disappointment in a child. James understands his father's meaning and apologizes to Kate who compassionately understands the truth in James's words. James then solicits Kate for her help in dealing with his father, and Kate informs James that it is up to James to confront and deal with his father. James then asks for and receives Kate's friendship.

From there, Kate goes to the garden house where she sees Helen stitching and Annie pouring over a dictionary while she writes a letter. Annie's words are full of frustration and self-doubt, and when her eyes ache so badly, she lowers her glasses. Kate speaks to her. Helen's mother is overwhelmed at the picture of civility her daughter now presents. Helen eats the food her mother brought in a mannerly way and sits calmly to sew. Kate sees tremendous growth in Helen, but Annie shares her disappointment in the fact that her pupil still doesn't connect spelling with word meaning.

Kate asks Annie how she intends to convey that, and Annie responds that she will keep spelling until something awakens in Helen's brain. Annie encourages Mrs. Keller to spell to her now so Kate will be ready to converse with her daughter when these finger movements cease to be a game. Through sign, Annie asks for more time, but as Kate is about to refuse, Keller enters the house with Belle. Annie demands her full day until Helen is returned to their care. She orders Keller out, but lets Belle stay. The captain calls her a tyrant, which she turns on him.

Annie tries to reason with the Kellers that if they are pleased with Helen's progress so far, why not give them another week. Mr. Keller admits missing Helen, and he is grateful to Annie for forcing him to come to that realization. Mrs. Keller must have her daughter back, and Annie is denied her request. They all watch as Helen spells into Belle's paw, and the captain sees the futility in this, much the same, as he believes it to be for Helen. Annie, however, will not give up. The captain challenges Annie on her motives. He states, "You make us see how we indulge her for our sake. Is the opposite true, for you?" Annie tells the parents that Helen is hers until 6:00.

Annie continues to teach Helen the rest of the day. She thrusts Helen's hand into a water pitcher to understand water's meaning, but Helen simply puts Belle's paw in, as demonstrated by her teacher. Annie tries words all afternoon, but Helen simply mimics the signing. Annie is deeply saddened that she cannot find the key to unlock understanding for her pupil.

It is six o'clock and the servants come to the garden house for the furnishings and personal belongings, and the mother for her daughter. Kate waits as Annie spells mother into the child's hand, but then Kate orders Annie to let Helen come, and the daughter gropes tentatively. She reaches her mother, they embrace, and Kate carries her "baby" to the back of the house.

Annie is now alone and washes her eyes with her eyecup. Voices of Anagnos, Jimmie and herself haunt her. Jimmie's "forever and ever" torment her, and the realization that she perhaps owes someone something rather than feeling victimized dawns on the teacher. It is then that Keller appears at her doorway and presents her with her first month's salary. She feels undeserving of it, as Helen still shows no sign of understanding. Annie tells Keller that not understanding is a form of blindness and she cannot accept that. The captain is still grateful for the transformation in Helen. Annie believes that to obey blindly is just that a blindness. She wants so much more for Helen, and she will continue to get that from her pupil. The captain asks to escort Annie to the dining room in his home. She accepts.

In the dining room, Helen enjoys smelling and felling familiar objects. She checks to make sure both doors open and hands the keys to her mother who puts them in her pocket. The family begins a civil dinner, but Helen pulls off her napkin that Annie replaces three times, each time bringing the attention of a new family member.

Annie refuses to accept such behavior and pulls Helen's plate away from her. Helen responds by kicking under the table. Annie grabs the child throwing a tantrum and starts to drag her out of the room, but Helen grabs her mother's skirt. The two women then argue over what's best for Helen. Aunt Ev, who has joined the family for dinner, sees no harm in Helen dropping a napkin and Kate, who has prepared Helen's favorite foods, feels she has barely seen her child in two weeks. Annie throws up her belief that Helen is testing them, but James turns it on Annie and asks if the child is not testing the teacher.

Annie entertains James's notion and admits that the child is actually testing her and how far the teacher will go upholding what has been learned. Kate sees the wisdom in this and turns her daughter over to Annie. Keller, however, countermands his wife when he sees Helen's repulsion to Annie's touch. He regains custody of his daughter.

Keller takes his now docile child, leads her to her chair, and places a fork in his daughter's hand. Helen appears to be appraising the situation and proceeds to throw her fork on the floor. She grabs her food with her hands and shoves it into her mouth. Then Helen reaches for the food on Annie's plate and Annie grabs the child's wrist. Helen gropes about the table, and finding a water pitcher, swings it at Annie, who intercepts it with her elbow. Annie stands, grabs Helen and leaves the room, prepared to make Helen refill the pitcher.

Aunt Ev is appalled that Keller would let Annie talk to him like that. Keller, seeing the correctness of her challenge, chases after Annie and Helen. James, "with shaky resolve," blocks his father's exit. James tells his father that everyone else is right and

that perhaps for once Keller could be in error. Kate watches this confrontation, and when she starts to intervene, Keller holds his hand up and orders everyone to be seated. They all sit, Keller watching James as he is asked politely to sit. They all remain in the dining room.

While this battle is waged, Annie fights another one outside at the water pump. The teacher orchestrates Helen's working of the pump and then, spelling "w-a-t-e-r," thrusts the pitcher at Helen. Annie takes over the working of the pump as an awakened look takes over Helen's face. From that face come the words "Wah. Wah." Helen grabs for Annie's hand, and she spells out "w-a-t-e-r," pumps some more and spells it again.

Next, the child feels the ground and reaches for her teacher to spell it. These are frenzied moments of awakening. The pump itself and then a step are what Helen must have names for next. Having gotten the name for trellis, Annie alternates between spelling into Helen's palm and calling for Mrs. Keller. Helen climbs the porch steps and rings the bell.

Aunt Ev runs to the window and James remains seated, wiping his brow. Father and mother run out to see their daughter. Helen rushes to Kate, and Annie spells

"Mother" for her. Annie then spells "Papa" for Keller when Helen touches him. The three embrace in joyous recognition, but Helen breaks loose in search of Annie, who spells the word "Teacher" in her pupil's hand.

Helen still appears somewhat tentative about her teacher and returns to her parents. She pats her mother's pocket and Kate gives her daughter the keys. Helen then spells for the first time a word for Kate "Teacher." Kate is overwhelmed with joy and sadness as her daughter grows away from her. Kate gives up her child to the teacher sitting by the pump.

Helen finds her way across the yard to Annie and hands her the keys. Helen moves into Annie's arms, slides her glasses aside and kisses her teacher on the cheek. Annie surrounds the child with her arms.

This is hard for Mrs. Keller to witness, and her husband leads her back into the house. The lights now focus on the teacher and her pupil by the water pump. Annie whispers and spells into Helen's hand, "I, love, Helen." Hugging the child closer, Annie adds, "Forever, and..." and not hearing anymore voices, finishes with "ever."

In their home, Keller comforts his grieving wife. James helps Kate sit and Keller acknowledges his son. Aunt Ev humbly moves to the door to welcome Annie being led into the room by Helen.

Act 3 Analysis

In this scene, the playwright interjects the spelling of Annie's words into the dialogue in the Keller household. In the metaphor established earlier in the play, the war fronts are

about to be brought together in this final act. There is, of course, the war between Helen and Annie, and then there is the war between father and son.

At Helen's homecoming dinner, James says grace, a Biblical passage about Jacob wrestling with an angel. He then refers to Annie as an angel, acknowledging her accomplishment. Aunt Ev does not see the appropriateness of this prayer and a discussion follows. It is through this that Helen starts to act out again. James and Annie implore Kate's resistance to such behaviors, and eventually she turns over control of her unruly child again to Annie. This scene brings the characterization of Kate to full development. She is a woman who wants the best for her child even if it is not herself. Her example of love is admirable.

It is after Kate's submission to Annie that Keller rescinds her wishes. He will calm the untamed child and appears to do so at first, but then Helen acts out again and Annie takes over. When she restrains the wild child and starts to leave the room, Annie tells everyone, "Don't get up!" In addition to being somewhat ironic given the situation, this exclamatory statement is also indicative of the cause of Helen's problem. The family has sat and watched as this child ruled their lives with rudeness and filth.

Aunt Ev is outraged that Annie speaks to her employee in that way. She refers to Annie as "a creature who works for you." This demonstrates Aunt Ev's old southern mentality even though this is after the Civil War. The war caused many older southerners to hold on to their old traditions and beliefs since so much of their world was changing. Aunt Ev considers hers an old southern family, and as such is entitled to unquestioned respect and obedience. If you are not of the old order, you are simply a "creature." Add to that mentality the fact that she is Yankee, as shared earlier in the play, and Aunt Ev cannot understand such inappropriate behavior.

What follows Annie's removal of the misbehaving child is pivotal to the climax of one of the battles that has raged in the play. James blocks his father's exit from the room. He makes a decisive move to stand up to his father for what he knows is right. This results in mutual understanding and respect for both men.

Oppositional forces are also at work out in the yard. Annie will not let Helen revert to her uncontrolled behavior, and over the pump, she struggles to make Helen fill the pitcher. It is then that the miracle occurs. With the universal symbol of life, it is water that brings recognition to Helen. Her life of understanding begins with water pouring over her hands.

Once Helen realizes there are names for everything, she can't get enough of Annie's spellings. At one point, Helen goes up onto her porch and rings the bell. It happens that the town's hourly bells are ringing simultaneously, signifying the widespread acknowledgment and celebration of Helen's accomplishment. Symbolically, the recognition of word meaning not only changed Helen's life, but through Helen's resultant work and discoveries, it also changed the lives of many hearing- and vision-impaired people.

Helen's family likewise shares in this moment, and it is Kate's unconditional love for Helen that allows the child to learn. Kate has had this child as a focus in her life for over six years, and with Helen's breakthrough, that will change. The attention will now shift to Annie as her daughter's teacher. In a symbolic move in the yard, Kate gently directs Helen toward Annie, and then moves into the house.

Annie, too, has grown through this experience. She now uses the words she once used with her brother, promising to be there for him always. She also tells Helen she loves her, even though she once thought herself incapable of love again. She no longer hears the voices of the past, and Annie and Helen are ready to move into the future together.

Characters

Anagnos (ah-nah-nyose)

Anagnos, described by Gibson as "a stocky bearded man," is Annie's counselor at the Perkins Institution for the Blind. It is Anagnos who places Annie in the Kellers's home as a governess for Helen. He is loving and kindly with Annie, but he can also be stern when necessary.

Annie

See Anne Sullivan

Aunt Ev

Aunt Ev is described by Gibson as "a benign visitor" who serves as a catalyst for the Kellers's first contact with the Perkins Institute. Aunt Ev is a talkative woman who often tries to be helpful, but who can be a bit intrusive. She sometimes oversteps her place as a visitor in the Keller household and at one point even threatens to take matters into her own hands.

Blind Girls

The "Blind Girls," who range in age from 8 to 17 years old, are the girls at the Perkins Institution with whom Annie has the closest relationship. Together they are like sisters: excited, lively, and loving. The youngest of the girls has difficulty accepting Annie's departure to the Kellers. When Annie is leaving, it is the Blind Girls who give her the smoked glasses that became Annie's trademark. They also give Annie a doll to give to Helen.

Doctor

The doctor opens the play with Helen's parents, Kate and Arthur. He is an elderly man who provides comforting words to Helen's parents after their child has just come out of a high fever caused by what the Doctor calls "acute congestion of the stomach and brain."

Keller

See Captain Arthur Keller

Captain Arthur Keller

Captain Keller is referred to by Gibson as "a hearty gentleman in his forties" and throughout the play displays the greatest measure of doubt in Annie's ability to teach his daughter. Keller is a newspaper publisher who possesses much power, both in the business world and in his own home. Nothing is done and no decisions are made in the Keller household without his consent. When Annie first arrives on the scene, Keller is extremely skeptical of her abilities, especially because of her young age. He is also not used to Annie's forthrightness and considers her to be rude and unladylike. Throughout *The Miracle Worker* Annie fights the constant battle to win Captain Keller's acceptance in order to keep her job, but she does not win his respect until after she has worked her "miracle" with Helen.

Helen Keller

Helen, the recipient of the miracle that is worked in the play, is the six-and-a-half year old daughter of Kate and Arthur who is left deaf and blind after a serious illness as an infant. Her struggle to communicate and relate to the world around her necessitates the arrival of Annie to the Keller household. Despite her handicaps, Helen is a girl of exceptional intellect and cleverness, but it is her lack of restraint that leaves her thrashing around the world in which she lives without any focus or discipline. During the action of the play, the emphasis is mostly on Helen's battle of wills with Annie. Annie tries to get Helen to connect the hand symbols that she leaches her with the world around her. At the climax of the play, this connection is finally made with a substance that Helen remembers from a time in her infancy prior to her illness, namely water.

James Keller

James, Captain Keller's son from a previous marriage, is described by Gibson as "an indolent young man." James is often flippant and sarcastic, largely due to his inner turmoil. With all of the attention being paid to Helen and the baby, James is easily hurt and wears this hurt openly. When Annie arrives he is at first skeptical but eventually becomes one of her strongest supporters. This support reveals itself as important in Annie's struggle to prove to Captain Keller that she is a capable teacher.

Kate Keller

Defined at the play's beginning as "a young gentlewoman with a sweet girlish face," Kate Keller develops into a woman consumed with guilt over her daughter Helen's condition. She is patient and gentle wiih Helen, but when Annie arrives Kate must learn that it is sometimes necessary to use force while trying to teach her daughter. At first Kate has a difficult time letting Annie take control of Helen's discipline, but after witnessing Annie's success with Helen in two short weeks at the Keller household, Kate

realizes that she must let go, relying upon her strength to help her do the best thing for her child.

Martha

Martha, a young African-American child, is playful and curious, and can also be a bit bossy. especially with Percy. In the scenes that she shares with Helen, Martha is both amazed and terrified by Helen's behavior.

Offstage Voices

The "Offstage Voices" in *The Miracle Worker* serve different functions at different times in the play, but they are always directly related to Annie and her struggle. One of the recurring voices is "Boy's Voice," which is the voice of Annie's dead younger brother, Jimmie. This voice, along with the others, represents Annie's internal struggle with feelings of guilt, her motivation to succeed widi Helen, and her will to continue living her own life.

Percy

Percy is a young African-American child who seems to be a bit younger than Martha, Although Percy is frightened of Helen, he becomes directly involved in Helen's education while he is staying in the garden house with Annie and Helen.

Servant

An African-American man who is a servant who helps with some of the heaviest labor around the Keller household. This servant has no lines in the play, and serves mainly to help change the set and move the large and weighty items that Viney, Percy, and Martha cannot move themselves.

Annie Sullivan

Annie Sullivan is the "miracle worker" to which the title of the play refers. She first appears while she is still at the Perkins Institution for the Blind, where she has lived as a pupil since she was a child. Everything that she has learned, including the sign language that she later uses with Helen, she has learned at Perkins. When Anagnos asks her to become Helen's governess, as requested by the Keller family, it is her first job. At the age of twenty, Annie takes her first step out of the Perkins Institution and into her adult life. From the first moment that she enters the Keller household, Annie is met with skepticism and doubt, mostly because of her young age and lack of experience. This, however, does not deter her from what she feels must be done. When Annie and Helen first meet, Helen is a spoiled child who, because of her family's pity, is allowed to

do whatever she pleases. Annie's first challenge is simply to get her to respond to discipline. After that, her time is devoted to teaching Helen hand symbols in the hope that she will eventually connect them with the objects and people around her, and thus learn "language."

The other characters in the play also offer their own challenges to Annie. Captain Keller almost fires Annie because of what he calls her "Yankee" attitude, and they are constantly at odds with each other over the way that she treats Helen. It is only through clever manipulation that Annie is able to bide time until she can successfully prove herself to him. James Keller, in his usual sarcastic way, finds Annie's methods laughable at first, but he is eventually won over. Kate Keller also meets Annie with skepticism, but she is in such pain over Helen's condition that she is willing to let Annie have whatever she needs in order for Helen to have a better life.

The character who has the most direct effect on Annie throughout the play, however, is her own conscience, represented by the Offstage Voices. These voices represent Annie's past experiences and give her the motivation that she needs to succeed with Helen, Alone, these voices present the only direct threat to Annie's confidence and strong will. The most powerful of them all is the voice of her younger brother, Jimmie, whose death Annie blames on herself. Annie is not able to silence his voice until the end of the play, when the "miracle" finally happens and she clutches Helen to her promising to love her "forever and ever," just as she once promised Jimmie.

Viney

Viney, an African-American woman, is a servant in charge of the daily housework and meals in the Keller household. She is cheerful, practical, and very adept at her job. Viney is also very loving and protective with the Keller children, and although Mildred, the Kellers's baby, is obviously her favorite, she appears to love Helen very much. It is difficult for Viney to know what to do with Helen and how to communicate with her.

Themes

Change and Transformation

The first overriding theme of *The Miracle Worker* is that of change and transformation. The characters of the play very much want to change their lives but are unsure of the extent to which they are willing to transform themselves. When Annie first comes to the Keller household to help with Helen, the Kellers are desperate for any change in their relationship with Helen. Once Annie begins to take charge of the situation, however, she meets with resistance. Mr. Keller is unaccustomed to her brash manner and is reluctant to give her control of Helen, while Kate finds it difficult to watch someone else take charge of her daughter's discipline. Annie is a very stubborn woman who does not give up easily and is able to manipulate both parents into letting her have the chance to prove herself; however, she must fight tooth and nail for this privilege again and again throughout the course of the play.

Throughout the play small changes are made within the lives of the characters, but the true transformation does not occur until the climax of the play when the "miracle" takes place. It is when Helen finally connects the simple hand symbols that Annie has been teaching her with actual objects and people that everything else falls into place. Helen's is utterly changed as she rushes around asking Annie the names of different objects and people. Mr. Keller and Kate finally realize the significance of Annie's methods and are able to believe in what can be done. It is also during this last scene that Kate is finally, after a difficult struggle, able to give Helen to Annie. Gibson describes this in the play's stage directions as "a moment in which [Kate] simultaneously finds and loses a child." Annie's transformation is complete when she can no longer hear the voices of her past haunting her; Annie then realizes that she can devote herself to loving and teaching Helen without and fear or doubt.

Language and Meaning

It is during the climactic scene at the end of Act Three that the second major theme, language and meaning, is resolved. The importance of language is first emphasized in an early scene between Kate and Annie, shortly after Annie's arrival. Kate begins by asking Annie what she plans to teach Helen and Annie answers, "First, last, and in between, language.... Language is to the mind more than light is to the eye." Annie is actually quoting someone else's words at this point, but it is obvious that she realized the significance of it because she was once blind herself and has benefitted from the language that she has learned. The question for Annie is how and whether it is possible to teach Helen language and its meaning.

In the beginning, the work that Annie does with Helen is simply a matter of discipline and repetition. Annie must first struggle to control Helen's extremely strong will, which had never been challenged prior to Annie's arrival. Once Annie begins to have progress

in this area she is able to begin teaching Helen hand symbols for different objects. The hand symbols, at first, are just a repetition game to Helen, who does not make any connection between symbol and object; Annie hopes that through tiiis repetition Helen will eventually start to connect the symbols with actual objects in her world. Annie's doubts about whether this mediod will work, however, are strong and eventually Annie realizes that it is necessary for Helen to depend on her for everything; only then will Helen be motivated to use the symbols that Annie teaches her. Annie convinces the Kellers to give her complete control over Helen and she then uses every method from repetition to force to resentment to keep Helen interested in learning. Annie's methods hold Helen's interest, but Annie expresses her realization of their inadequacy when she tells Helen: "Now all I have to teach you is one word. Everything."

The final connection between language and meaning does come, but not until it seems that all the work that Annie has been in vain. After living secluded in the garden house for two weeks with Helen and Percy, Annie has no choice but to let Helen go back to the Kellers. In a short scene at the dinner table, Helen begins to recede back into her old ways. Annie will have none of it, and in a final battle of wills with Helen over spilled water, she inadvertently helps Helen make that huge leap of connecting language to the world around her. In the triumphant scene at the water pump, Annie can finally exclaim about Helen that "She knows!" It is during this one scene that the themes of change and transformation and language and meaning come together in a demonstration of the power of love and determination and the strength of the human will.

Style

Flashback

The most striking aspect of the construction of *The Miracle Worker* is the style in which the play is written. Although realistic in tone, *The Miracle Worker* often makes use of cinematic shifts in time and space to illuminate the effect of the past on the present in a manner analogous to Arthur Miller's *Death Of A Salesman*. It is clear that Gibson was influenced by *Death Of A Salesman*, which was written in 1949, especially in terms of his use of flashback and stage space. The realistic tone *of The Miracle Worker* comes through in the dialogue, which is similar to the way that people talk to each other in real life. It is Gibson's use of flashback that brings about many of the cinematic shifts within the linear action of the play. The first of these flashback scenes occurs at the play's opening, when the audience learns how Helen Keller first became deaf and blind. The scene depicts the incident which sets the wheels in motion for the rest of the events in the play. Right after diis scene, the audience is taken into "real" time and the action proceeds chronologically.

After this initial scene, the use of flashback in *The Miracle Worker* changes. Unlike *Death Of A Salesman*, in which the characters actually step into the past and play out scenes, Gibson uses offstage voices whenever he wants to set past events against the action of the present. Gibson uses this device solely with the main character, the miracle worker herself, Annie Sullivan. These voices from the past help the audience to understand why Annie does the things that she does while working with Helen in the Keller home. By using these voices, the audience is able to hear and see into Annie's mind. These moments are also the only time that the point of view of the play changes. Most of the time, as in most plays, the action unfolds before the audience's eyes as it happens and not through any particular character. However, in the flashback scenes in which Gibson uses offstage voices, the point of view changes because the audience is getting a glimpse of the past through the mind of Annie Sullivan.

Setting and Use of Space

The cinematic style that Gibson uses also can be seen with the setting of the play and the use of stage space. Gibson's use of stage space is also very similar to Arthur Miller's in *Death Of A Salesman*. Both playwrights establish a particular setting as a base for reality in their plays, in which only the basics are used. In *The Miracle Worker*, Gibson uses only the items that are actually used during the action of the play to establish the Kellers's home, such as the water pump and doors with locks. Anything that is not actually used by the characters in the play should only be suggested. Both playwrights use this particular technique so that the characters can enter into other areas of the play without having to do complicated set changes that would ruin the fluid motion of the play. As Gibson states in the script: "The convention of the staging is one of cutting through time and place, and its essential qualities are fluidity and spatial

counterpoint." By using this convention, the audience is quickly taken from the Keller home to the Perkins Institution for the Blind, the train station, or the garden house, without disturbing the action of the play.

With the use of this staging convention, characters occupying different areas of the stage can affect one another. This can be seen early in the play when Annie is at the Perkins Institution where she is preparing to leave to go to the Keller home. In the scene, Annie is hearing the offstage voices of her past when Anagnos calls out her name, quickly bringing her back to the present. At this point, Annie answers him by calling out "Coming!" Atthe same moment, Kate, who is in the Keller home, catches the word "coming" and "stands half turned and attentive to it, almost as though hearing it." This is a prime example of how Gibson uses the space of the stage to bring worlds in the play together in order to show the effects that they have on each other. In production, the careful use of lighting helps to make these shifts in setting clear to the audience, as if a world is unfolding before their eyes instead of the action being interrupted for a change of set. This keeps the audience involved and helps to make them a part of the world of the play, which is similar to the way film directors use crossfades and other editing devices to manipulate their audience's attention.

Honesty

Although the cinematic style that Gibson uses in *The Miracle Worker* works very well, it is important to note that Gibson placed great importance on the play truthfulness. No matter what devices Gibson used in *The Miracle Worker*, honesty is apparent in his technique. Without honesty, whether dealing with the characters' relationships or the dramatic conflicts that arise in the action of the play, the audience will not connect with the play. It is due to the play's honesty that Gibson is able to use flashback, cinematic shifts, and other devices in order to inspire the audience and pull them into the world of Annie Sullivan and Helen Keller. The audience is able to believe in and care about what is happening in the world of the play because of the honesty with which Gibson endows every character and situation in *The Miracle Worker*.

Historical Context

Prejudice and Fear in America during the 1880s and 1950s

*The Miracle Worke*r was written in the United States during the late 1950s, which was the beginning of a period of change in American society. The country had just witnessed the paranoia of the McCarthy hearings, during which many theatre artists were charged with participating in "un-American" ' activities, or simply accused of being Communists. The mid- to late 1950s also witnessed the beginning of the Civil Rights movement in the southern U.S., including in Alabama, where *The Miracle Worker* is set. In American theatre, audiences had seen the crumbling facade of the American dream in the plays of Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller. All of these aspects are a part of *The Miracle Worker* in its form, origin, and focus.

Although the subject of *The Miracle Worker* is not the paranoia of possible Communist invasion or the civil rights of African Americans in the 1950s, both of these factor into an underlying theme of the play: prejudice and fear. In the play, the prejudice and fear that arise from misunderstanding are brought to light. The most obvious example of this is the way in which the Kellers treat Helen. They use Helen's handicap as a reason to treat her with pity and for their reluctance to discipline her. The Kellers' s fear and ignorance of Helen's condition cause them to underestimate Helen's intelligence, and allow them to treat her like an animal.

Prejudice is also clearly present in the relationships that Captain Keller has with Annie and Viney. *The Miracle Worker* is set in the southern U.S. in the 1880s, shortly after the Reconstruction following the Civil War. During this period, the South resented the North's methods and ideas, especially those concerning the treatment and rights of former slaves. This view is dramatized in the play with the relationship Captain Keller has with Viney; he is very short with Viney, and does not appreciate when she offers her opinion of the changing circumstances in the Keller household after Annie's arrival. Viney displays a fear of Captain Keller and is unsure of her place in their relationship. The suspicion and resentment of the North fay the South is seen in *The Miracle Worker* with the arrival of Annie, who is from the North and her relationship with Captain Keller. From the beginning, Captain Keller establishes himself as a man of the South while he is discussing the Battle of Vicksburg with his son James during Annie's first breakfast with the Kellers. The Battle of Vicksburg lasted for 47 days and ended with the victory of the North, led by Ulysses S. Grant, on July 4,1863, Grant became famous for his ruthless determination during this Civil War battle and Captain Keller later compares Annie's stubbornness with Grant's. Captain Keller's prejudice and resentment can be seen in his remarks about Grant's drunkenness; therefore, his comparison of Annie and Grant can be construed as negative. Captain Keller is also fearful of Annie's methods because of her young age and the fact that she herself is virtually blind. In these

examples, Gibson is displaying deeply rooted prejudices common among many Americans.

American Theatre in the 1950s

During the 1950s, the American theatre saw many plays dealing with the problems of American society and the disenchantment that people sometimes experienced while trying to pursue the" American Dream." Arthur Miller's *Death Of A Salesman* (1949) is often considered a modern tragedy because of the depth of one simple man's struggle in American society. This play in particular had an effect upon the theatre structure and form of *The Miracle Worker*. In his play, Gibson uses flashback and past events to punctuate the action that is unfolding on stage in "real" time, as the audience is watching. Other artistic trends such as the use of psychological truth as a basis for the characters' conflicts and motivation were seen in plays like Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947). Gibson follows this trend as well in his use of offstage voices in *The Miracle Worker*, which represent Annie's subconscious and give her the motivation to do the difficult things that she does. By the end of the 1950s, however, these trends began to fade away as plays began to take nonrealistic and existential paths; an example of which is *Waiting For Godot* by Samuel Beckett.

The late 1950s were a difficult time in the U.S. for many people. Fear and prejudice were relevant themes in many aspects of American life, especially in the South. Some people were reluctant to change and desperately tried to hold on to their idea of American society, while others around them cried out for their own place in the world while expressing their views of what American society should be. Eventually, many Americans allowed change to enter their lives and like the Kellers in *The Miracle Worker* learned and grew together in the process.

Critical Overview

When *The Miracle Worker* first opened on Broadway on October 19,1959, it was an instant popular success. Despite mixed reviews from the press, it had no trouble attracting 1,000 theatergoers a night during the length of its run. *The Miracle Worker* was William Gibson's second play to be produced on Broadway, and because of its success with the public, it is also the play for which he is best known and the one on which his reputation as a playwright rests.

The positive critiques of *The Miracle Worker* focus mostly on Gibson's honest and unsentimental treatment of the relationship between Helen and Annie. Gibson is praised for the wit and humor that he brings to the situation, and for the emotional purity with which he endows the struggle to bring Helen into the world around her by teaching her language. Much has been written about the acting out of the play's youthfulness and vigor by Anne Bancroft, who played Annie Sullivan, and Patty Duke, who played Helen Keller. Both of these actors were praised for the concentration, stamina, and passion that they brought to the play, especially during the now famous struggle between the two of them in the dining room. Next to the climactic scene by the water pump at the end of the play, this scene in the dining room is the one that critics and theatergoers remember most vividly. The pure, raw emotional energy of this moment in the play can, as cntic Richard A. Duprey maintained, "work marvelous things in the soul." It is this emotional connection with the audience that kept the play well attended during its Broadway run and is largely why it continues to be produced today.

Most of the negative criticism that *The Miracle Worker* received was concerning the structure of the play itself. Critics expressed that what was characterized as an uneven and clumsy structure was a result of the play's adaptation from a television script. Some critics went as far as to say that Gibson sometimes confuses play writing with psychological counseling and although emotionally rewarding, *The Miracle Worker* is a less than perfect drama. Gibson's use of offstage voices came under fire from some critics as well. These criticisms of the structure of the play, however, never seem to come without praise of other areas of Gibson's talent. In Richard Hayes's review of *The Miracle Worker* in *Commonweal*, he praised the play's "affirmations of the human spirit," but declared: "One recognizes the content of the moment, of the experience, but is released into nothing else: essentially, it is a *fact* to which one has responded. That the fact may be a gratifying demonstration of human worth is, in itself, aesthetically irrelevant." Other critics echoed Hayes's sentiments, arguing that although it offers an emotionally satisfying night of theatre, *The Miracle Worker* does little to further the artistic development of drama as a genre.

Overall, the popular success and positive criticism of *The Miracle Worker* have continued to eclipse the negative criticism that it has received, and have helped establish its reputation as a classic American play and one of the most life-affirming dramatic works to come out of the 1950s. Robert Brustein summed up Gibson's positive reputation when he observed in the *New Republic* that "Gibson possesses substantial literary and dramatic gifts and an integrity of the highest order. In addition, he brings to

his works authentic compassion, wit, bite and humor, and a lively, literate prose style equaled by few American dramatists."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Coy is a retired educator who has continued his instruction of drama with numerous contributions to textbooks and journals. In this essay he proposes that a reader/viewer can obtain an excellent overview of Gibson's theatrical skills by reading/seeing The Miracle Worker.

William Gibson has published fiction, poetry, plays, and autobiography, but he is best known for two stage works: *Two for the Seesaw*, a successful comedy-drama produced on Broadway in 1958; and *The Miracle Worker*, a classic American play and later a popular television play and film.

Though not ranked alongside Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, and Tennessee Williams, Gibson has carved an impressive niche for himself and will not be overlooked by history. The distinguishing features of his work are an uninhibited combination of humor and seriousness, often with a touching emotional effect; an elegance of style which resides not in fancy language but in a fine-tuned sense of the absolutely appropriate word or gesture; a flexibility of approach which permits him to move from solid realism to an almost Shakespearean use of the stage's capabilities; and anotable skill in orchestrating dialogue, actor movement, sound, and especially lights to produce effective theatrical moments.

Some of these aspects of Gibson's ability will become apparent in this analysis. But all of his skills, and some of his weaknesses, can be seen better by reading the entire text of *The Miracle Worker* and best by seeing a decent stage production.

The Miracle Worker is certainly Gibson's best known and most widely-produced drama. What is not commonly known is that the play was originally created as a drama for television: it first appeared on *Playhouse 90* on February 7, 1957, with Teresa Wright as Annie Sullivan and Patty McCormack (known for her role in the Broadway play *The Bad Seed*) as Helen Keller. The stage version, with Patty Duke as Helen and Anne Bancroft as Annie, began its Broadway run in 1959. The story next became a motion picture, adapted by Gibson and directed by Arthur Penn. The film won Academy Awards for Bancroft as best actress and Duke for best supporting actress, as well as nominations for Gibson, Penn, and Costumer Ruth Morley. Completing a circle more odd than vicious, *The Miracle Worker* resurfaced as a television feature production in 1979. The chief reason for this revival was apparently to give Patty Duke, now a grown woman, a turn on the other end of the seesaw: she played Annie to the Helen of Melissa Gilbert, who is best known for her role on the television series *Little House on the Prairie*.

The Miracle Worker is a well-titled play. It tells part of the story of Helen Keller, who, though blind and deaf from childhood, became a noted writer, public figure, and source of inspiration for many people. However, the title refers not to Helen and her miracles they are still in the future when the play ends but to her teacher, Annie Sullivan. The story concerns the first year in the professional life of Annie (formerly blind herself but partially cured through many operations before she was out of her teens) and her

extraordinary efforts in one short year to make a teachable child out of the utterly spoiled, crafty animal that Helen had become.

The play is based on real lives, and Gibson feels strongly that the necessary "shaping" of the material for the stage must not interfere with its basic truth or reality. He cites biographies of Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan Macy in his foreword to the play, and says, "The main incidents of the play are factual: I have invented almost nothing of Helen's, or of what passes between her and Annie, though often I have brought together incidents separated in time."

Space too is telescoped in the play. Gibson describes the stage as being divided into two areas by a diagonal line. The area upstage of this line is on raised platforms and always represents the Keller house; inside we see, down right, a family room, and up center, elevated, a bedroom. The downstage area is neutral ground; when not simply the yard of the Keller home, it "becomes" various places at various times The Perkins Institute for the Blind in Boston, the Garden House, and so forth. In this downstage area, near center stage, is a water pump. Readers interested in stage design will recognize the similarity of this arrangement to that of Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, with the Loman household on levels upstage and the downstage area serving as back yard, offices, a restaurant, and other venues of the play. A paradoxical concept of staging one area stays reliably the same, the other is fluid was becoming acceptable to American audiences. It should particularly be noted that Gibson has placed the water pump near the center of the entire stage area, reflecting the fact that the pump, Helen's favorite spot and the place where the most crucial dramatic moment of the play occurs, is central to the play itself.

Movement in time and space onstage is accomplished by the use of properties and set pieces (the Garden House where Annie isolates herself with Helen is assembled onstage before the eyes of the audience), by the movements of the actors, and by changes in the lighting. How Gibson unites these theatrical tools shows the confidence and control of his craftsmanship: in one remarkable sequence, the audience is taken, in a few seconds of stage time, from a crowded farewell party for Annie in Boston to a solitary moment in which Annie hears, from the past, the voice of the younger brother from whom she was tearfully separated at an orphanage, to a voice summoning her for departure, to the sounds of train travel, to the Keller home where Annie is awaited. Technically, these rapid changes may seem like mere film editing, but the special quality of the stage for these transitions its specifically spatial counterpoint is seen when Annie starts into her painful memory as the party laughter recedes; and when Annie answers, "Coming!" to the voice summoning her for the train and Helen's mother Kate, "faraway" in Alabama, "stands half turned and attentive to (Annie's voice), almost as if hearing it."

The essential conflict in *The Miracle Worker is* between Annie and Helen, with Annie trying her every resource humor, patience, cruelty, kindness, and above all perseverance to make Helen communicative enough so that the teaching process can, in earnest, begin. But while that conflict is the core of the play, there are important secondary conflicts. Helen's father has given up on the child, while her mother, Kate, refuses to do so. Of doctors trying to treat Helen, the Captain says:

KELLER; Katie, how many times can you let them break your heart"?

KATE: Any number of times.

Kate's attitude makes her an ally of Annie's, and she often intervenes to prevent Keller from firing the upstart Irish girl. But the Captain is completely authoritarian, and Annie's high-handed ways with the entire household regarding their treatment of Helen no more being "bountiful at her expense" leaves him angry and unaccepting for most of the play. If trying to reach Helen is the ultimate test of Annie's native wit, guile, and stamina, then her confrontations with the Captain are the test of her integrity and her faith in her methods; for it is because of her thorny refusal to budge from her standards that she is threatened with the loss of her job and her pupil.

A more subtle problem surfaces between Kate and Annie. In making Helen totally dependent upon her as the conduit of all communication, particularly during the period in which the two are completely isolated in the Garden House, Annie inevitably puts herself in the position of mother to the child. This change makes the women not antagonists but simply uncertain about how to behave. This is seen poignantly near the end of the play, when Helen makes her first real breakthrough. Just as the struggle appears lost, Helen starts to work the pump in the Keller yard and the "miracle" her mind learning to name things happens as she feels the water and the wet ground, Annie and the others realize what is happening as Helen, possessed, runs about touching things and learning their names, finally, to her parents' great joy, the words "Mother" and "Papa." The frenzy slows as Helen realizes there is something she needs to know, gets Annie to spell it for her, and spells it back. It is the one word which more than any other describes the subject of *The Miracle Worker*: "Teacher."

But Annie's discomfort is not yet banished. As Helen's parents fall to their knees to embrace her, Annie "steps unsteadily back to watch the threesome" in their family-shared joy and wonder. The pain of Annie's loss of her brother Jimmie, present in recurrent memories throughout the play, had led her to say that she could never love another human being and that God owes her a resurrection. In reaching Helen, she finds that she is capable of love. But it is not clear whether the resurrection is of Annie, restored to full humanity, or of Jimmie, since Annie now sees Helen as a sister rather than a daughter, conveniently removing Annie as a kind of mother-competitor to Kate. The play ends with Annie saying to Helen, as she used to say to Jimmie, that she loves her "forever and ever." She says this as the two are the last to leave the stage, and it is a moment of intense emotional power.

Powerful as it is, this ending reflects one of the weaknesses of Gibson as a playwright: he has often been accused, and not without justice, of excessive sentimentality. There are critics who feel that the basic material and conflicts of *The Miracle Worker* are themselves so powerful that the addition of poor, pathetic Jimmie, whose offstage whimperings we hear (through Annie's memory) many times during the play, is a sort of emotional overkill. Helen's breakthroughs at the end of the play are intensely moving, and together with Annie's discovery that she can, at last and indeed, love Helen, they are enough to render unnecessary the emotional baggage of Jimmie's "presence" in the

play. It must be said in fairness, however, that many critics, honoring the indisputable power of the play, do not find it over sentimental.

There is one other aspect of the play which may keep it, not in reading but in terms of actual production, from realizing its full potential. It suffers from what might be called the "Lear Syndrome." The actor John Gielgud is supposed to have said that if you are young enough to play the demanding title role in William Shakespeare's *King Lear*, you are not old enough to understand it, and vice versa. The part of Helen simply cannot be played by most child actresses: any girl young enough to play Helen at six is unlikely to understand the character except shallowly; and any child actress who can understand Helen, and go convincingly from savagery to lovabihty, is likely to be not only intelligent but very willful and nearly impossible to direct. This may sound trivial, and is certainly not a criticism of the play as literature. But we remind ourselves that plays are created to be performed first (and read secondarily) and that anything which hurts their possibilities for production must be recognized.

Whatever Gibson's (debatable) weaknesses as a playwright, they are overshadowed by his virtues: skillful characterization, psychological sensitivity, humor, strong dramatic conflicts, and a craftsman's control of the working tools of theatrical production.

Source: Stephen Coy, in an essay for *Drama for Students*, Gale, 1997.

Critical Essay #2

In this excerpt, Kerr praises Gibson's skill in telling an emotionally gripping story while avoid-ing the pitfalls of melodrama.

Kerr is an American dramatist, director, and critic who won a Pulitzer Prize for drama criticism in 1978.

If it is sometimes difficult to make ugliness palatable, it is even more difficult to make goodness persuasive.

All audiences love to have their emotions stirred in the theater, and all audiences hate to have their emotions stirred too easily. The greatest danger author William Gibson faced in telling the story of Helen Keiler in *The Miracle Worker* was that of arousing the quick, instinctive resentment of people who might come to feel that they had opened their hearts to a setup.

The materials for too many tears, too easily drawn, were there. The child Helen Keller, deaf, dumb, and blind, was at once an object of pity. We were apt to be on guard, determined not to surrender our compassion too swiftly, when we met her. Annie Sullivan, her twenty-year-old nurse and teacher, invited very nearly the same obvious sympathy: she was orphaned, unlettered, the victim of haft a dozen operations on her own eyes. The spectacle of these two misfits, cut off from the kindness of the rest of the world and from each other as well, moving in sorry circles toward a moment of communication that might never come, was in one sense irresistible; in another sense it was the very sort of patent bid for pathos that generally causes us to set our jaws, stiffen our backs, and defy The Little Match Girl herself to make us cry.

Mr. Gibson won our consent to the harrowing adventure, and then our open surrender to ihe full-throated chords it dared to sound, by one right stroke of craftsmanship. He did not deal tenderly with images that were already rich in wistful appeal. He dealt roughly with them.

The most direct question posed during the earlier stages of the evening, as a harassed family tried to cope with the small inarticulate monster that moved among them, was spoken by one of Helen Keller's parents to the other.

"Do you like her?" was the question. It was not answered, though the silence, of course, constituted an answer in itself. Love, perhaps, was possible, in some dim maternal way, for the pale, spastic creature whose ringers went flying like thousand-leggers over the faces around her, searching out frantic identifications. But honesty forbade the pretense of liking. Patty Duke played the near-animal who crawled like a frightened crab across an Alabama front yard lo hurl a stolen key into a well and then pound herself fiercely on the head as a sign of secretive delight. And she played with a taut mouth drawn back from defiant teeth, with hands that were quicker to strike than they were to receive

caresses, with a directionless energy that was doubled by a despair she could not understand.

Nor was any sentiment wasted on the problems Anne Bancroft faced when, as the inexperienced Annie Sullivan, she settled down to the task of breaking a fierce, unintelligent will. "A siege is a siege" said this indestructible battering-ram, rolling up her sleeves and lunging at the locked fortress with a ferocity that might have distressed Attila. There was a long pantomime passage in the middle of the second act during which Miss Bancroft was determined that Miss Duke would eat her dinner, eat it with a spoon, and thereafter fold her napkin. Miss Duke was ready to kick, scratch, bite, tear chairs to splinters and the tablecloth to rags before any such eventualities took place. No known holds were barred, no shreds of flesh spared; the sounds were the sounds of bodies grunting under impact and of furniture cracking under assault; two naked wills wound up on their knees, like dogs panting twice before moving in to the kill; the holocaust was total, not merely physical but spiritual.

When it was over, Mis s B ancroft quietly reported to the waiting parents,' "The room's a wreck but her napkin is folded." And there was almost more strength in the quiet statement than there had been in the desperate donnybrook. Miss Bancroft's command of her own powers was absolute; and when she touched us she did it not by begging but by the assertion of a rigid, almost brutal, rectitude.

Certain questions of art may be raised about play and production. Should Mr. Gibson have carried along with him, from the television original, a subjective sound track native to another medium? Hadn't he compromised his own honesty by casting six children who were actually blind in one very short sequence in order to introduce, through their attractiveness, an appeal that had nothing to do with the quality of his writing? Had he drawn too steadily not on what was pathetic in his materials but on what was artificially dramatic around them, stretching some of his family tensions beyond the point of profitable return? I think he may have done all of these things, though without essential damage to what was, and is, essentially important: the excitement of watching a mind wrenched, by main force, into being.

Source: Walter Kerr, *The Miracle Worker*, in his *The Theater m Spite of Itself*, Simon & Schuster (New York), 1963, pp. 255-57

Critical Essay #3

In this essay, Brustein analyzes The Miracle Worker *and Gibson's motivationsforwriting the play*.

Brustein is an American drama critic and the artistic director of the American Repertory Theater Company.

Near the conclusion of *Two for the Seesaw*, the rambunctious street urchin, Gittel Mosca, is gently informed that "after the verb to love, to help is the sweetest in the tongue." William Gibson, setting aside more serious concerns to anatomize the sweeter, softer virtues, has thus far dedicated his dramatic career to the definition and conjugation of these two verbs.

For, like the play which preceded it, *The Miracle Worke*r written with the same wit and mounted with equal competence is essentially a two-character work about the relationship of kindness to love. The time has been set back to the 1880's, the seesaw has been freighted from New York to Alabama, and precariously balanced upon it now are an afflicted child and a 20-year-old Irish girl from Boston; yet, the two plays are clearly lifted from the same trunk. In outline, both works are about the redemption and education of a helpless little ragamuffin by a more experienced, vaguely guilty mentor which results in a mutual strengthening of character. Here the ragamuffin is not a Jewish dancer from the Bronx, but the child Helen Keller, while the helping hand belongs not to the disconsolate divorce, Jerry Ryan, but to Helen's gifted teacher, Annie Sullivan. On the other hand, everybody's motivation remains constant. Annie's conscience-pangs over her desertion of her dying brother, for example, recall Jerry's uneasiness over his desertion of his wife, and both expiate their guilt through "help," unswerving dedication to the welfare of another. To press the parallel further, both plays rely excessively on extra-dramatic devices: *Two for the Seesaw* on a persistently clanging telephone, *The Miracle Worker* on a garrulous loudspeaker. And, despite the excellence of the writing, both plays impress me less as dramas of conflict than as socio-psychological essays on the subject of interpersonal relations.

The Miracle Worker documents a historical occurrence: Helen Keller's transformation from a hopelessly untidy, aggressive, isolated, willful animal, possessed only with a sense of touch, into a disciplined, well-groomed human being about to enter the world of languages. The factual story contains only two disclosures of a dramatic nature. Since one of them (that Helen has become deaf and blind from an infant disease) is expended in the opening moments, the bulk of the play consists of Gibson's filler. Some of this filler is purely theatrical: Helen and Annie engage in what are surely the most epic brawls ever staged-in the course of these highly entertaining improvisations, ink is eaten, food is spit, faces are slapped, plates are broken, water is thrown, and general havoc prevails. Some filler is designed for edification: Annie lectures Helen's parents on the dangers of permissive child-rearing (Helen has been badly spoiled), and, in an ill-defined subplot, a cowardly son learns at last to command the love and respect of his stern father by asserting himself. It is Gibson's penchant for instructing his characters in

"mature" behavior which disturbs me most. In common with most playwrights of the modern school, love operates in his plays with all the intensity of an ideology, and the only development his people are permitted is a more accurate apprehension of the proper way to show affection.

In consequence, no event occurs in *The Miracle Worker* which is not somehow identified with love. Take the last scene, the other factual disclosure of the story and the "miracle" towards which everything moves. From history, we know that Helen Keller suddenly made the connection between words and things essential for learning language while pumping water from a well. On the stage, this discovery issues in a perfect orgy of embraces. The child pumps the water, grunts out the word, scurries back and forth along the length of the stage, rings a bell wildly, embraces her mother, kisses her once cold, now loving father, and finally offers her love to Annie whom she has hated throughout the action. As for Annie, finally permitted to express the affection she has purposely withheld, she spells out on the child's hand, "I love Helen ... forever and ever," and the curtain descends.

What is one to say about this? Mr. Gibson's motives are undoubtedly impeccable, his heart is rooted in the proper place, and, though he dances on the edge of Sentiment's soggy slough, he rarely falls in. In its homiletic genre, the play is solid species, and it has been given an admirable production. Arthur Penn has conducted the action with spontaneity, truth, and flow; George Jenkins has provided a functional, multi-story set; and the actmg-in a season plagued by miscasting-is all fine, particularly by Anne Bancroft, now a top notch comic-pathetic actress with a mime's expert control of her neck, hands, and facial muscles, and by Patty Duke, a sniffing, sniveling, staggering, moaning Helen who can transform a well-ordered room into Hiroshima in a matter of seconds. But I am afraid I am churlish enough not to respond very strongly to Human Documents, or Testaments to the Human Spirit, or even to Profound Convictions that Man will Endure and Prevail, unless they are accompanied by a good deal more grit, a good deal more mystery, and a great deal more information about the dark places of human motivation than we are given here.

I say this with regret because, although his craft is still a little shaky, Gibson possesses substantial literary and dramatic gifts, and an integrity of the highest order. In addition, he brings to his works authentic compassion, wit, bite, and humor, and a lively, literate prose style equalled by few American dramatists. (Annie's moving tribute to words, while appropriate for a character concerned with communication, is clearly a reflection of Gibson's own love affair with the English language.) Since Gibson is one of a handful of theater writers who does not have to apologize for his dialogue, he can afford a faithful production which does not have to apologize for the play.

But his weakness for inspirational themes, if not suppressed, will inevitably doom him to the second rank. That Gibson has intelligence, tough-mindedness, and a capacity for indignation, nobody who reads *The Seesaw Log* will deny, but his dramas persistently follow the safer, more familiar road of routine wisdom and spiritual uplift. Like most dramatists of his generation, Gibson confuses playwritmg with psychological counseling; unlike most of them, he is capable of much more. His potential is large but it

will never be fulfilled until he can find more compelling sources for his view of man than the cheery chapbooks of Horney and Fromm, until he can examine the more dangerous truths which he beneath the comforting surface of the skin.

Source: Robert Brustein,' Two for the Miracle," in the *New Republic*, November 9,1959, pp. 28-29.

Adaptations

The Miracle Worker was originally written for television and produced on CBS's *Playhouse 90* in February of 1957. Teresa Wright starred as Annie and Patty McCormack portrayed Helen.

The film version of *The Miracle Worker* was produced in 1962 by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. It was adapted by Gibson himself, directed by Arthur Perm, and stars Anne Bancroft as Annie and Patty Duke as Helen both leads in the original Broadway production of the play. The film is available on videocassette.

The 1979 television remake of *The Miracle Worke*r, which stars Patty Duke as the teacher Anme and Melissa Gilbert as Helen, is available on videocassette from Warner Home Video. The production bears noting, as the same script used for the original *Playhouse 90* production was used for this remake.

Topics for Further Study

Discuss the use of food and drink as significant parts of the action of *The Miracle Worker*.

The end of *The Miracle Worker* has been described by some critics as "too sentimental." Do you agree? What, then, does "sentimental" mean?

Read *Two for the Seesaw*. What are the qualities of Anne Bancroft as an actress that would prompt directors to cast her as the heroine of two such different plays as *The Miracle Worker* and *Two for the Seesaw*?

How many kinds of sign language are used in the U. S.? Research the methods of hand-spelling used with people who are both deaf and blind

Compare and Contrast

1880s: Alabama and the rest of the South just finished living through the period of Reconstruction (1865-77) which followed the Civil War. Southerners were suspicious of the North's methods and ideas, including rights for African Americans.

1950s: Alabama attracts international attention as the birthplace of the Civil Rights Movement. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), led by Martin Luther King, Jr., helped the black community to mobilize and plan a strategy to realize their goals, which included desegregation and voting rights.

Today: The United States government and much of American society has adapted to accommodate and promote the ideas of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement. There are still some citizens, however, who choose to keep their racist and separatists beliefs even though the law does not support them. Subversive groups such as the Ku Klux Klan continue to exist and promote their message of hatred and division.

1880s: African Americans in the South struggle to find their place in society. Most work as servants in the households of the wealthy white families.

1950s: The practice of segregation led to little opportunity for African Americans to receive higher education and advance to well-paying careers.

Today: African Americans hold positions at all levels of business in the U.S. Nevertheless, racism continues to be a problem in American society. Great steps have been taken since the dawning of the Civil Rights Movement, but much is left to be done to lessen the racial problems in the United States.

1880s: Sign language, like the hand symbols that Annie uses in *The Miracle Worker*, is introduced to American society. It is met with strong resistance and nongesticulating schools continue to hold prominence.

1950s: The invention of the tellatouch enables a sighted caller to communicate with a deaf-blind person who can read braille.

Today: More technological advances continue to be developed to help the visually and hearing impaired communicate effectively within a hearing and sighted society.

1880s: Almshouses or asylums are used to house America's outcasts and disabled where they are used for forced labor to help defray maintenance costs. The Perkins Institution for the Blind (founded by Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe in 1832) continues to offer an alternative to asylums, as well as teaching the visually and hearing impaired.

1950s: Blind and deaf students attend public schools with non-disabled students. Special day and residential schools are also common and continue to receive funding to help meet the needs of deaf and blind students as well as their teachers.

Today: The Americans with Disabilities Act was passed in 1990 to address the needs of the disabled, from education and employment to telecommunications and public services.

What Do I Read Next?

The Story of My Life, by Helen Keller. Learn what this miracle worker accomplished.

Anne Sullivan Macy, by Nella Brady. A fascinating account of Sullivan's life, and an examination of what happens to a life that climaxes at the age of twenty-one.

The Seesaw Log, by William Gibson. This the author's own account of the entire process of getting *Two for the Seesaw* produced on Broadway. There is not to be found a funnier or more truthful book about the farce, the frustrations, and the sheer lunacy of big-time commercial play production.

The Joy of Signing, by Lottie L. Riekehof. An illustrated guide to sign language that provides a working understanding of the language of the deaf.

Further Study

Atkinson, Brooks.' *'Miracle Worker*. Two Strong Minds and Two Strong Players" in the *New York Times*, November 1, 1959, p. 1.

A favorable review of the play's Broadway premiere Atkinson finds favor with both Gibson's material and the performances of the lead actresses

Contemporary Literary Criticism, Volume 23, Gale, 1983.

Provides an overview of Gibson's work, providing criticism on a number of his plays, including *The Miracle Worker*.

Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 7: *Twentieth Century American Dramatists*, Gale, 1981.

An overview of Gibson's career, with insights into a number of his works.

Tynan, Kenneth. "Ireland Unvanquished" in the *New Yorker*, Vol. XXXV, no. 37, October 31,1959, pp. 131-36

A mixed review of *The Miracle Worker* that ultimately finds the play somewhat exploitive.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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