

Miracle Worker Characters

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.

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.”

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- 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 teaches 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- 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 with 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- 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.

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 with Helen, and her will to continue living her own life.

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 die 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- 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- 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.