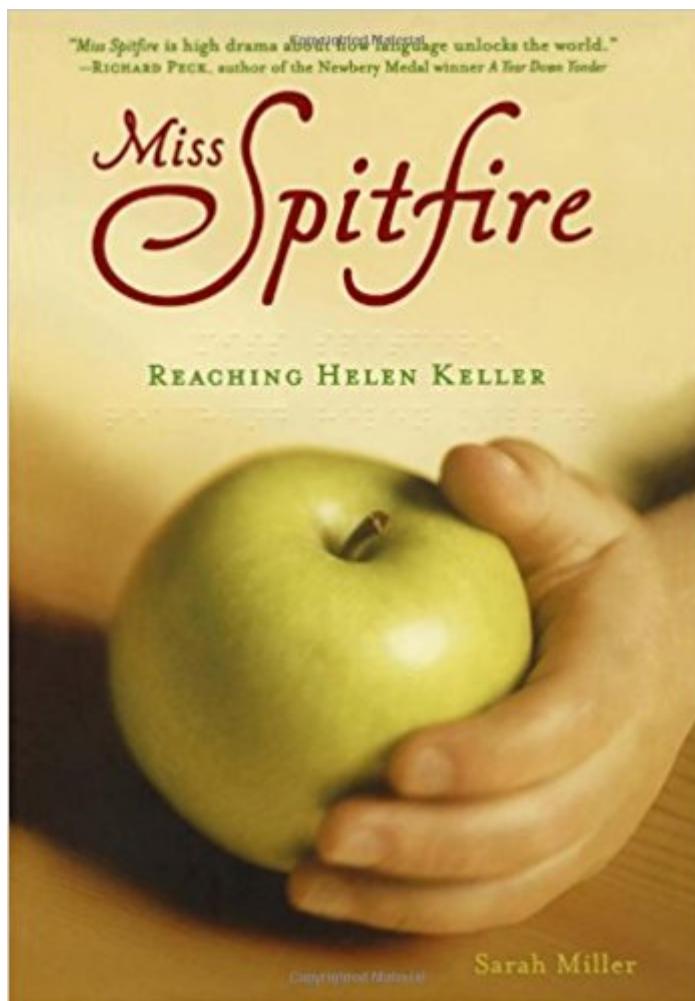


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Miss Spitfire: Reaching Helen Keller



Synopsis

Annie Sullivan was little more than a half-blind orphan with a fiery tongue when she arrived at Ivy Green in 1887. Desperate for work, she'd taken on a seemingly impossible job -- teaching a child who was deaf, blind, and as ferocious as any wild animal. But Helen Keller needed more than a teacher. She needed someone daring enough to work a miracle. And if anyone was a match for Helen, it was the girl they used to call Miss Spitfire. For Annie, reaching Helen's mind meant losing teeth as raging fists flew. It meant standing up when everyone else had given up. It meant shedding tears at the frustrations and at the triumphs. By telling this inspiring story from Annie Sullivan's point of view, Sarah Miller's debut novel brings an amazing figure to sharp new life. Annie's past, her brazen determination, and her connection to the girl who would call her Teacher have never been clearer.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review Miller's accomplished debut imagines Annie Sullivan's first experiences with her famous pupil, Helen Keller, from the young teacher's train ride to Alabama, during which she anticipated teaching a charge who had "no words, only sensations," to the breakthrough at the water pump, where she taught Helen to use language. Miller based her story on Sullivan's letters, excerpts of which begin each chapter, and in Sullivan's voice, Miller muses about the monumental questions and challenges that she faced: "It's up to me to show Helen that communication between people exists at all." Many lengthy passages detailing the wild, messy intimacy and the violent physical altercations between Sullivan and young Helen may tire some

readers, but they also amplify the visceral sense of Sullivan's exhausting struggle. In language that often reads like poetry, Miller creates a strong portrait of Sullivan's accomplishments, as well as her character; volatile, ferociously intelligent, and yearning for love and belonging, just like Helen. "Words bridge the gaps between two minds. Words are a miracle," Sullivan says. Miller's words reach beyond the historical facts here, encouraging readers to think about the small miracles of connection they can accomplish with words every day. Photos, a chronology, and an extensive bibliography conclude this stirring, fictionalized account. Engberg, Gillian

"This moving story--for all ages--is about how Anne an underprivileged young woman awoke Helen Keller, the most famous woman of her time, to life and learning. "Miss Spitfire" is high drama about how language unlocks the world." --Richard Peck, author of the Newbery Medal-winner "A Year Down Yonder"** "Miller's accomplished debut imagines Annie Sullivan's first experiences with her famous pupil, Helen Keller... encouraging readers to think about the small miracles of connection they can accomplish with words every day." --"Booklist", starred review"Details drawn from Annie's letters and Helen's autobiography are fleshed out engagingly in the first-person voice of Miller's imagined Annie, the young "spitfire" who overcomes obstacles no matter the power of the adults in her life." --"Kirkus Reviews""Children encountering [Annie and Helen] for the first time will feel an overwhelming sense of wonder and delight when Annie helps Helen make a communication breakthrough. School Library Journal Readers will appreciate Annie's devotion to her pupil and how her tenacity makes a difference in the young girl's life." --"Kliatt""Miller brings history to life." --"Voya"

Bought this along with narration for a reading project in 8th grade social studies. The book is good the narrative is horribly slow and my kids struggled listening to it.

Quick read. But nothing new. Pretty much everything in this book has been in other books.

Twenty-year-old, half-blind, fiery tempered Annie Sullivan is on her way to Tuscumbia, Alabama to teach six-year-old Helen Keller, who has been deaf, blind, and mute from the young age of 19 months. After she arrives in Tuscumbia, Annie meets Helen's kindly, but desperate mother, Kate Keller. After Annie's first encounter with her obstinate little pupil, she is unsure whether she can breakthrough to Helen. After her first lesson, Helen does not seem to understand that d-o-l-l means the word "doll." Kate seems disappointed, but Annie assures her that it is natural for her daughter

not to realize the meaning yet, though Annie feels a bit the same as Kate. Next, Annie wants to teach Helen obedience. Because her parents can't stand to punish her, Helen has remained a tyrant for almost five years. Annie is sure that with a firm hand, she can teach her student how to behave. But her first attempt comes to an abrupt halt after Helen knocks out one of Annie's teeth. Only pain keeps her from continuing the lesson. Now Annie is intent on breaking Helen's appalling table manners. First, she muster enough courage to discipline Helen in front of her employers. After a long battle over teaching her pupil to eat from her own plate with a spoon, and fold her own napkin, Annie breaks down. Annie is sure that it is useless for to teach Helen language or anything else under the Kellers' sceptical eyes. She asks that Kellers if she and Helen can live somewhere else with. The Kellers consent to letting the pair live in the small garden house where Helen was born. After a few weeks, Annie manages to teach Helen manners, but not that everytime she spells something to Helen that it is the name of an object, tought, or idea. Annie is disappointed when the Kellers insist on having their daughter back, but she has no choice. After the two go back to the main house, Helen begins to act up. Annie knows that she must discipline Helen, but she is afraid that it might get her fired. When she does try to punish Helen, Helen's father, Captain Keller, does not agree with her methods. Annie is infuriated, and explodes in rage. Luckily, Helen's doting aunt, Ev, convinces Annie to stay, and Annie does. Annie is still trying to break into Helen's silent night, but she is afraid that she is not experienced enough to do the job. Will Annie breakthrough to Helen, or will she become a failure, and Helen live an empty life? Buy the book and read it, and you will find the word that changed world history. The cover also has the title in Braille. It's really neat, because it is embossed enough for you to be able to feel it! I also suggest this book: The Miracle Worker ~ by William Gibson And this movie: The Miracle Worker ~ with Annie Bancroft and Patty Duke

If you've watched the movie, you've "read" the book. The kids in my class loved it, but I was unimpressed.

Really interesting book.

Who doesn't like a story of resilience and persistence along with a strong dose of empathy! Anne Sullivan met a small version of herself. She may have been the only one on the planet that could ever have reached Helen!

In 1887, Annie Sullivan (age 20) goes to Alabama to try to teach Helen Keller (age 6, who is deaf

and blind) how to communicate. Told from Annie's point of view, it talks about her struggles before moving to Alabama from Massachusetts, and what her life was like before she had surgery to restore her own eyesight. Helen proves very difficult to teach. Her family has spoiled her and inadvertently reinforced that crying and being physically violent is the way to get what she wants, because they can't bear to see her upset. It is mostly a story about frustration, emotional turmoil, and feeling defeated; however, it has a bright ending, as we already know the outcome of Annie Sullivan's time spent teaching Helen Keller. I like how each chapter begins with an excerpt from actual letters written by Annie Sullivan, documenting her challenges and time spent with Helen Keller. I would probably recommend this novel to girls. Its major themes are perseverance and success in the face of adversity, and accepting others who are different or have a handicap.

Beautiful story... Mesmerizing. Joyful in its ability to draw you into the complexity of raw human emotion. As much about the "teacher" as the student. Should probably be required reading for all would be teachers. For that matter, should be recommended reading for all would be mothers... as a glimpse into the awakening of selfless love. Caren

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