

June 19th



Memory verse

He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names. (Ps. 147:4)

Don't forget to have a grand memory verse session today. There are some suggestions in today's lesson for different ways of "saying" memory verses.

Words!

Letter from Anne Mansfield Sullivan to Mr Michael Anagnos, director of the Perkins Institution for the Blind in New York **June 19th** 1887

My little pupil continues to manifest the same eagerness to learn as at first. Her every waking moment is spent in the endeavour to satisfy her innate desire for knowledge, and her mind works so incessantly that we have feared for her health. But her appetite, which left her a few weeks ago, has returned, and her sleep seems more quiet and natural. She will be seven years old the twenty-seventh of this month...



During our walks she keeps up a continual spelling, and delights to accompany it with actions such as skipping, hopping, jumping, running, walking fast, walking slow, and the like. When she drops stitches she says [spells out], "Helen wrong, teacher will cry." If she wants water she says, "Give Helen drink water." She knows four hundred words besides numerous proper nouns. In one lesson I taught her these words: *bedstead, mattress, sheet, blanket, comforter, spread, pillow*. The next day I found that she remembered all but *spread*. The same day she had learned, at different times, the words: *house, weed, dust, swing, molasses, fast, slow, maple-sugar, and counter* and she had not forgotten one of these last. This will give you an idea of the retentive memory she possesses. She can count to thirty very quickly, and can write seven of the square-hand letters and the words which can be made with them. She seems to understand about writing letters and is impatient to "write Frank letter." She enjoys punching holes in paper with the stiletto, and I supposed it was because she could examine the result of her work; but we watched her one day, and I was much surprised to find that she imagined she was writing a letter. She would spell "Eva" (a cousin of whom she is very fond) with one hand, then make believe to write it; then spell, "sick in bed," and write that. She kept this up for nearly an hour. She was (or imagined she was) putting on paper the things which had interested her. When she had finished the letter she carried it to her mother and spelled, "Frank letter," and gave it to her brother to take to the post office....

Anne Mansfield Sullivan's little pupil, Helen Keller, was not only blind; she was deaf as well. An illness had robbed her of both these senses before she was two years old. As a result she was unable to communicate except by a few gestures. Her parents naturally indulged her out of pity and she became a wilful and extremely naughty child prone to bouts of wild temper, deeply frustrated by her inability to communicate by means of words. Her parents despaired of helping her until, on the advice of Alexander Graham Bell,¹ they contacted Mr Michael Anagnos, director of the Perkins Institution for the Blind to ask if he could find a teacher for Helen. He sent them a remarkable woman, Anne Mansfield Sullivan, herself only partially sighted, under whose loving discipline Helen learned what words were.² At first Helen had no inkling that everything had a name. When

¹ The inventor of the telephone.

² If you want to see Helen Keller and her beloved teacher Ann Sullivan there is a little bit of old film footage here:

she was older, she explained what happened when she finally realised this fact that Miss Sullivan had been trying to teach her:

We walked down the path to the well-house... my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over my hand she spelled into the other the word *water* first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motion of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten – a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that “w-a-t-e-r” meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy....

Anne Sullivan had already begun to teach Helen to spell out words using the manual sign language. Later she also learned to write “square-hand” a special handwriting using a metal grid. She also taught her how to lip read by putting her hand on the speaker's face.

In Helen Keller's day the Perkins Institute for the blind taught its students to write using a sheet of paper laid on a metal guide which had horizontal grooves in it. The paper was creased into the grooves. This enabled the user to feel them and so have a means of guiding the hand across the paper. The index finger of the left hand was used to form a grid with the horizontal grooves in the following way: as soon as a letter has been drawn using a pencil in the right hand, it was covered up by the index finger of the left hand. This produced a three sided space in conjunction with the upper and lower grid lines in which the next letter could be written. Then that letter was covered by the left hand index finger and so on. Between words a finger's space was left. The resulting letters have a square look to them but are readable by a sighted person and pleasant to look at. Helen also learned to type on an ordinary manual typewriter.

Helen's appetite for words was prodigious and she went on to become a talented writer. Here is her description of a visit to the Statue of Liberty.³ Helen was at this time at the Wright-Humason School for the deaf in New York.

Last Saturday our kind teachers planned a delightful trip to Bedloe's Island to see Bartholdi's great Statue of Liberty enlightening the world.... the ancient cannon, which look seaward, wear a very menacing expression; but I doubt if there is any unkindness in their rusty old hearts.

Liberty is a gigantic figure of a woman in Greek draperies, holding in her right hand a torch... A spiral stairway leads from the base of this pedestal to the torch. We climbed up to the head which will hold forty persons, and viewed the scene on which Liberty gazes day and night, and O, how wonderful it was! We did not wonder that the great French artist thought the place worthy to be the home of this grand ideal. The glorious bay lay calm and beautiful in the October sunshine, and the ships came and went like idle dreams; those seaward going slowly disappeared like clouds that change from gold to gray; those homeward coming sped more quickly like birds that seek their mother's nest...

Something to think about

Helen describes how, before she had understood what words were, her teacher “...brought me my hat, and I knew I was going out into the warm sunshine. This thought, if a wordless sensation may be called a thought, made me hop and skip with pleasure.”

To what extent can thoughts exist without words? Can you try to think a thought which does not involve words? If the answer is “no” how was Helen thinking before she learned what words were? Who spoke the first words in the history of the world and what were they?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KLqyKeMQfmY>

3 See the Lesson for June 17th.

A story from history

On June 19th, 1306, Robert Bruce, the newly crowned King of Scotland, was defeated by the English. His horse was killed under him and he was taken prisoner. Many of Bruce's supporters were put to death by their captors but the king escaped into the Scottish Highlands. With his queen by his side, and accompanied by a handful of followers he fled from hiding-place to hiding place, living on the fish they could catch and the deer they could kill. Often they were very near to starvation and survived many pitched battles with their enemies who seemed to be everywhere.

In *the Tales of a Grandfather*, Sir Walter Scott describes the King's flight and struggle for survival.

When the winter arrived the Queen left her husband and retreated to a castle in Aberdeenshire, while he took refuge on an island off the coast of Ireland, living like a peasant in a tumbledown hut. Bad news followed him there, for after a few weeks he heard that the Queen had been captured by the English and imprisoned.

Bruce was lying one morning on his bed, Feeling very depressed, he wondered whether it would be better for him to give up the Scottish crown for ever and go as a crusader knight to the Holy Land, to join in the fight against the Saracens.

Sir Walter Scott writes: "Looking upwards to the roof of the cabin in which he lay, his eye was attracted by a spider, which, hanging at the end of a long thread of its own spinning, was endeavouring to swing itself from one beam in the roof to another, for the purpose of fixing the line on which it meant to stretch its web. The insect made the attempt again and again without success. Bruce counted that it had tried to carry its point six times, and had been as often unable to do so."

He realised that he himself had fought six battles against the English and lost them all. Should he, like the spider keep on attempting to succeed? He watched to see if it would try again.

Sir Walter Scott continues: "The spider made another exertion with all the force it could muster, and fairly succeeded in fastening its thread to the beam which it had so often in vain attempted to reach. Bruce, seeing the success of the spider resolved to try his own fortune."⁴

Bruce's determination to "try, try, try again" was amply rewarded when he defeated the English at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314.

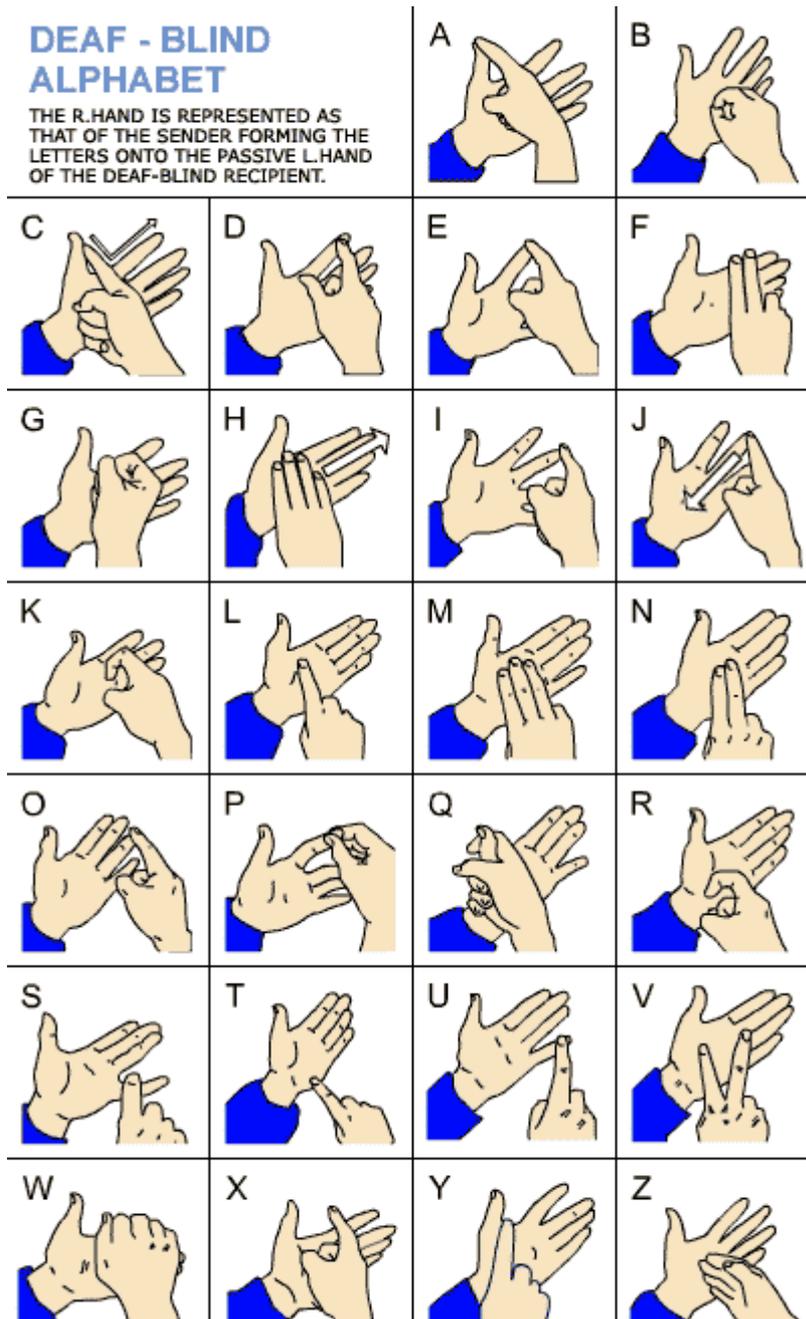
However much truth there is or is not in the story of the spider, it is a good example to us all to keep trying. Many worthwhile things cannot be done at the first attempt. Imagine what a lot of repeated effort Helen Keller had to put in before she could lip read and before she could type! In her case a thirst to know about the world around her which she could not see and could not hear drove her onwards. On the next two pages are some things to learn which might be tough and take repeated practice. However, be like Robert the Bruce and don't give up!



4 Adapted from Owen, Evan, *What Happened Today* Volume 2 Available on the *Mothers' Companion* Flashdrive. <https://motherscompanion.weebly.com>.

Something to do

Helen learned to communicate using a manual sign language like this⁵:

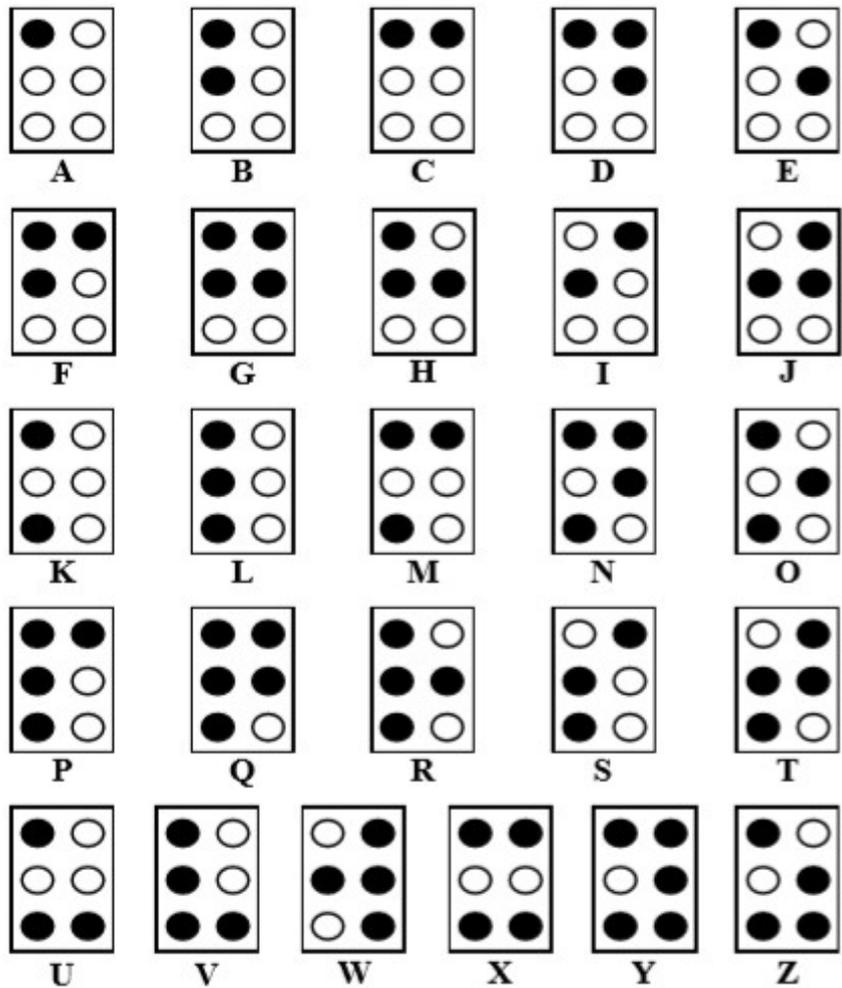


If you would like to try to learn this alphabet a good place to start is by learning the vowels. They consist of pointing to the thumb and then the fingers in turn of the “listener's” hand. You can have a lot of fun with this alphabet if there are two of you, especially if you become good enough to hold silent conversations. Could you learn to say your memory verse like this?



5 Image included by kind permission of Deafblind Information Australia www.deafsign.com

Helen Keller also learned Braille. This is a system of raised dots on the page that represent letters of the alphabet. A blind reader can feel the raised dots with their fingers and so read the words. The black dots in the diagram show the raised dots for each letter. The white dots are shown in the diagram just to help you visualise the block of six on which Braille is constructed. They do not represent anything raised on the paper. What would your memory verse look like in Braille?



Both these alphabets are fun to learn and use as codes but they have a much wider use too. You never know when you might find it wonderful to be able to communicate with a blind person or a deaf/blind person.

Sighted deaf people in this country often use British Sign Language (BSL) to

communicate. This is a non-alphabetic communication system which has become officially recognised in recent times. It began to emerge in the nineteenth century but was discouraged by teachers in schools for the deaf who thought that deaf children should learn to lip read and that sign language hindered this. British Sign Language does not translate from English by spelling out words. Instead, concepts are signed using not just with the hands but facial expression and movements. BSL is considered to be a language in its own right.⁶



⁶ You can see this language in use here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jy1udrFarXA&list=PLpbP91Nrmn3UFi_-fO1mvbCN_DQjnmsh8.

TRY AGAIN⁷

'Tis a lesson you should heed,
Try, try, try again,
If at first you don't succeed,
Try, try, try again.

Once or twice though you should fail,
Try again,
If we strive 'tis no disgrace,
Try again.
Though we may not win the race,
What should we do in that case?
Try again.

If you find your task is hard,
Try again.
Time will bring you your reward,
Try again.

All that other folk can do,
Why, with patience, should not you?
Only keep this rule in view—
Try again.

(Anon.)



⁷ In his *John Ploughman's Talks* C. H. Spurgeon refers to this little rhyme in his talk number 22 "Try". He has John Ploughman say: "Of all the pretty little songs I have ever heard my youngsters sing, that is one of the best which winds up: 'If at first you don't succeed, Try, try, try again.'" The whole talk is easy to understand and well worth reading in connection with this poem. It can be found here: <https://archive.org/details/johnploughmansta00spur> on page 204.