

The Digital Helen Keller Archive

Lesson Two: Primary and Secondary Sources

Activity: Be the Historian

Correcting the Record

Primary sources help historians connect directly with people who lived decades and even centuries ago. Often, these firsthand accounts contain perspectives that may have been left out of traditional histories. This is certainly true of people with disabilities. Rarely will a classroom textbook talk about the everyday struggles and heated public debates that affected (and continue to affect) disabled people. Primary sources can correct those omissions.

Read and analyze six of the following sources from the digital Helen Keller Archive. Directly cite at least four primary sources.

Helen Keller lost her hearing and vision when she was only 19 months old, and her outspoken advocacy as a person with disabilities captivated public interest. Write a mini-history of living with disability during Helen Keller's lifetime (1880-1968).

In your history, consider the following questions:

- What skills and technologies did Keller and others use to navigate a world that wasn't designed to be accessible to them?
- How did Keller and others advocate on behalf of the deaf and blind community?
- Links begin on the next page.

- [Photograph of Helen Keller using a braille writer](#)
- [Letter from Harry Fribush to Helen](#)
- [Photograph of Helen Keller conversing with deaf man via tactile fingerspelling](#)
- [Correspondence with 9-year-old Larry Sherrill who taught himself the manual alphabet](#)
- [Letters from Inge Hauff asking Helen Keller about fingertouch](#)
- [Film clip of a day in the life of Helen Keller](#)
- [Letter from Robert B. Irwin, NYC to Major L. L. Weissmiller](#)
- [Letters from Helen Keller to Dorothy Eustis](#)
- [Letter to Helen Keller regarding employment opportunities for the blind](#)
- [Helen Keller's speech at the National Library for the Blind](#)
- [Letter from Helen Keller, Westport, CT to Rev. Arthur W. Blaxall about her visit to South Africa](#)
- [Letters concerning a labor dispute at the New York Guild for the Jewish Blind](#)