

Dulce et Utile (Sweet and Useful)

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To please and to teach have been standards of good literature, both fiction and non-fiction, for more than 2000 years. Pleasure may refer to the style, while teaching refers to the moral content of a work of art. Great literature, such as Shakespeare's plays and Dickens' novels, are written well and have obvious moral or ethical themes. We encourage young people to read because they can enlarge their experience of people and places, as well as the enjoyment of the written word. As a teacher of middle school students, I assign literature that I hope will enlarge the moral sensibility of students. As students experience good literature they can learn to empathize with characters beyond those they encounter in their daily routines. Themes of courage, humility, and love help develop the mind and heart of students as they enter into unfamiliar worlds of literature. The essay below, for example, was written by an 8th grade student, Julia Montes. She was asked to write an essay on Annie Sullivan, the heroine of *The Miracle Worker*, a play by William Gibson about Helen Keller. Her

discussion of the play allows her to understand the depth of character of Annie and the extraordinary results she achieves in teaching Helen Keller.

THE CHARACTER OF ANNIE By Julia Montes, 8th grade student, The Principled Academy In *The Miracle Worker*, Annie Sullivan displays powerful character strengths; such as bravery, perseverance, and compassion. Because she was able to discipline herself in these areas, she gave a deaf and blind 6 year old her whole future, as well as developing her own character.

Annie developed a large amount of bravery throughout the play. On page 25, she says, "[My] third [advantage] is, I've been blind." It's Annie's first job, she just met Kate but she bravely admits one of her biggest shortcomings in life. She does this to show Kate that she is well-qualified to teach Helen. Another example is on page 45, when Annie exclaims, "I'll begin [to teach] this minute, if you'll leave the room, Captain Keller!" It isn't even her house, but she told Keller to get out! This will allow Annie to teach Helen to eat properly. On page 60 she boldly states, "I don't think Helen's worst handicap is deafness or blindness. I think it's your love. And pity." She tells the parents that they are preventing their daughter's ability to learn. This is very brave, for she could get fired. But she does it despite the risk for Helen's well-being. Her brave actions brought Helen one step closer to learning language. Perseverance has also helped Annie pull through the task of educating Helen.

This can be shown on page 49 while Helen tried to escape from Annie: "she tries right again and is deposited back [in her chair], and tries left again and is deposited back, and now feints Annie to the right but is off to her left, and is promptly deposited back." No matter how many times Helen tries to run, Annie won't give up, and will always try to catch her. On page 78 she argues, "I want more time." Annie wants to remain teaching Helen even though her parents want her back. She is persevering from the forces that tell her no. Annie says, on page 84, "Simply go on, keep doing what I've done, and have faith that inside she's - That inside it's waiting." She's stating how she has to persevere until Helen understands the meanings behind the hand games. Neither Helen nor Annie would have benefited without perseverance. Lastly, the character strength of compassion has benefited Annie and Helen. For example, on page 77 she says, "Spell it! If she ever learns, you'll have a lot to tell each other, start now."

Annie's compassion for the Kellers shines here when she eagerly tells Kate to practice her sign language. She does this because she wants them to communicate as mother and daughter. Annie's compassion can also be seen on page 81 when she says, "I wanted to teach you - oh, everything the earth is full of, Helen, everything on it that's ours for a wink and it's gone, and what we are on it." Annie wanted to teach Helen everything she could because, unlike before, she genuinely cares for the well-being of another. My last example, the final words of the play, is when Annie whispers, "I, love, Helen. Forever and ever." If it weren't for Annie's compassion, Helen would have never been able to be fully human, and neither would have Annie, if she had never manifested compassion. A miracle like Helen would have never happened if it weren't for Annie's character. Because she took on brave acts, never gave up, and cared for Helen's well-being; she gave her a way to speak. She also completed herself when she learned to love again. Better futures were made because of Annie.