

DIGITAL LESSON GUIDE

**DEVOTION – ANNE SULLIVAN**



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## LESSON SUMMARY

Devotion is love, loyalty or enthusiasm for a person, activity or cause. People are devoted to many things in their lives. However, it is important to remember to be devoted to yourself just as much as you are devoted to others. This lesson gives a real-life example of a woman who was a devoted teacher. It helps girls understand the importance of devotion and how to incorporate the character trait into their lives and relationships.



## SECTION 1: PREPARATORY READING

# I. INTRODUCTION FROM HEATHER STARK: WHY ANNE SULLIVAN?

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I chose Anne Sullivan as a Grace & Grit woman because her life was not easy. In fact, it was hard; but, despite that, she still put herself on a life path that would continue to be challenging.

Above all else, Anne was an insightful teacher.

I was a special education teacher for several years. I chose to go into a specific teaching field that continually proved to be challenging. The flip side to challenging was that I worked with a culture of children who were marginalized by schools and, at times, society—very much like Helen Keller, Anne’s student—and I knew I could help them.

When I started teaching my special education students, they did not get to go to the library or PE. I worked very hard at getting people to understand they deserved the same opportunities as every other student in the school. Anne believed this to be true of her student, too. Helen’s life before Anne was confusing and frustrating. She didn’t get to do many things because she did not understand the world around her. Anne took on every battle Helen faced and did not relent. She knew if she stayed true to her student, she would make her student’s life better. Through her devotion and perseverance, Anne taught Helen life skills, sign language, communication skills and even how to TALK.

Anne showed devotion to many things: teaching, thinking big, problem-solving, her student and serving those with challenges. But here is the other side of devotion—as devoted as Anne was to Helen, she also did something for herself. She fell in love and got married. She did not lose herself in her work. That is an important thing to remember. You can be devoted to something without sacrificing your whole self for it. You can keep part of your spirit for yourself and still serve.

It is important for our girls to know that devotion can change the trajectory of something. It can change one’s own life, the life of another, your family, a friend or even the world. It opens people up to having grace and grit. Devotion requires the grit of one to show another a way of grace.

The other important lesson Anne teaches is that sometimes, our work may go unnoticed no matter how hard we work. We hear a lot about Helen Keller, but very little about her teacher, Anne. It is important that our girls also understand not everyone gets the limelight. Sometimes your work, though impactful, will not always get huge recognition. While Anne taught Helen many things, it was Helen whom people wanted to see, communicate with and write about. Anne’s work was the foundation on which Helen stood; her teacher remained in the background. The background work is just as important as the work that is seen. The songwriter we don’t see is just as important as the singer we do see. In fact, without the songwriter, there would be no songs!

Anne was a strong woman who did quiet work. She was humble, but she was also proud of herself. While her devotion to one person may seem small, the changes she made in that person’s life were huge, and her contributions continue to inspire us today.

## SECTION 1: PREPARATORY READING

## II. THE JOURNEY OF MARIE CURIE'S LIFE

At first glance, the life of Anne Sullivan appears to be a quiet existence—a small life full of service to others. However, upon delving into the details, it quickly becomes obvious what strength Anne had. She overcame a lot of obstacles in order to be devoted to Helen. This was not a small life; this was a life filled with quiet strength and loud devotion.

**1866:** Anne Sullivan was born in Feeding Hills, Massachusetts.

**1871:** Anne contracted an eye disease that led to near-blindness.

**1874:** Anne's mother passed away. Her father found raising a family too difficult, so he sent Anne and her brother, Jimmy, to a "poorhouse" called Tewksbury. It was here that Anne's brother passed away.

**1880:** 14-year-old Anne was enrolled in Perkins School for the Blind, her first time attending school.

**1882:** By this time, two surgeries had dramatically improved Anne's vision, and she could see well enough to learn to read and write.

**1886:** Anne graduated from Perkins as class valedictorian.

**1887:** Over the next 49 years, Anne devoted herself to the education of Helen Keller.

**1932:** Anne and Helen were awarded honorary fellowships by the Educational Institute of Scotland.

**1936:** Anne died following a coronary thrombosis. When Helen passed away, she was also cremated, and her ashes were entombed beside Anne's.

Although Anne had to endure some very harsh circumstances, these circumstances led her to change the life of her student—thus effecting change in the lives of all visually impaired individuals. Think about it: She was born into a struggling family, abandoned by her father, spent her childhood in a poorhouse, begged for an education at Perkins School for the Blind and it was there, at Perkins, that she started on the path to change her and Helen's worlds. Anne's burial at the National Cathedral is very fitting. It was a symbolic move that showed our nation's indebtedness to Anne and how her devotion bettered the lives of so many others.

## SECTION 1: PREPARATORY READING

**III. CHARACTER TRAIT: CURIOSITY**

Devotion seems to dance in grace. It floats around and hugs, it lifts and empowers, it builds others up. It appears soft and light, but it can be a very gritty character trait. It demands focused work, clarity of thought, determination, raw honesty, self-care and discipline.

Truly, what does it mean to be devoted to something, to someone, to an idea or a life plan? Think of a mother awake through the night caring for her sick child, the shelter volunteer who spends every spare moment with the animals, a music student practicing on the piano for hours to perfect her solo. All these scenarios wither away without devotion. It takes work to care; it takes heart to care. Being devoted to something is the hard choice.

Everyone has a purpose in this life—something to be cherished and to be tended with devotion. It could be helping the needy, curing illness, raising a family, empowering others. Devotion gives life meaning. A life devoid of devotion is a life lived devoid of emotion.

Devotion requires courage and selflessness, as well as self-care and grace. Its lesson is that, in order to help others, one must first believe in her abilities. Without self-love, one cannot fully love others. Devotion is a steep investment of heart, belief and commitment. When it is given fully—just as Anne Sullivan did in her lifelong friendship with Helen Keller—the rewards are undeniable. It is a gritty choice with a graceful outcome.

**SECTION 1: PREPARATORY READING****IV. LESSON CONTENTS**

Below are descriptions of each item we offer as part of the Devotion Theme. Depending on your purchase, some of these may not be applicable.

**ILLUSTRATED PORTRAIT**

This Illustrated Portrait of a young Anne Sullivan, the newly minted teacher of Helen Keller, shows Anne standing at the infamous water pump. For those who don't know, the water pump was where Anne's devotion to Helen had finally paid off. Up until this point, whenever Helen wanted something to drink, she would make one general sign for "drink," leaving her family to guess which beverage she wanted. A frustrated Helen would throw temper tantrums until her family settled on the right drink. However, at the water pump, Helen finally understood water had an actual name and how she could ask for it. Water is not called "drink." It is called "water." After her epiphany, Helen's frustration started to decrease along with her temper tantrums. (Imagine Anne's relief at that!)

In the picture, Anne's eyes are full of compassion, and she is holding out one hand—perhaps looking at Helen and getting ready to reach for her to gently pull her out of her darkness and into a world full of words and signs.

**ACTIVITY BOOKLET**

This condensed version of Anne's story, questions and/or activities pulled from the workbook will be useful for small groups with a limited amount of time. The questions will deepen the reader's understanding of our hero's life and why she was given the character trait of Devotion.

**BIOGRAPHY**

From her impoverished Irish background to her success as a teacher, we strove to give an honest retelling of Anne

Sullivan's story. One that shines a light on her legacy that young girls can understand and strive for.

**BIOGRAPHY WORKBOOK**

This is where the reader breaks down the lessons Anne's legacy teaches us and applies them to her life. The questions and/or activities will not only deepen the reader's understanding of Anne and why she was given the character trait of Devotion. But they ask girls to reflect on both Anne's and their own lives and find the space where they intersect. In the workbook, the girls will understand what is required in order to lead a life of devotion.

**TIMELINE POSTER**

The timeline is an easy introduction to the life of each of our historical women. It is meant to be an overview of her accomplishments and impact on the world.

**PLAY-IT-FORWARD CARDS**

In this devotion box, the Play-it-Forward Cards focus on two things: thanking others for their inspiration and devotion and recognizing other girls who have overcome hardship in their lives, such as Anne did. Upon recognizing a service that someone has done on another's behalf or acknowledging the struggle one has overcome, connections occur between individuals. Devotion cannot happen without a true connection between two people.

There are cards to give to girls who inspire, cards to give to those who made someone's day a little better, and cards to give to girls who have overcome hardship in life. The Play-it-Forward Cards are one way of inspiring girls to empower others

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## **GLOVES**

During Anne Sullivan's young adulthood in the 1880s, women chose from a variety of accessories to pair with their demure long dresses. There were fans and parasols, earrings and handkerchief pins, bonnets and shawls. But the accessory that best represented Anne, her life's work and her devotion to Helen Keller was a pair of gloves.

It had to be all about the hands. Touch means so much to a person—hands can comfort others, wipe away tears and hug, but they can also push and pull. Anne had to push and pull Helen throughout her childhood. She also used touch to let Helen know she was next to her. It was the way they communicated. To Helen, Anne's "voice" came by way of touch.

Gloves accentuate hands perfectly, and these set the fingers free—just as Anne's loving hands taught Helen how to use her fingers to speak to the world, setting her free.

## **CHARM**

The G&G Charm for Anne is a disc that reads "Humble and Strong" and the hand sign for "I love you" in American Sign Language.

Love is a form of devotion, and being able to tell someone "I love you" is a way of letting them know you are devoted to their life and want what is best for them. Anne was completely dedicated to her student, immersing herself in Helen's life, but not so much that she lost herself in her giving. This charm is the perfect symbol of her devotion to herself as well as her pupil.

**SECTION 2: GROUP ACTIVITY GUIDE****I. INSTRUCTIONS**

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Hand out the materials to the girls, allowing them to spend some time going through them independently. If you purchased the charm or accessory, invite them to try it on or talk about how they can use it or add the charm to a bracelet. Give them time to satisfy their curiosity so they can focus on the lesson once you begin. After a few minutes, bring their attention back to you and start the lesson.

The following sections provide you with guidance to get the girls thinking and discussing the topics related to the theme and lesson contents. Use the discussion questions to the extent time allows.

Consider using a whiteboard to note responses, comments and ideas from the group as you go along.



## SECTION 2: GROUP ACTIVITY GUIDE

## II. TIMELINE POSTER

## STATEMENT OR INSTRUCTIONS:

Direct the girls to the timeline. Take turns having the girls read each event on the poster.

## QUESTIONS:

- What do you know about Helen Keller?
- After reading the timeline, what events do you think impacted Anne Sullivan's life the most?

*Gracie Legitt*

**THE Journey of ANNE SULLIVAN**

**1866**  
ANNE WAS BORN IN FEEDING HILLS, MASSACHUSETTS.

**1871**  
ANNE CONTRACTED AN EYE DISEASE THAT LED TO NEAR-BLINDNESS.

**1882**  
By this time, two surgeries had dramatically improved Anne's vision and she could see well enough to learn how to read and write.

**1887**  
ANNE MET HELEN KELLER. Over the next 49 years, Anne devoted herself to the education of Helen Keller.

**1887**  
18-YEAR-OLD ANNE ENROLLED IN PERKINS SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND, HER FIRST YEAR ATTENDING SCHOOL.

**1936**  
ANNE DIED FOLLOWING A CORONARY THROMBOSIS. WHEN HELEN PASSED AWAY SHE WAS ALSO CREMATED AND HER ASHES WERE ENTOMBED BESIDE ANNE'S.

**NINETEEN THIRTY-TWO**  
Anne and Helen were awarded honorary fellowships to the Educational Institute of Scotland.

**1886**  
ANNE GRADUATED FROM PERKINS AS VALEDICTORIAN.

**SECTION 2: GROUP ACTIVITY GUIDE****III. ILLUSTRATED PORTRAIT****STATEMENT OR INSTRUCTIONS:**

Direct the girls to the portrait.

**QUESTIONS:**

- What do you already know about Anne Sullivan?
- Have you heard of her student, Helen Keller?
- What are your initial thoughts about Anne's portrait?
  - Who do you think she is looking at?
  - What might she be thinking?
  - Can you tell what she is standing next to? (It is an old water pump, and the spot where Helen finally understood everything had specific names she could use to communicate with others.)
- What do you want to know about Anne?



## SECTION 2: GROUP ACTIVITY GUIDE

## IV. BIOGRAPHY

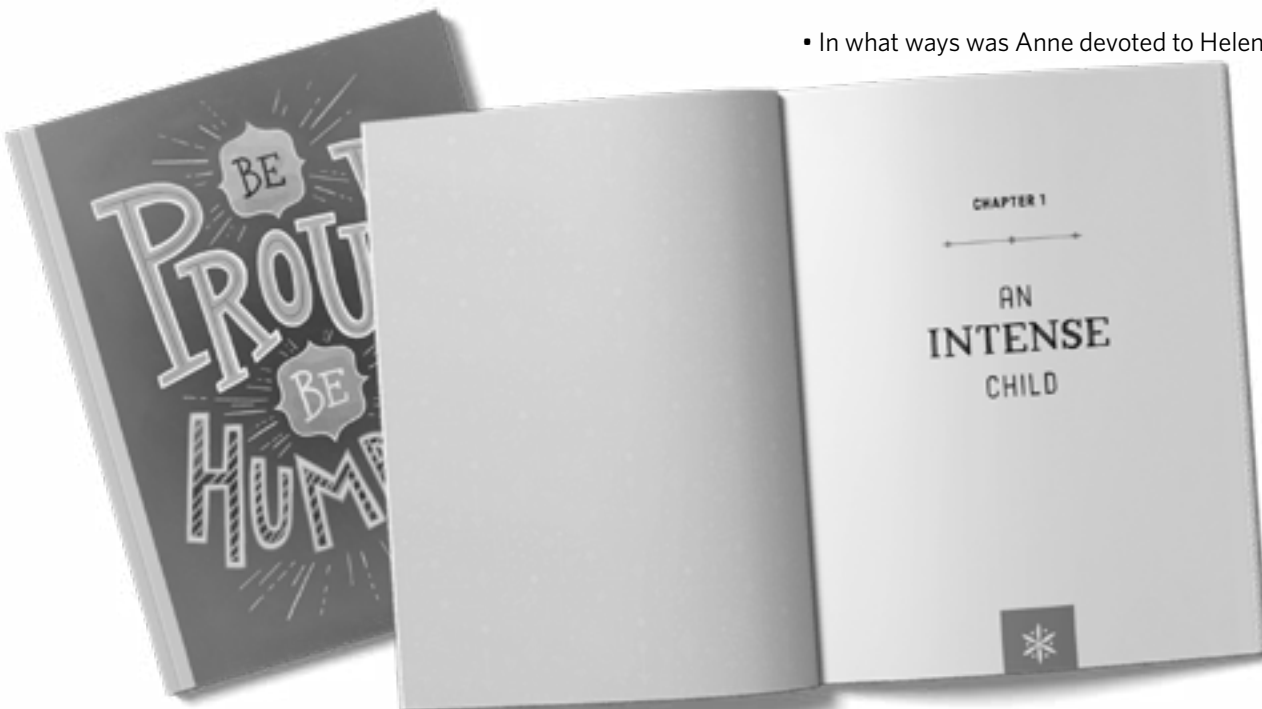
**STATEMENT OR INSTRUCTIONS:**

NOTE: If time is limited, group leaders may consider assigning the reading to be done independently before the group meets.

If the group is reading the biography together, consider doing so during silent reading time, out loud by the facilitator, or by taking turns, each girl reading a paragraph or page.

**GUIDED QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN UNDERSTANDING OF THE BIOGRAPHY:**

- Can you imagine what Anne must have felt like, not starting school until she was 14 years old? How do you think she felt?
- Do you think Anne's misbehavior in school was understandable? Do you think you would have acted like Anne if you had lived her life?
- What do you think was the biggest reason for Anne changing her behavior and becoming valedictorian?
- Do you think Anne was able to understand why Helen had temper tantrums because of her own behavior in school?
- If Anne had an easier life, do you think she would have been an effective teacher for Helen?
- In what ways was Anne devoted to Helen?



## SECTION 2: GROUP ACTIVITY GUIDE

## V. ACTIVITY BOOKLET READING SECTION

## STATEMENT OR INSTRUCTIONS:

## ASK THE GIRLS:

What do you think the quote on the cover of the booklet means?

Have the girls open up the activity booklets and invite them each to take turns reading a paragraph.

## OPTIONS:

1. Read parts of the booklet and use the suggested questions below to deepen the discussion and check for understanding.
2. Read the booklets (up to the activity questions) and then use the suggested questions below to deepen the discussion and check for understanding.

## GUIDED QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN UNDERSTANDING OF THE ACTIVITY BOOKLET READING:

- What is your interpretation of Anne's quote at the front of the booklet?
- Can you imagine what Anne must have felt like, not starting school until she was 14 years old? How do you think she felt?
- Do you think Anne's misbehavior in school was understandable? Do you think you would have acted like Anne if you had lived her life?
- What do you think was the biggest reason for Anne changing her behavior and becoming valedictorian?
- Do you think Anne was able to understand why Helen had temper tantrums because of her own behavior in school?
- If Anne had an easier life, do you think she would have been an effective teacher for Helen?
- In what ways was Anne devoted to Helen?



## SECTION 2: GROUP ACTIVITY GUIDE

## VI. ACTIVITY BOOKLET QUESTION SECTION OR BIOGRAPHY WORKBOOK

**STATEMENT OR INSTRUCTIONS:**

Invite the girls to complete the activities in the back of the booklet and discuss their answers. This is the heart of the lesson. While some girls may not want to share their answers, please allow time for discussion and processing their answers. The objective is for the girls (when applicable) to apply lessons about the woman's life and character trait to their own lives.

The following are the questions found in the Activity Booklet or Biography Workbook. They are meant to be answered independently by the girls in the booklet, but may be referenced as needed in the lesson.

**ACTIVITY 1:**

Anne's life was an uphill battle, but her climb produced a legacy of selfless love and complete devotion that would change the world for those with disabilities.

Devotion is love, loyalty or enthusiasm for a person, activity or cause.

- What do you think about the idea of being devoted to someone?
- Why do you think Anne was so devoted to Helen?

**ACTIVITY 2:**

In every role during their 49-year relationship—teacher, governess, friend and companion—Anne was devoted to Helen.

- Take a moment to think about your life and what role devotion plays in it.
- To whom or what are you devoted? Why?
- What difference do you hope to make?

**ACTIVITY 3:**

No matter how many tantrums Helen threw or how much she balked during lessons, Anne's patience, persistence and devotion to her student unlocked the door to a lifetime of learning and growth.

Teachers make a huge difference in our lives.

- Who has been your favorite teacher so far?
- What makes that person your favorite teacher?



**ACTIVITY 4:**

Though the relationship between Anne and Helen encouraged and inspired them both, it also was a factor in the deterioration of Anne's marriage. Also, many times Anne's expertise as a teacher was overshadowed by her bright student's accomplishments.

Sometimes devotion can be hard.

- Do you believe Anne and Helen got along all the time?
- Do you think they ever disagreed with one another? Can you be devoted to someone and still disagree with them? Why or why not?

**ACTIVITY 5:**

To be devoted to something or someone, you must first take care of yourself.

Self-care is a form of devotion.

- What do you do to take care of yourself?
- Why is self-care important?

**ACTIVITY 6:**

Although Anne never had an adult to love and care for her, she made sure to give Helen the care she needed and deserved.

- Which trusted adult woman in your life shares your same views and opinions? Invite her to read Anne's story.
- What did she learn from it?
- What did she think of Anne's devotion?
- Whom or what is she devoted to?

**QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN DISCUSSION****[IF TIME ALLOWS]:**

- In your own words, describe what it means to be devoted.
- Does being devoted to someone mean you have to remain devoted even when they do something hurtful to you or others?
- Being devoted to someone means you care for them greatly and want them to be the best they can be. This means that sometimes you will disagree with them or gracefully let them know when their behavior is hurtful. You may even need to spend time apart. What are some things that someone you are devoted to might do that would compel you to let them know you disagree with their words or behavior?
- Who is devoted to you?

## SECTION 2: GROUP ACTIVITY GUIDE

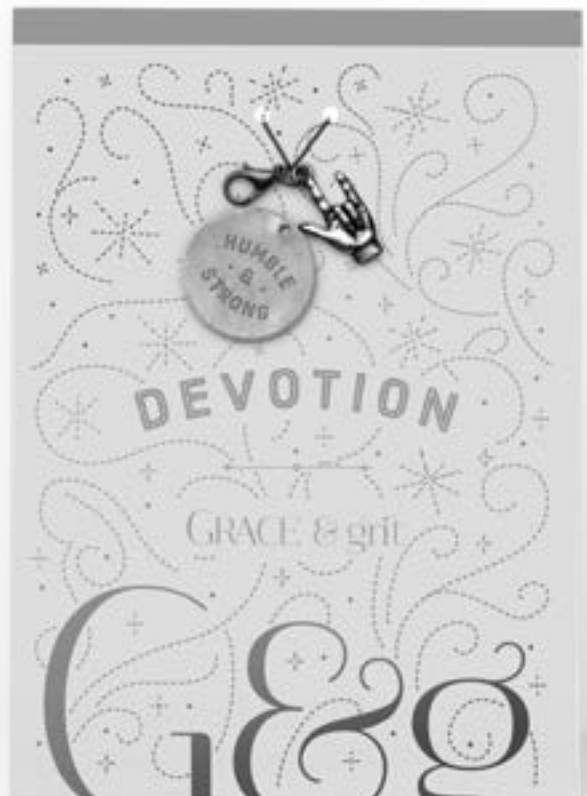
## VII. CONTENT DISCOVERY

**STATEMENT OR INSTRUCTIONS:**

Have the girls take the gloves and the G&G Charm from the box. Use each item as you discuss the following questions.

**QUESTIONS:**

- Why do you think fingerless gloves are the accessory in Anne's box? (To emphasize the use of sign language because she taught Helen Keller to communicate with her hands.)
- Do you know the charm is actually making a sign from American Sign Language?
- Do you know what that sign is? (It is the sign for "I love you.")
- Do you know any other sign language?





## SECTION 2: GROUP ACTIVITY GUIDE

**VIII. PLAY-IT-FORWARD CARDS****STATEMENT OR INSTRUCTIONS:**

Tell the girls what the Play-It-Forward Cards are and how they are intended to be used with other girls in their daily lives. Have the girls take the Play-It-Forward Cards from the box and browse through them for a moment. Go around the group and have them read the front and back of one card aloud. Ask the girls what that card means to them and how they could use it in everyday life. (Depending on time, you may want to limit this exercise to 3 cards.) Remind them that, over time, as they choose to pass out a card to another girl with positive intent, their name will go into a drawing to get the tote bag.





## SECTION 3

**CLOSING DISCUSSION GUIDE**

As you close the lesson, you are looking to spark a conversation among the girls about how they plan to use Harriet's inspiration to improve their lives while also helping and supporting one another. The goal is to help them recognize how topics from the lesson apply to their own lives in a positive way.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

Optional: Use the Timeline Poster as a focal point for open discussion.

- What impresses you most about Anne?
- What did you find most interesting?
- What are some ways you can practice devotion in your life?
- How can you help someone else practice devotion?
- How do you think this will help you become a devoted person?
- What ideas do you have for using the Play-It-Forward Cards?
- Did you learn things about Anne that were different from what you typically learn in school? Does that remind you to look beyond the obvious things to see what else there is to learn?