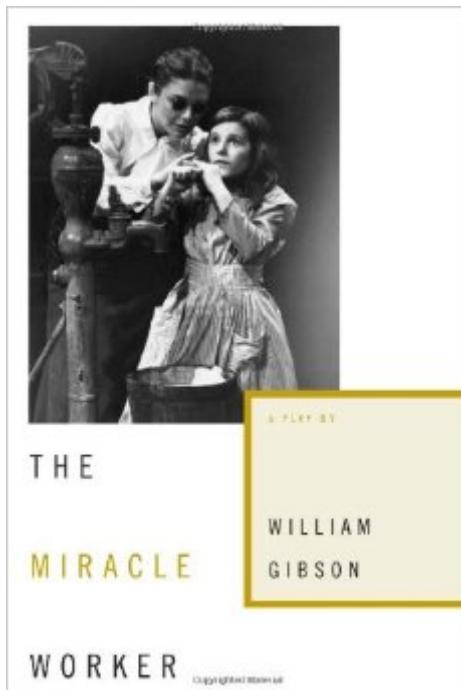


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The Miracle Worker: A Play



Synopsis

Based on the remarkable true story of Helen Keller and her teacher Annie Sullivan, this inspiring and unforgettable play has moved countless readers and become an American classic. Young Helen Keller, blind, deaf, and mute since infancy, is in danger of being sent to an institution because her inability to communicate has left her frustrated and violent. In desperation, her parents seek help from the Perkins Institute, which sends them a "half-blind Yankee schoolgirl" named Annie Sullivan to tutor their daughter. Despite the Kellers' resistance and the belief that Helen "is like a little safe, locked, that no one can open," Annie suspects that within Helen lies the potential for more, if only she can reach her. Through persistence, love, and sheer stubbornness, Annie breaks through Helen's walls of silence and darkness and teaches her to communicate, bringing her into the world at last.

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Customer Reviews

"The Miracle Worker," a play by William Gibson, has had an enduring presence as a piece of living literature. It appeared on Broadway during the 1959-60 dramatic season, was made into a motion picture a couple of years later, and then was remade as a television movie for the 1979-80 season. The play's genesis lies in the real story of Helen Keller (1880-1968), the woman who was struck deaf and blind by illness at the age of 19 months. "The Miracle Worker" tells how a young Helen was led out of her prison of silence and darkness by the remarkable Anne Sullivan, who set out to teach the girl sign language. "The Miracle Worker" is a truly great play. Gibson brilliantly takes the historical facts of Keller's childhood (many of which can be found in "The Story of My Life," Keller's

1902 autobiography) and turns them into a suspenseful, profoundly moving piece of theater. Although the core of the play is the fiery relationship between Sullivan and the wildly undisciplined Helen, Gibson's drama takes in the entire Keller household. I was particularly moved by the relationship between "Miss Annie" and Helen's frustrated but devoted mother. "The Miracle Worker" is remarkable because much of the story is told not in dialogue, but in Gibson's stage directions. This is one of those plays which is not only powerful in performance, but also a gripping read. Gibson's play is one of those great examples of a drama that takes real American life stories and turns them into enduring art; in that sense, it is comparable to such great works as "The Crucible," by Arthur Miller, or "The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail," by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee.

William Gibson's "The Miracle Worker" is as poignant and powerful today as it was back in 1957, when it was first performed on "Playhouse 90." Annie Sullivan is an "inexperienced half-blind Yankee schoolgirl" who attempts to reach seven-year-old Helen Keller, a child who became deaf and blind as a result of a childhood illness. Helen's father, Captain Keller, is a southern gentleman who is used to being obeyed. However, even he stands helplessly by in the face of Helen's violent and disruptive outbursts. Mrs. Keller, Helen's mother, is a sweet and loving person who pities Helen, and by giving in to her every whim, she helps turn her daughter into a demanding tyrant. Annie Sullivan is only twenty when she comes to Alabama to become Helen's teacher. Annie had been blind herself, and although numerous operations on her eyes have restored some of her sight, her eyes remain weak and sensitive to light. Annie is appalled when she meets her volatile and undisciplined charge. The teacher sets out to civilize Helen by instructing her to eat from her own plate with utensils rather than grab food from everyone else's plate with her hands. This leads to an angry confrontation between teacher and student, which leaves both of them emotionally and physically drained. William Gibson's five page long stage directions describe in great detail this pitched battle between these two stubborn individuals. After this harrowing encounter, Annie realizes that only by separating Helen from her indulgent family can she ever hope to tame this brilliant but willful youngster. "The Miracle Worker" is a beautifully constructed and concise play.

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