



Compare Helen's recollections of herself before the illness with what she was like before her teacher arrived.

A. Before her illness, she loved nature, heard birds sing, saw beautiful fruits, flowers, and leaves. After her illness, she lived in a world of darkness and silence, cut off from everything that she had enjoyed before.

Allow students to *quote* lines which *contrast* Helen's attitude before and after her illness. Contrast "song" and "gold and crimson" in the first two sentences with "dreary" in the third sentence and "silence and darkness" in the second paragraph.

Developing the Lesson:

In many stories, the plot line can be visualized as a triangle. Copy the illustration below on the board, and elicit the information in parentheses as the lesson develops. Relevant information is flagged with a triangle in the teacher's edition.

I. Exposition:

Explain exposition to the students: Characters and setting (time and place) are usually established fairly soon in a literary work.

1. characters
2. setting: a. time b. place

II. Rising Action

Entrance of conflict:

1. outer (man vs. man, man vs. nature, man vs. society)
2. inner (man. vs. self)

III. Turning Point

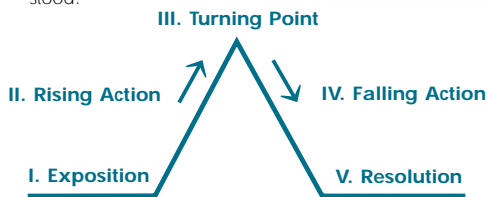
Highest point of action as a result of which resolution of conflict occurs.

IV. Falling Action

Action which results from turning point.

V. Resolution

Conflict either ends or is understood.



The Story of My Life

(an excerpt)

Helen Keller

FOCUS: AUTOBIOGRAPHY; POINT OF VIEW

To: Alexander Graham Bell
Who has taught the deaf to speak
and enabled the listening ear to hear
speech from the Atlantic to the Rockies,
I dedicate this story of my life.

Compare Helen's recollections of herself before the illness with what she was like before her teacher arrived.

... These happy days did not last long. One brief spring, musical with the song of robin and mockingbird, one summer rich in fruit and roses, one autumn of gold and crimson sped by and left their gifts at the feet of an eager, delighted child. Then, in the dreary month of February, came the illness which closed my eyes and ears and plunged me into the unconsciousness of a new-born baby. They called it acute congestion of the stomach and brain. The doctor thought I could not live. Early one morning, however, the fever left me as suddenly and mysteriously as it had come. There was great rejoicing in the family that morning, but no one, not even the doctor, knew that I should never see or hear again.

I fancy I still have confused recollections of that illness. I especially remember the tenderness with which my mother tried to soothe me in my waking hours of fret and pain, and the agony and bewilderment with which I awoke after a toss-

ing half sleep, and turned my eyes, so dry and hot, to the wall away from the once-loved light, which came to me dim and yet more dim each day. But, except for these fleeting memories, if, indeed, they be memories, it all seems very unreal, like a nightmare. Gradually I got used to the silence and darkness that surrounded me and forgot that it had ever been different, until she came — my teacher — who was to set my spirit free ...

I lived, up to the time of the illness that deprived me of my sight and hearing, in a tiny house consisting of a large square room and a small one, in which the servant slept. It is the custom in the South to build a small house near the homestead as an annex to be used on occasion. Such a house my father built after the Civil War, and when he married my mother they went to live in it. It was completely covered with vines, climbing roses and honeysuckles. From the garden



1 Define **exposition** as the introduction of the main character, the time, and the place.



it looked like an *arbor*. The little porch was hidden from view by a screen of yellow roses and Southern smilax.* It was the favorite haunt of hummingbirds and bees.

The Keller homestead, where the family lived, was a few steps from our little rose-bower. It was called "Ivy Green" because the house and the surrounding trees and fences were covered with beautiful English ivy. Its old-fashioned garden was the paradise of my childhood.

Even in the days before my teacher came, I used to feel along the square stiff boxwood hedges, and, guided by the sense of smell, would find the first violets and lilies. There, too, after a fit of temper, I went to find comfort and to hide my hot face in the cool leaves and grass. What joy it was to lose myself in that garden of flowers, to wander happily from spot to spot, until, coming suddenly upon a beautiful vine, I recognized it by its leaves and blossoms, and knew it was

the vine which covered the tumble-down summerhouse at the farther end of the garden. Here, also, were trailing clematis,* drooping jessamine, and some rare sweet flowers called butterfly lilies, because their fragile petals resembled butterflies' wings. But the roses — they were loveliest of all. Never have I found in the greenhouses of the North such heart-satisfying roses as the climbing roses of my Southern home. They used to hang in long *festoons* from our porch, filling the whole air with fragrance, *untainted* by any earthy smell; and in the early morning, washed in the dew they felt so soft, so pure ...

THE COMING OF THE TEACHER

I do not remember when I first realized that I was different from other people; but I knew it before my teacher came to me. I had noticed that my mother

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

smilax — a vine with glossy foliage.

clematis — a plant or vine of the genus *clematis* bearing white or various-colored flowers.



What role did the garden play in Helen's life?

A. The garden was a world that Helen recognized and knew in its entirety. It was a place of refuge for her after her fits of temper. Ask students how they cope with fits of temper or bad moods. Do they have places of refuge or special people to whom they can relate? Do they write feelings in a journal or speak to a special friend?

What role did the garden play in Helen's life?



2 Define **rising action** as the entrance of conflict into the plot.