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Somerville's Winter Hill School gets visit from Helen Keller

Photos

 Zoom




Delia Marshall


Silence fell over the audience at the Winter Hill Community School as actress Sheryl Faye portrayed the very young Helen Keller, trapped in a world without language. In this photo, Keller is first grasping the meaning of "doll," aided by her teacher, Annie Sullivan. This one-woman presentation, produced by Historical Perspectives for Children, was sponsored by the Somerville Kiwanis Club.



By **Delia Marshall**
Wicked Local Somerville

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Somerville — On April 14, Winter Hill Community School students were visited by one of history's most inspiring learners, Helen Keller.

Having lost her ability to see and hear when she was 19 months old, Keller existed until age 7 without language. With the help of a remarkable teacher, however, she was able to unleash her curiosity and intelligence on the world. By age 24, with teacher Annie Sullivan by her side, Helen had published "The Story of My Life" and graduated from Radcliffe College. During the next six decades, Keller wrote more than a dozen books and traveled the world as an advocate for the oppressed.

In presenting this remarkable person to Winter Hill students, actress Sheryl Faye re-enacted moments from Keller's early years and young adulthood. Faye opened her otherwise silent performance with a few spoken words approximating Keller's voice. Then, as a recorded voice narrated, she portrayed the tyrannical toddler, the inquisitive child, and the thoughtful scholar that Keller became.

The program was received with enthusiasm and rapt attention by the children in the audience. Winter Hill's K-5 teachers, including those with multi-grade classrooms and sheltered English immersion classes, had taken time in the weeks before the assembly to help these students think about Keller's daily challenges. In addition, many students learned about the manual alphabet that Sullivan first used when "fingerspelling" words into her student's hand, and about Braille, the system of raised dots that opened Keller's world to literature.

Historical Perspectives for Children produced both Sheryl Faye's presentation and related curriculum materials used by WHCS teachers. This event was sponsored by the Kiwanis Club of Somerville, which has also sponsored visits from HPC's Benjamin Franklin, Abraham Lincoln, Wilma Rudolph, Harriet Tubman, Amelia Earhart, and other illustrious figures to Somerville elementary schools in recent years.

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