

# Helen Keller

by Pam Ferguson

Illustrated by Rebecca Cohen





Imagine how hard it would be to learn to read  
if you couldn't see or hear.

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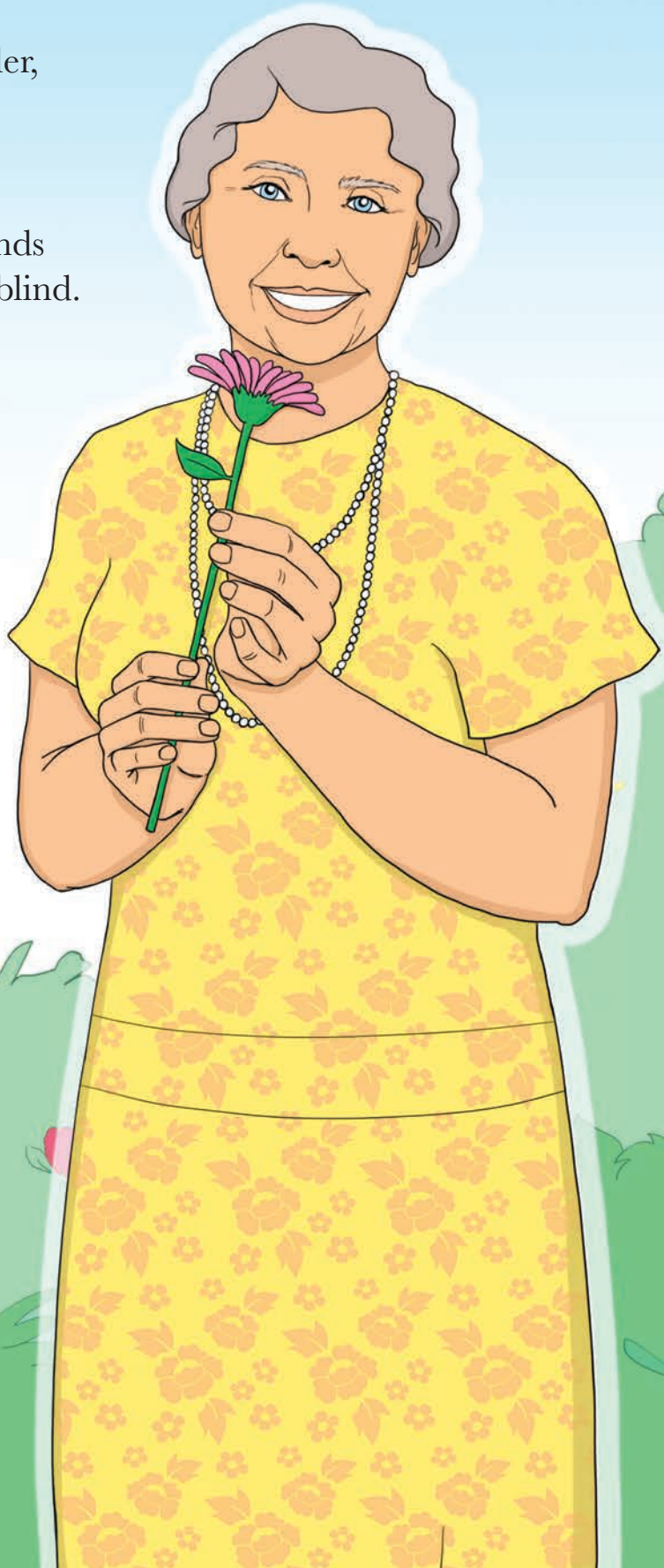
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My name is Helen Keller,  
I cannot hear or see.

I am deaf. I use my hands  
to communicate. I am blind.  
I use my hands to see.







But it wasn't always this way. When I was born on June 27, 1880, I could hear and see.









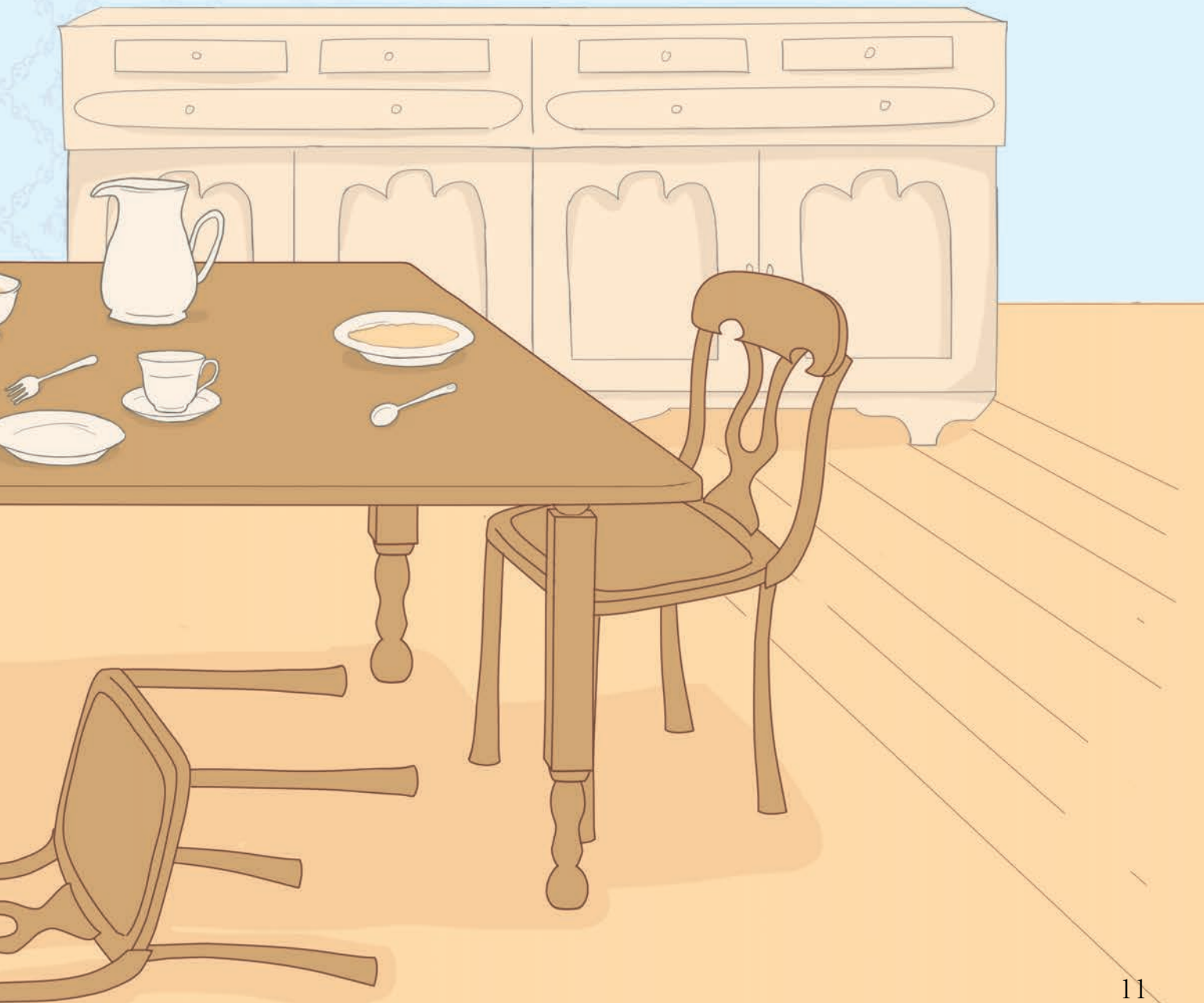
I became very sick when I was just a baby.  
I lost my hearing and my sight. From that  
day on, I could neither hear nor see.



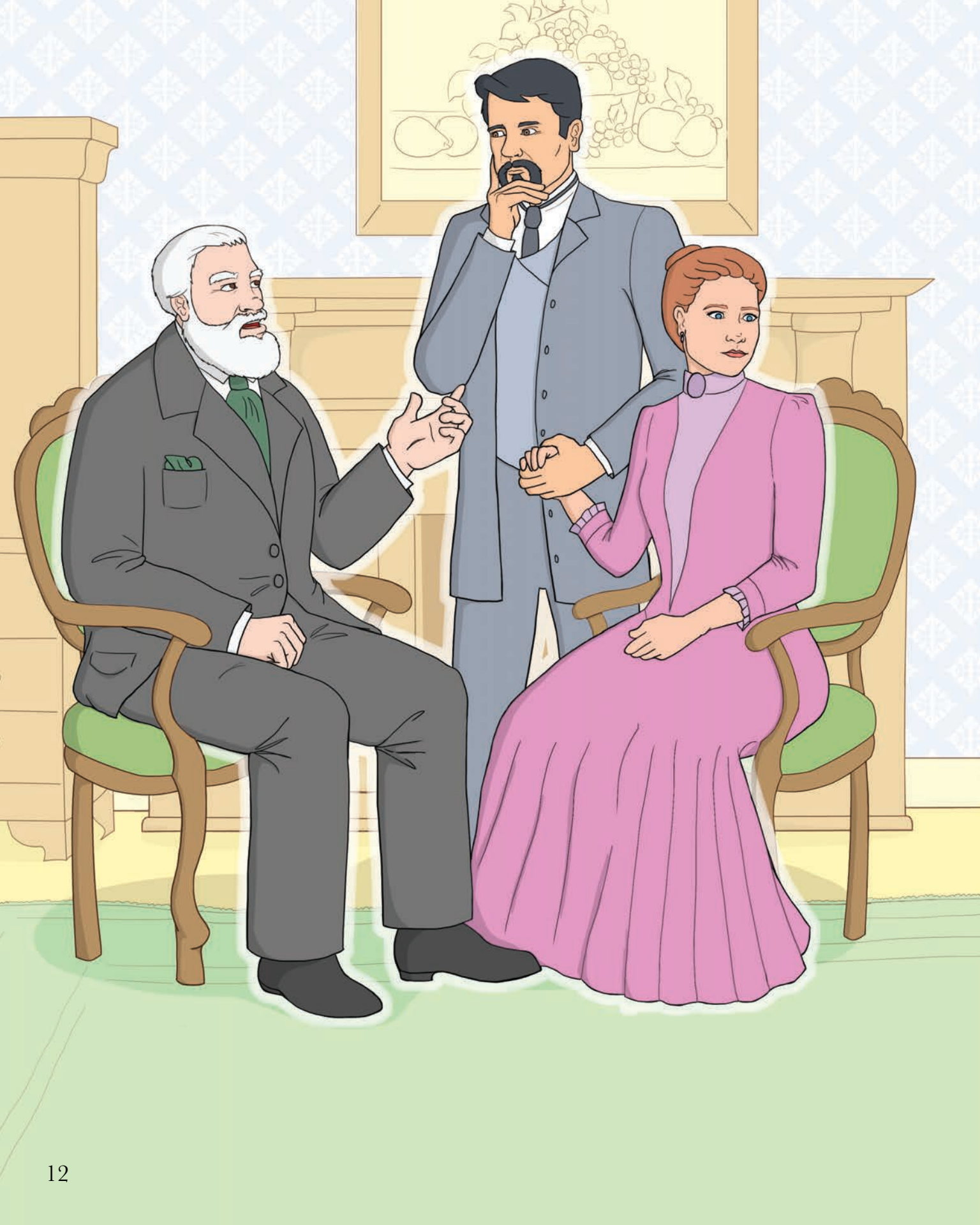


As I grew up, I could not tell my mother and father what I wanted. This made me angry and frustrated. I would kick, scream, and cry.

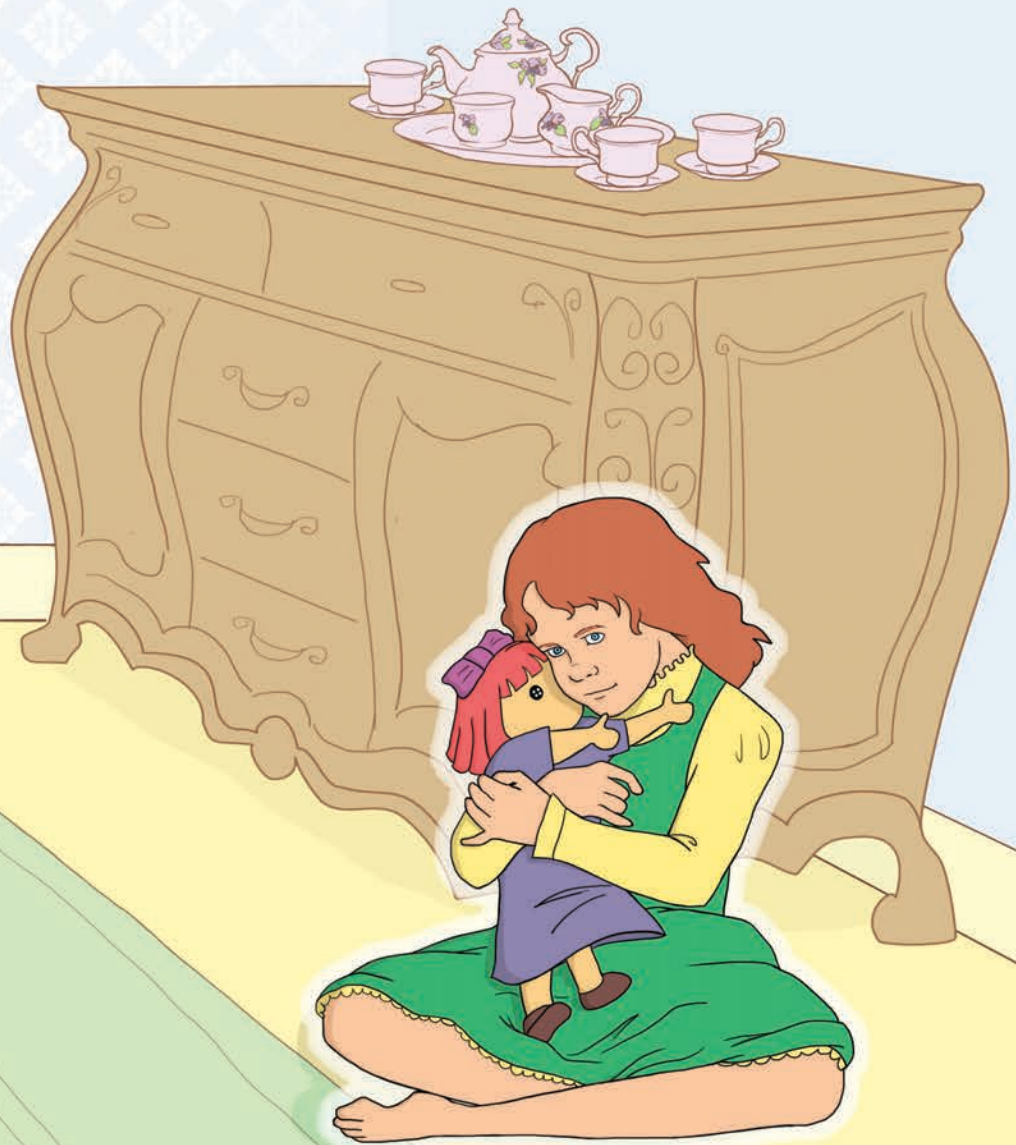
I needed to learn a way to tell others what I wanted and needed!



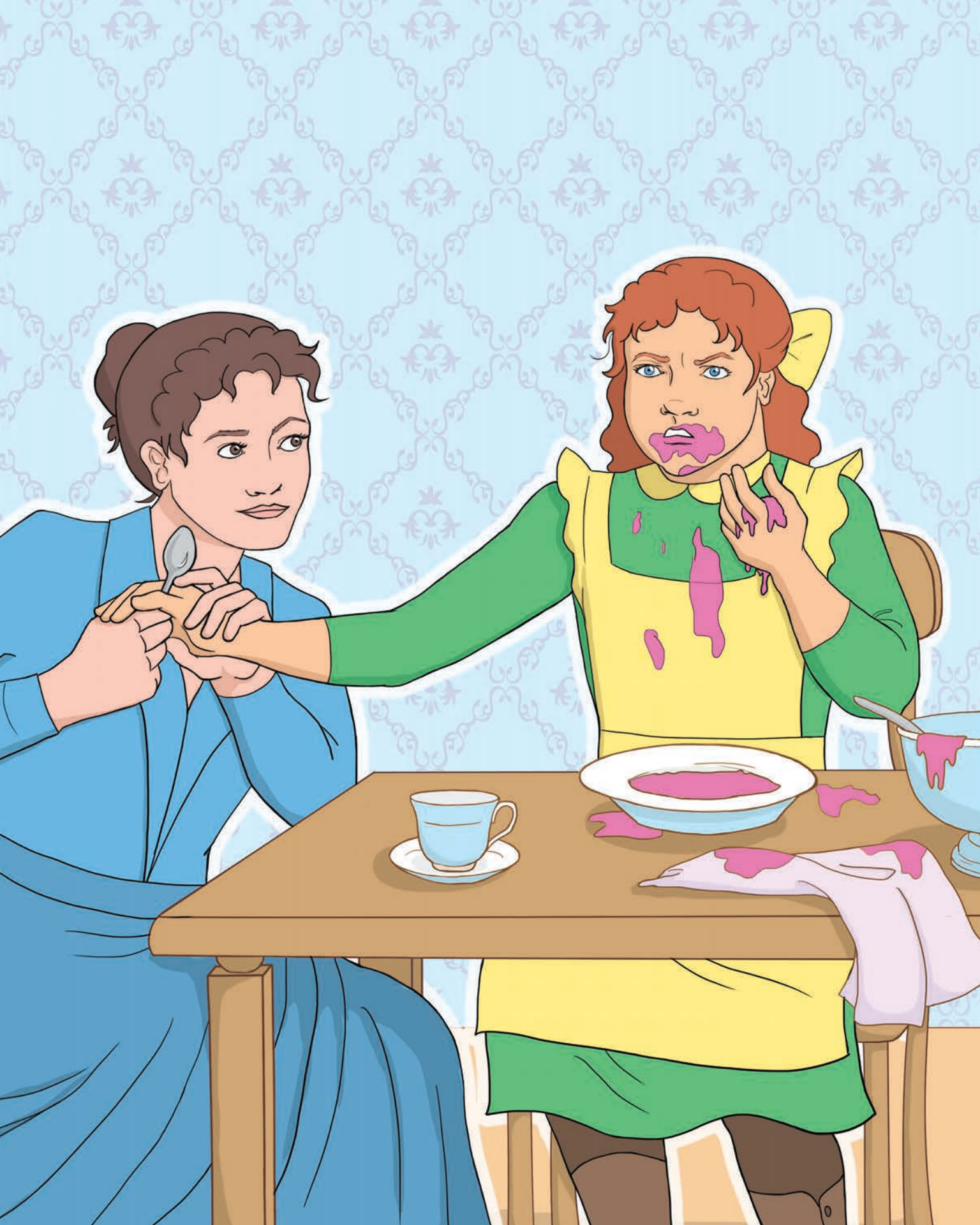




When I was 6 years old, Alexander Graham Bell, the famous inventor of the telephone, helped my parents find a teacher for me. Mr. Bell wanted to help deaf children.

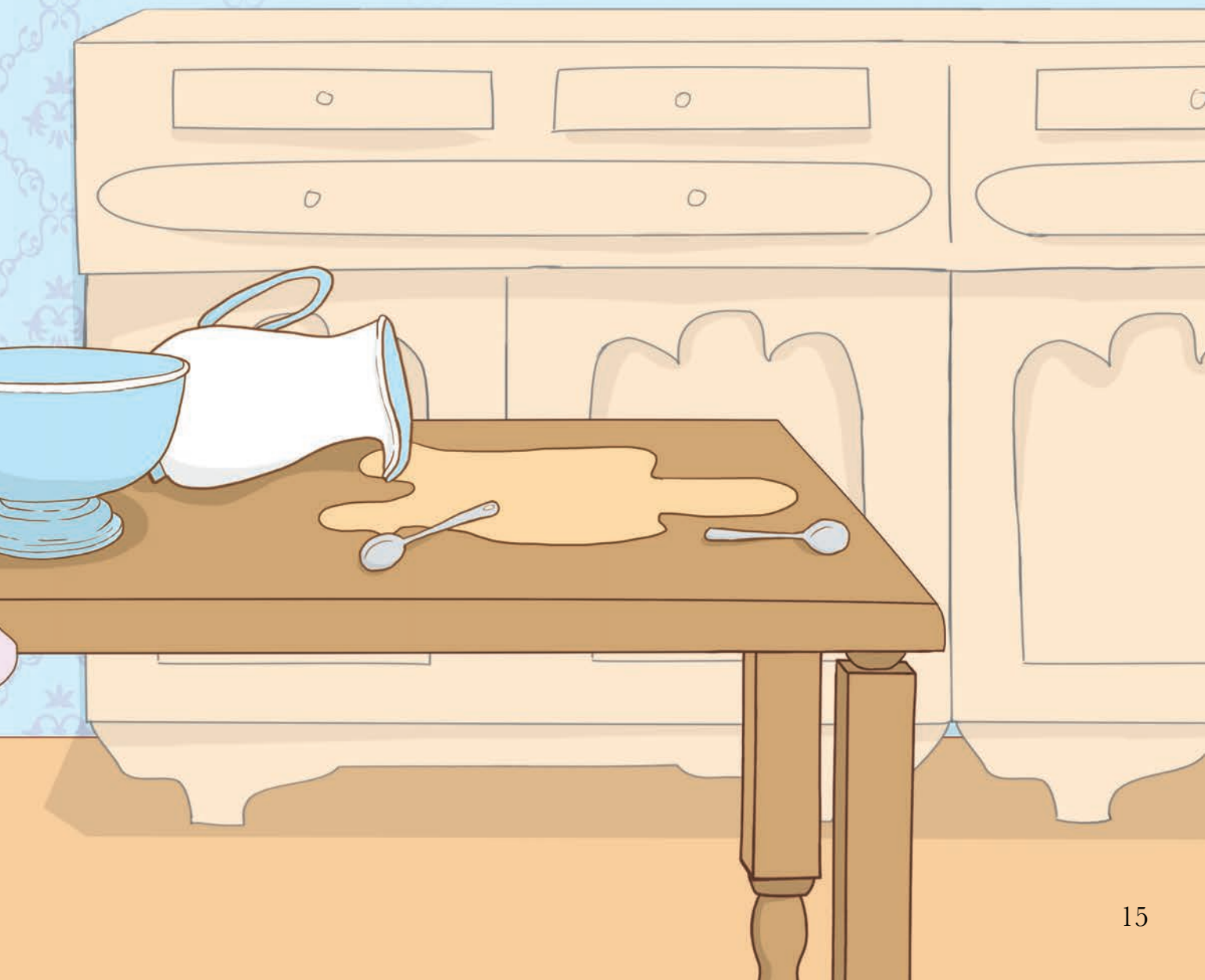




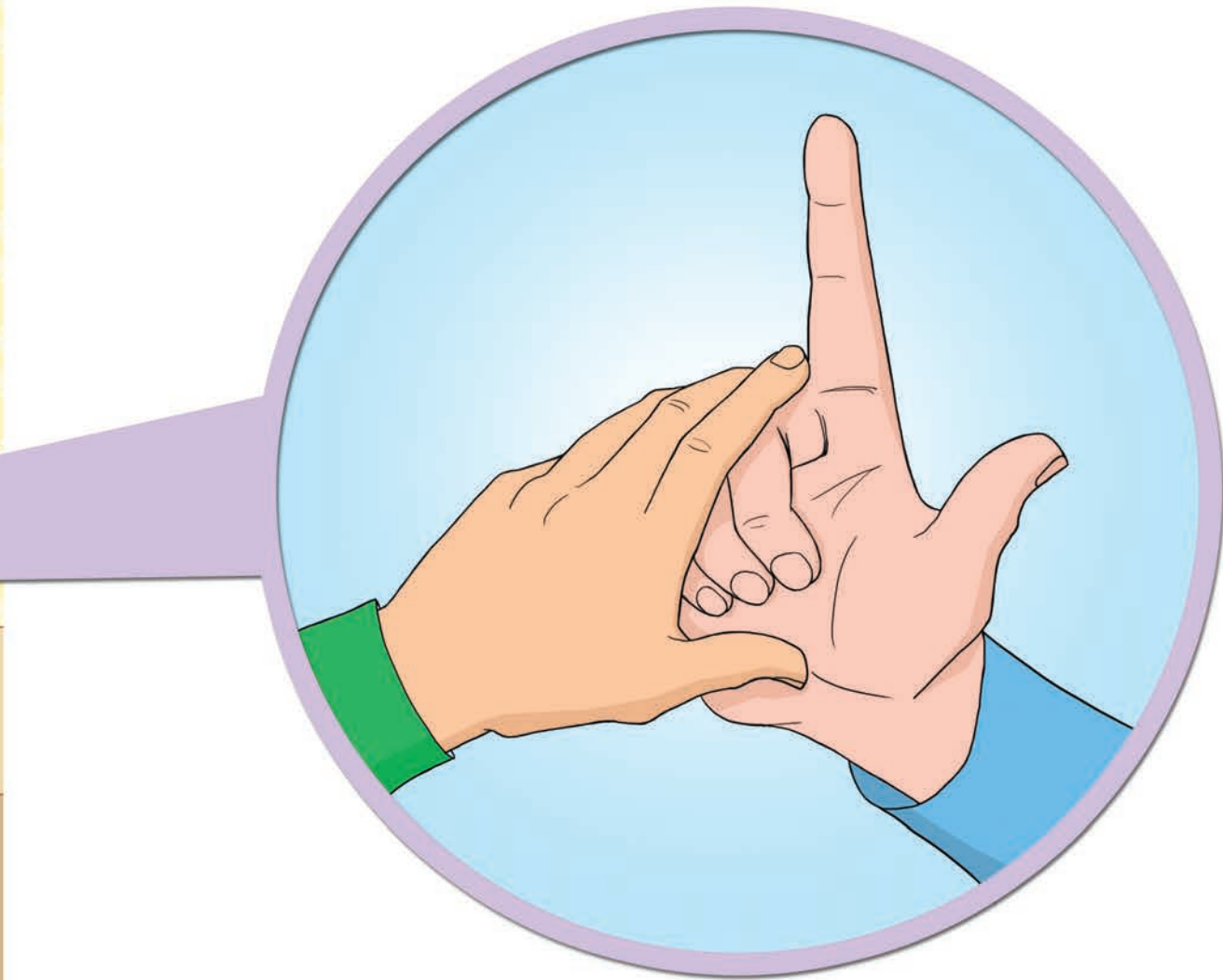




My teacher's name was Anne Sullivan.  
She came to live with us. Her first task  
was to teach me manners!





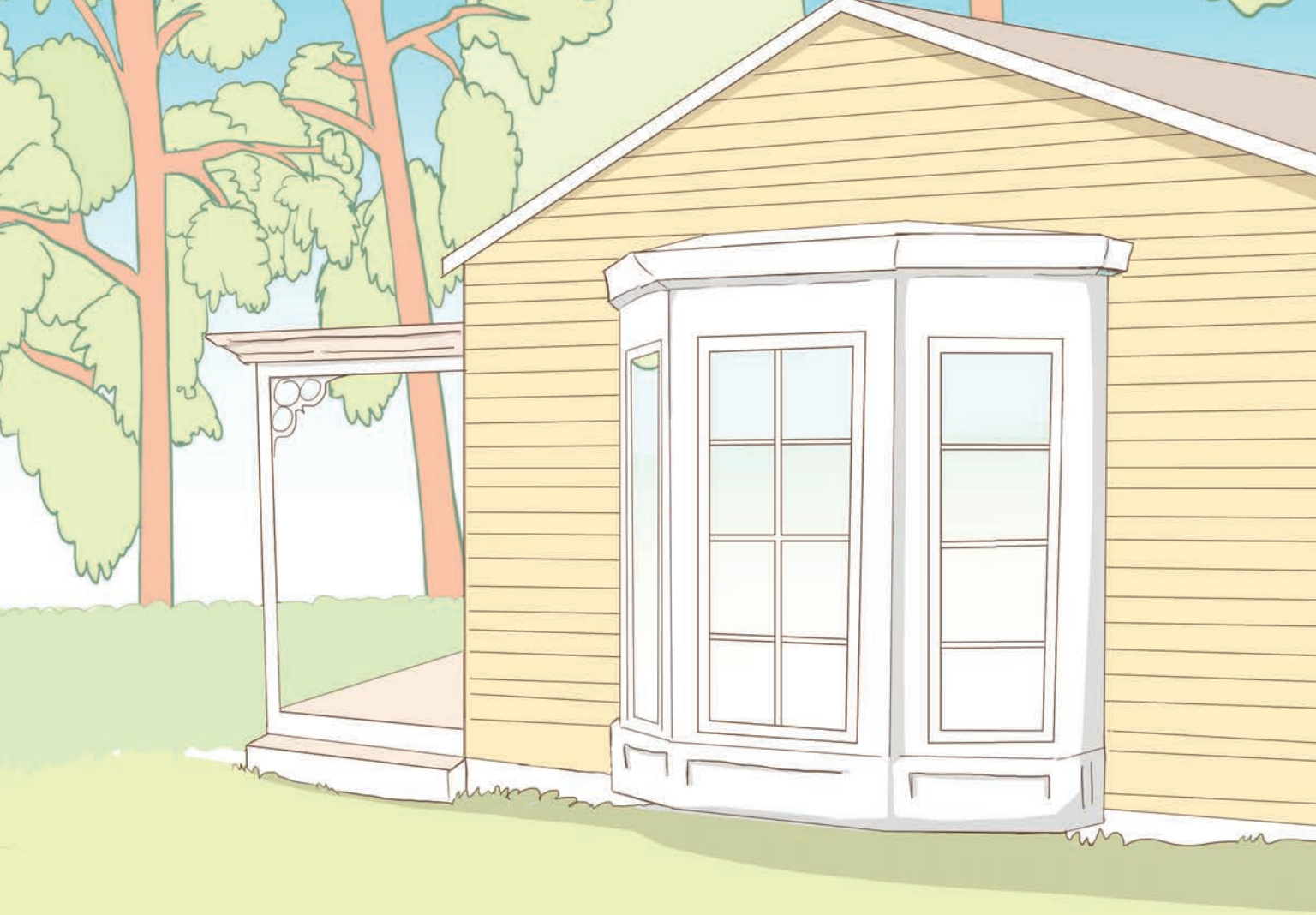


Anne taught me the Sign Language alphabet. Sign Language is a way to communicate using fingers and hands. Anne believed that if I knew letters, I would be able to learn words.

One day Anne put her hands in mine and signed the letters for doll, d-o-l-l. Then she gave me a doll to hold. I used my hands to feel the doll, but I did not connect it to the letters d-o-l-l.





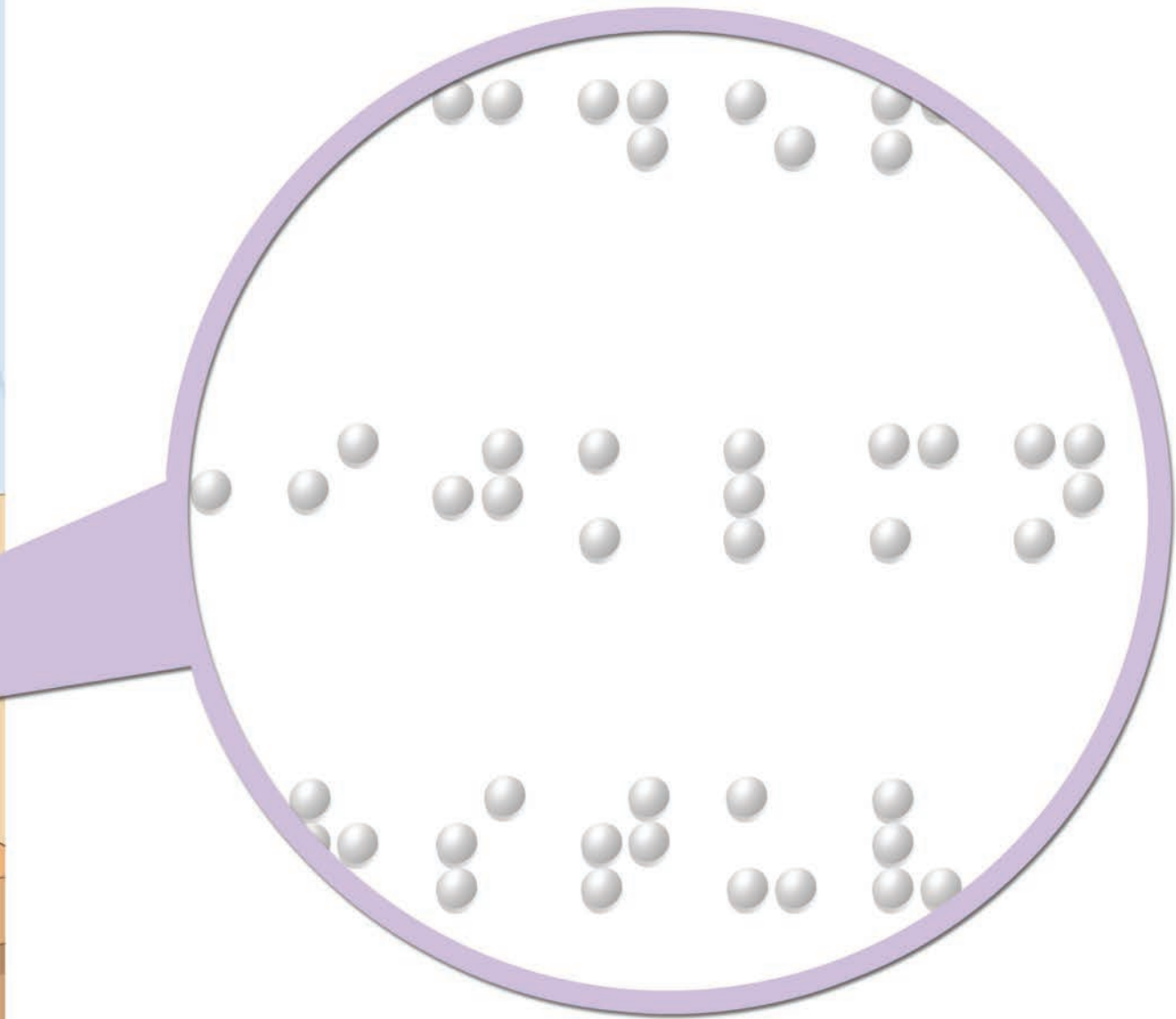


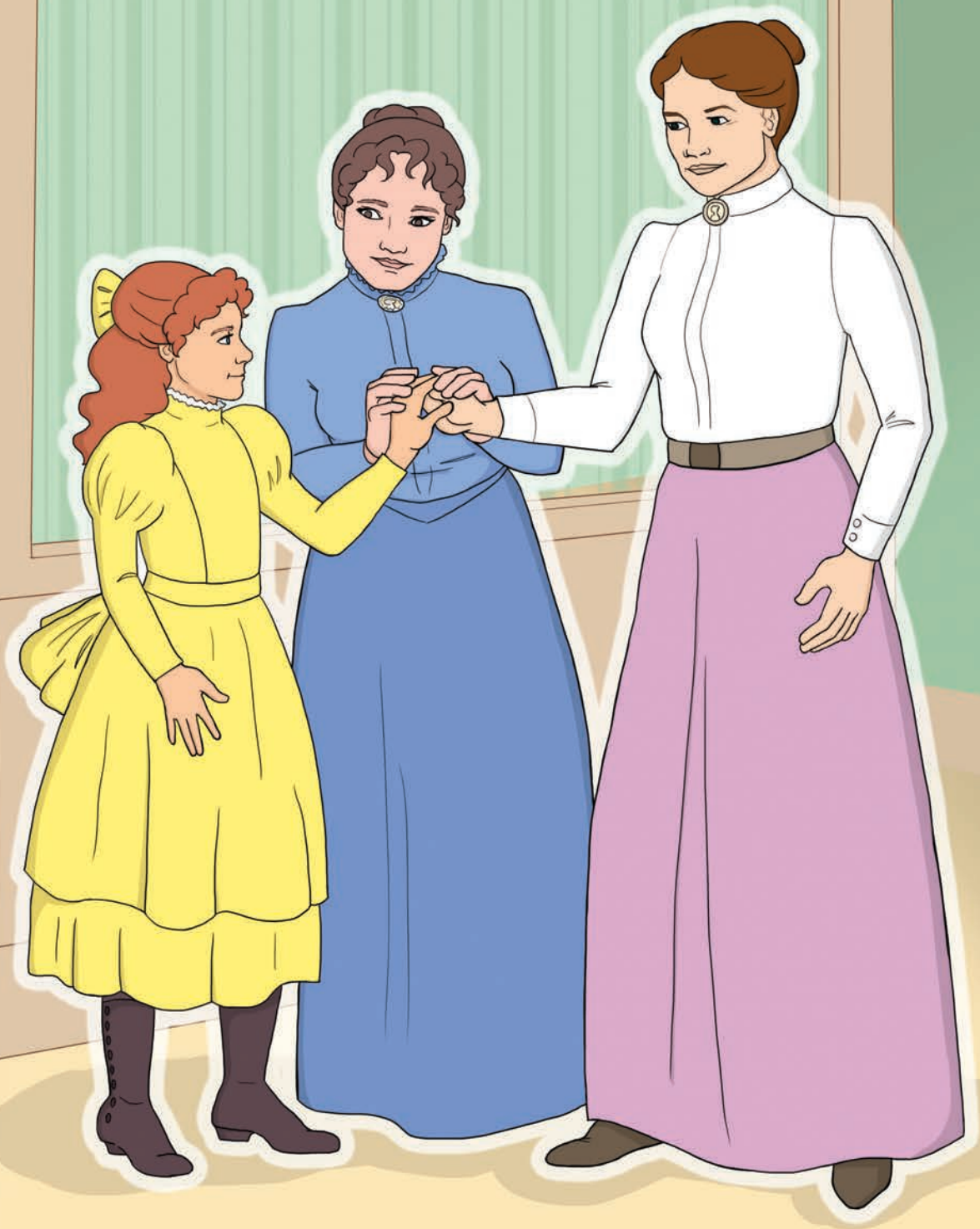
Anne tried again while we were at the water pump. She took one of my hands and placed it under the water. She spelled w-a-t-e-r in my other hand. I felt the water and suddenly understood: w-a-t-e-r meant “water!”

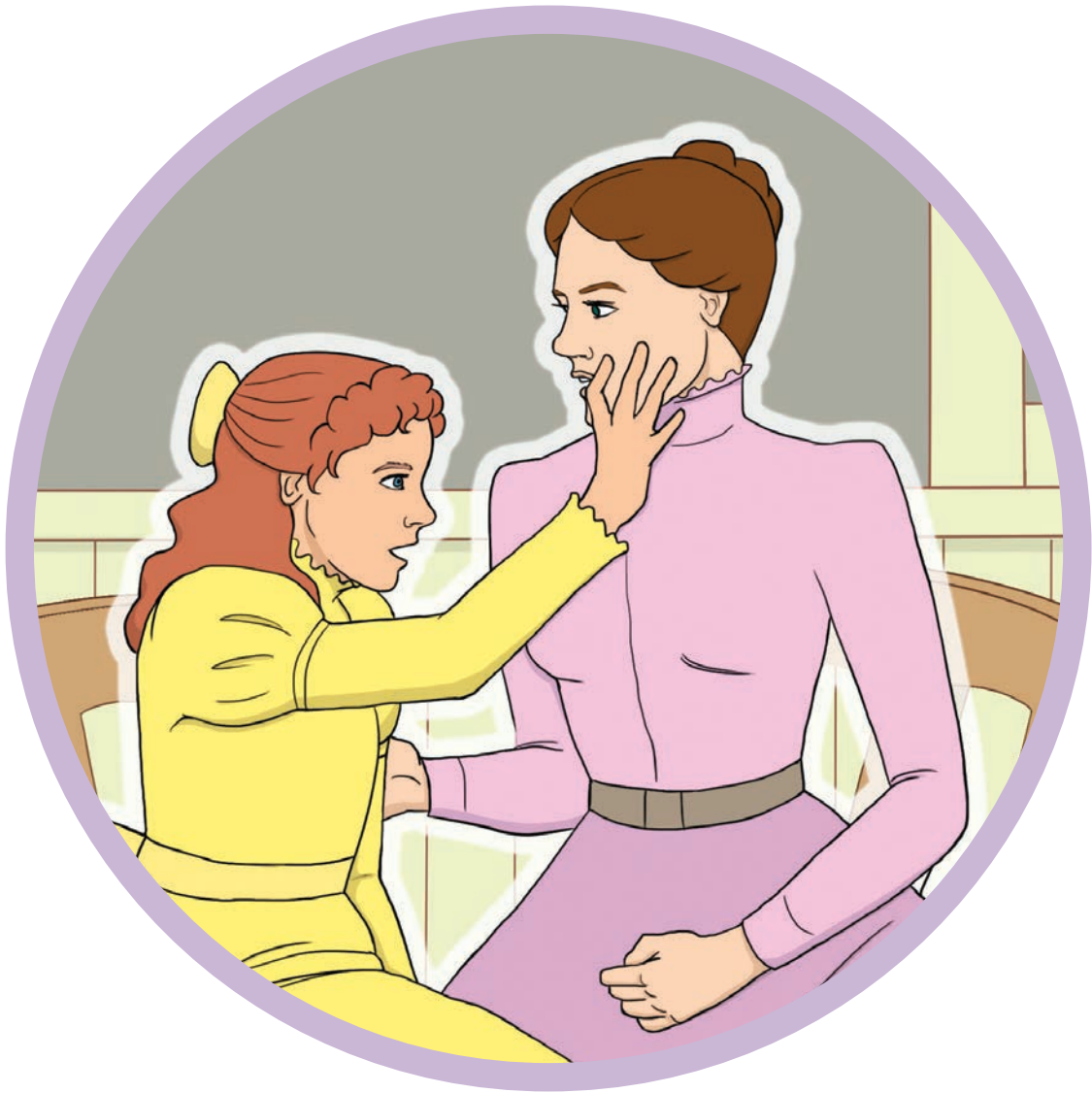




Now that I understood that letters work together to make words, I could learn to read. I used my fingers to feel raised dots on a page. The dots, called Braille, stood for letters. This made it possible for me to read without my eyes.







Even though I had learned better ways to communicate, I was not satisfied. I wanted to communicate using my voice.

Anne introduced me to Sarah Fuller, the principal at a school for the deaf in Boston, Massachusetts.

Sarah let me touch her nose, throat, and mouth. I felt the vibrations when she spoke. I learned to imitate the vibrations in my own nose, throat, and mouth to say words.

I'll never forget my first spoken sentence: "It is warm."







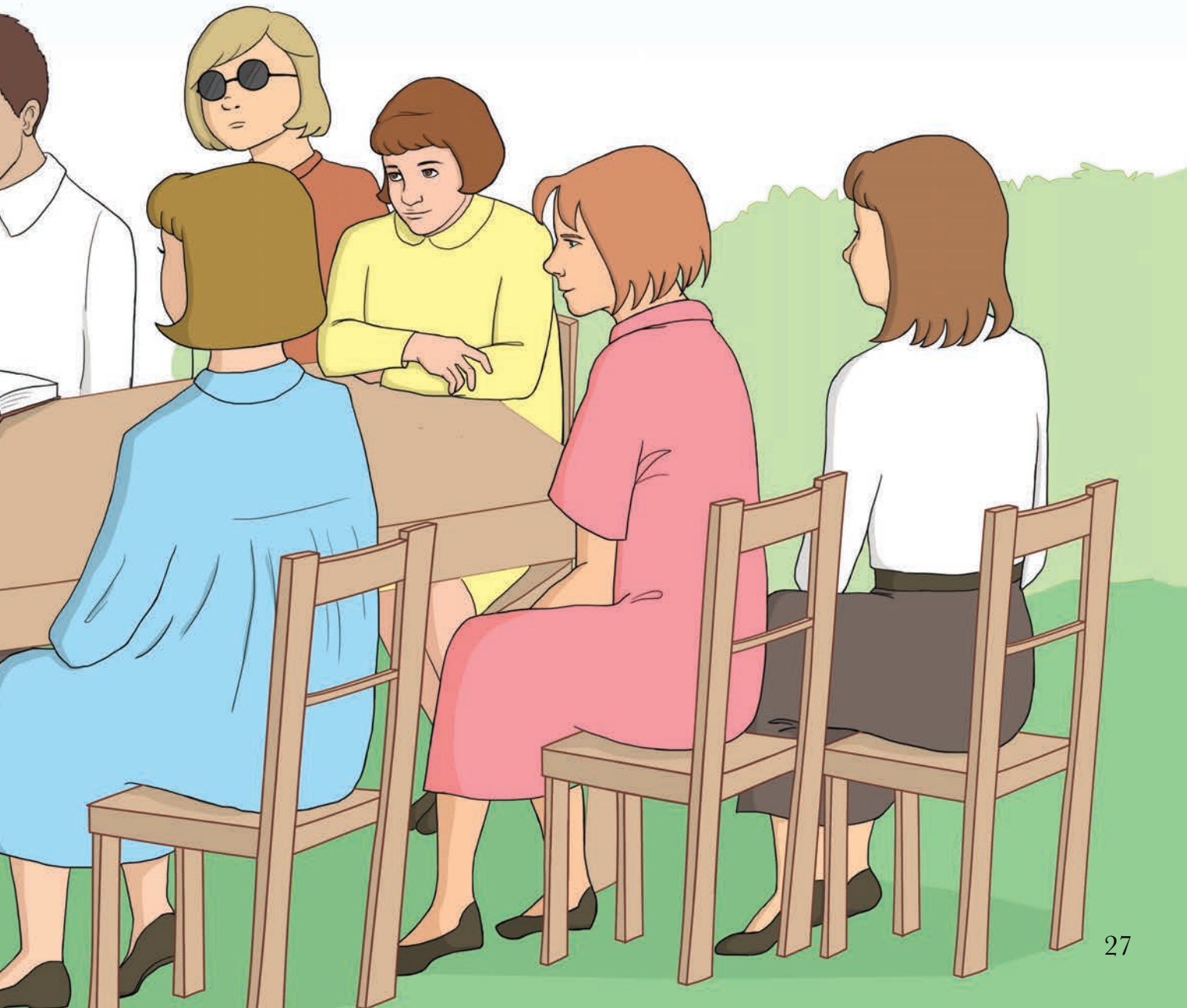
I grew up and went to college. I was the first deaf and blind person to graduate from college.





The day I learned what w-a-t-e-r meant was the day I felt hope and joy for the first time. I wanted to help others like me find hope and joy.

I spent the rest of my life helping the deaf and blind.



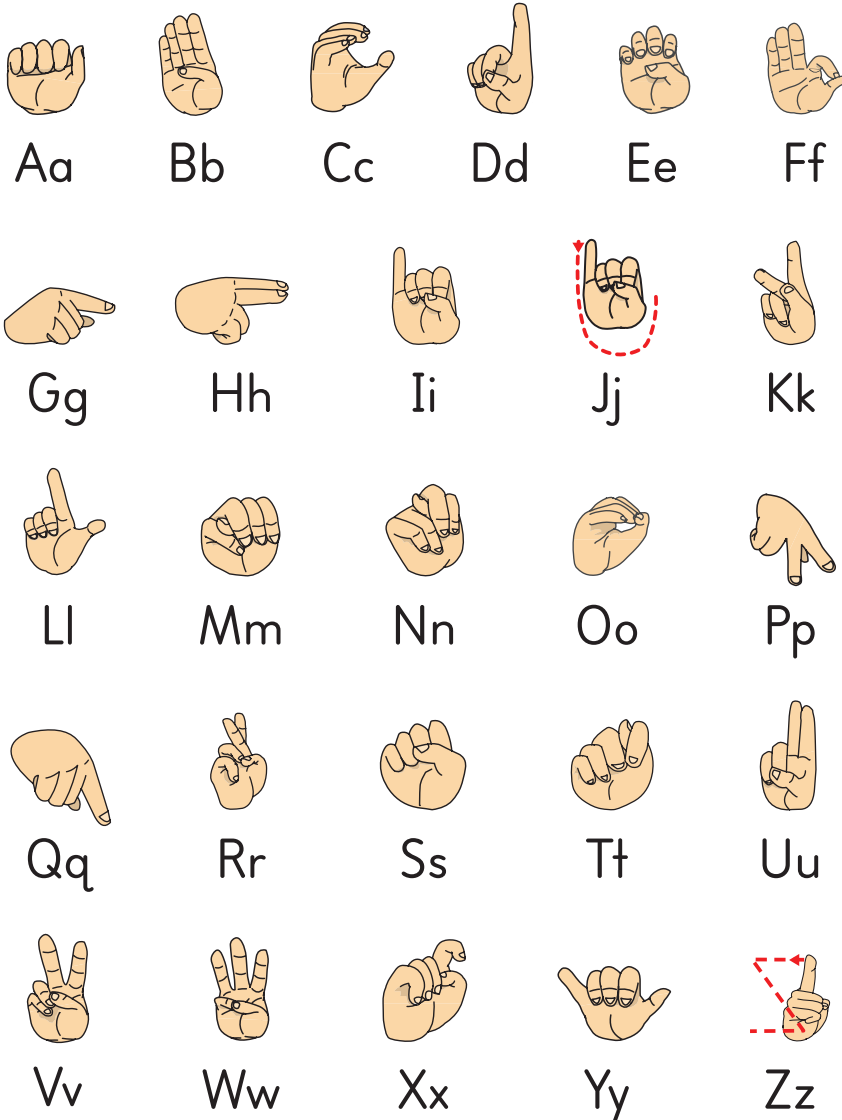




In 1964 President Lyndon Johnson awarded me the Presidential Medal of Freedom for my work.



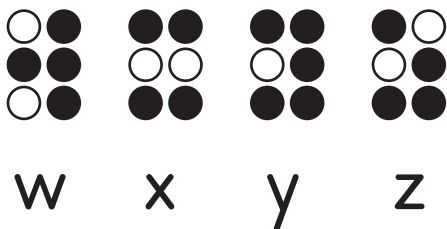
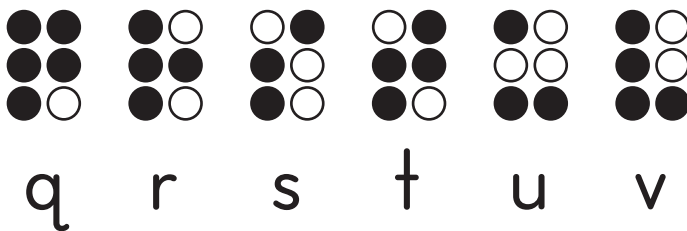
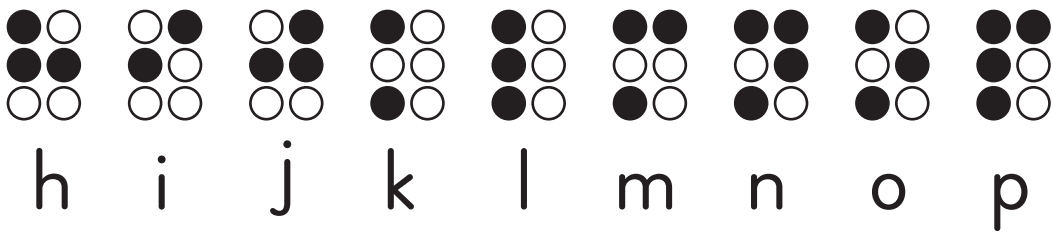
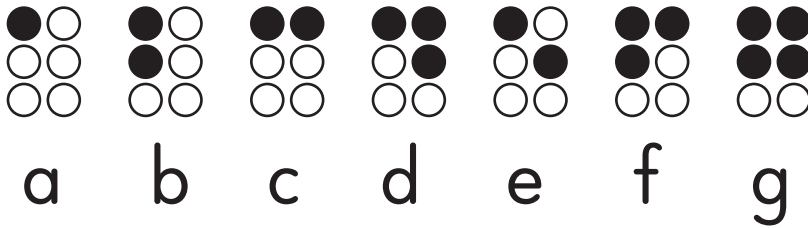
# American Sign Language



Helen Keller learned to communicate by using her fingers to feel and form letters of the alphabet. She felt the letters in her hand as her teacher, Anne Sullivan, finger-spelled words like **w-a-t-e-r** using the American Manual Alphabet.

The American Manual Alphabet is part of American Sign Language (ASL). Featuring hand signs for whole words and ideas, ASL is considered a native language to many people who are deaf or hard of hearing. It is also a vital form of communication for those with friends or family who use their hands to speak.

# Braille Alphabet



Louis Braille was blinded in a childhood accident. When he grew up, he invented a special alphabet for people who were blind, like himself, so they could read with their fingers. This alphabet is still in use today!

In the Braille Alphabet above, the black dots represent those that would be raised up on a page for visually-impaired readers to touch and recognize as letters. Individuals read by feeling each letter with their fingertips.

**Helen Keller** (1880-1968)

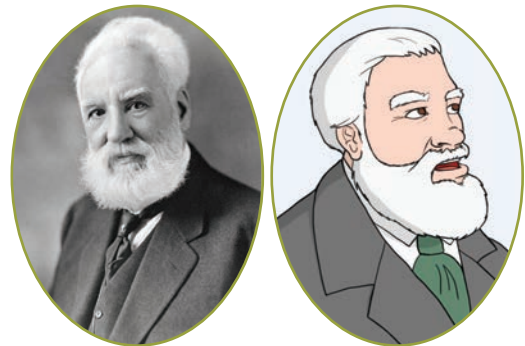
was a revered author, speaker, and educator best known for having learned to read, write, and speak despite losing her sight and hearing at the age of 19 months. With the help of her teacher and friend Anne

Sullivan, Helen Keller wrote and published many articles and 12 books including her autobiography, *The Story of My Life*, which she dedicated to Alexander Graham Bell. Helen helped soldiers who had been blinded in the war and she helped to found Helen Keller International, an organization dedicated to preventing blindness and teaching people with blindness how to live a fulfilling life. Helen said: “Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much.”



**Alexander Graham Bell**

(1847-1922) is best known for his invention of the telephone, but he was also a strong advocate for the deaf. Both Bell’s mother and wife were unable to hear, and this inspired him to study the human voice.





**Anne Sullivan** (1866-1936) contracted an eye infection which severely damaged her sight when she was just 5 years old. She was able to become a teacher nonetheless, and at age 21, she accepted a position to teach Helen Keller how to communicate. Once Anne gained Helen's trust and respect, she was able to teach her to associate letters with words, and words with objects and ideas, through American Sign Language. She remained Helen's interpreter and constant companion until Miss Sullivan's death in 1936.



**Sarah Fuller** (1836-1927) was principal of the Horace Mann School for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Sarah Fuller had many responsibilities. Nevertheless, she made time to provide Helen her first speech lessons using teaching methods developed by Fuller's mentor, Alexander Graham Bell.



## **Epilogue**

Helen Keller died at age 87 on June 1, 1968. Helen Keller Day is celebrated in the United States of America on July 27.

## **About the Author**

Pam Ferguson taught kindergarten for over 40 years in St. Petersburg, Florida. One year she had a student who was deaf. She learned sign language to communicate with her—and she has been teaching her students sign language ever since!

## **About the Illustrator**

Rebecca Cohen is an educator and artist who lives in Berkeley, California. She loves teaching and learning as much as she loves drawing. That's why she was very proud to illustrate this book about one of her biggest heroes, Helen Keller.