

Handicapped or Handicapable?



Essential Questions

- How do people generally feel about those with physical and mental differences?
- How have the handicapped been treated in previous centuries?
- Why and how have past attitudes toward the handicapped changed?
- How have the actions of individuals affected changes in the way handicapped people are viewed?

What is a Handicap?

A handicap is an aspect of a person's physical or mental state that

- prevents the body from functioning properly
- limits activity or ability to do a certain task
- affects social interaction or ability to learn

A handicap can be the result of a genetic disorder, such as spina bifida; a disease, such as polio, Parkinson's disease or multiple sclerosis; trauma, such as an accident that results in loss of a limb or ability; disorders that affect the brain, which can be anything from dyslexia to autism or Alzheimer's disease; or psychological or mood disorders, such as depression or schizophrenia. The degree to which a handicap affects a person can vary from individual to individual, even with the same disorder.

The Asylum



Popular Mode of Curing Insanity!
Lizzie Bunker punishing Miss Bidson, on suspicion of taking her key.



A patient kept in a straitjacket



Dorothea Dix

For centuries, people with handicaps were considered incapable of living productive lives in society. In medieval times, people with mental disorders were often considered to be bewitched or witches themselves and persecuted as such. Starting in the 18th century, a new emphasis was placed on finding rational explanations for natural phenomena. Those with genetic disorders, as well as the physically and mentally handicapped, were put away in asylums or hospitals. This practice often occurred simply because their families could not care for them adequately at home. In these institutions, people were often kept locked up or restrained all day. Medical science could do little for people with genetic disorders or mental conditions, or people who developed conditions later in life such as blindness or dementia, so the focus was on keeping the inmates under control. Nothing was done to try to treat their problems or improve their lives.

In the mid-1800s, Dorothea Dix (1802–1887) found that the mentally ill in her home state of Massachusetts were often abused. She wrote to the state legislature: “I proceed, Gentlemen, briefly to call your attention to the present state of Insane Persons confined within this Commonwealth, in cages, stalls, pens! Chained, naked, beaten with rods, and lashed into obedience.” She worked to have state hospitals built with professional staff to care for these people, as well as the blind, deaf, and mute.

The system Dix helped start lasted in most places well into the 20th century, until medical treatments, improvements in technology, and the actions of the handicapped themselves advanced the idea that people needed to be treated with attention to their individual needs and capabilities.

Hellen Keller

“The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched, they must be felt with the heart”

- 1880—Born in Alabama; at 19 months old, a disease left her blind and deaf
- 1887—Anne Sullivan became her teacher; Keller learned language
- 1903—Published her autobiography, *The Story of My Life*
- 1904—Became the first blind person to earn a B. A.—from Radcliffe College
- 1920—Helped found the American Civil Liberties Union
- 1920s—Began work with the American Foundation for the Blind, which she would support for 40 years
- 1964—Awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom
- 1968—Died at her home in Connecticut
- 2003—Alabama depicted her on its state quarter



Keller graduating from Radcliffe (top).
Keller and her teacher, Anne Sullivan.

One of the first people to demonstrate that having a disability was not the same thing as being disabled was Helen Keller, a lifelong advocate for the blind and deaf. When Keller was 19 months old, she suffered an illness that left her blind and deaf. Although she had not developed language at the time of her illness, Helen made up signs that she used to communicate. The Kellers hired Anne Sullivan, a former student of the Perkins Institute for the Blind in Boston who was also visually impaired, to be Helen's teacher.

Sullivan began to teach Helen a manual alphabet, in which letters are formed with the fingers. Helen often became frustrated with the process. One day, Sullivan was running water over Helen's hand, while spelling "water" into her other hand. Helen described the incident in her autobiography: "As the cool stream gushed over one hand, she spelled into the other the word water, first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten—a thrill of returning thought: and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that 'w-a-t-e-r' meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free. There were barriers still, it is true, but barriers that in time could be swept away." Helen learned language at a pace so rapid that Sullivan could hardly keep up with her demand for new words.

Keller's academic work was so good that she was admitted to Radcliffe College, the women's division of Harvard University. In 1904, she became the first blind and deaf person to earn a Bachelor's degree from any college. In 1903, Keller published her autobiography, *The Story of My Life*, in which she described her early years and education. Her writing showed real literary talent and she went on to write 13 more books and many essays.

Keller spoke out for many causes during her life. She was a pacifist and advocated both women's suffrage and birth control. She became a socialist and supported Eugene V. Debs when he ran for president. In 1920, she helped found the American Civil Liberties Union, which devotes itself to safeguarding the rights guaranteed in the first ten amendments to the Constitution. She also worked for the American Foundation for the Blind, raising funds for the organization for over 40 years, and traveled the world working for better treatment of the blind and deaf in other countries.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

- Jan. 30th, 1882—Born in Hyde Park, New York
- 1905—Married Eleanor Roosevelt, a cousin
- 1910—Elected to New York State Senate
- 1913—Became Assistant Secretary of the Navy
- 1921—Contracted polio, leaving his legs paralyzed
- 1928—Elected governor of New York
- 1929—Stock Market crashed, ushering in the Great Depression
- 1932—Elected President of the United States, offering the people a “New Deal” to recover from the Depression
- 1936—Reelected in a landslide
- 1939—Second World War began in Europe
- 1940—Reelected to a third term; first president to serve more than two terms
- Dec. 7th, 1941—Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor; U. S. entered World War II
- 1942–1945—Met with Allied leaders Josef Stalin (U.S.S.R.) and Winston Churchill (Great Britain)
- 1944—Reelected for a fourth term
- April 12th, 1945—Died in Warm Springs, Georgia



James Cox, the Democratic candidate for President in 1920, chose Franklin Delano Roosevelt for his running mate as vice-president. They lost to Warren G. Harding and the next summer, while vacationing with his family at Campobello Island in Canada, Roosevelt contracted polio, which left his legs paralyzed. He sought treatment to bring back his ability to walk, eventually going to a spa in Warm Springs, Georgia, where he met many other polio patients from all walks of life. In 1926, when the spa was in danger of going under due to financial problems, Roosevelt bought it. He continued to visit Warm Springs for the rest of his life.

Despite his illness, his wife Eleanor encouraged him not to quit politics. Roosevelt wore heavy braces on his legs and could walk a few steps by leaning on the support of aides or his sons. He used a wheelchair in private, but was photographed in it only twice. He feared that if the public knew how disabled he really was, no one would vote for him.

In 1929, the New York stock market crashed, which helped bring on what came to be called the Great Depression. Banks failed, businesses closed, and people lost their jobs, homes, and farms. By 1932, 25% of the workforce was unemployed, and the public was ready for a change. Roosevelt received the Democratic nomination and ran on a platform that offered a “New Deal” for the American people. He won the election. However, foreign affairs required more and more of Roosevelt’s attention. On December 7th, 1941, the Japanese attempted to wipe out the U. S. Pacific Fleet by bombing Pearl Harbor. The next day, Roosevelt asked Congress for a Declaration of War, and the United States entered World War II. He was reelected for an unprecedented fourth term in 1944, but died of a massive stroke the following April while in Warm Springs, Georgia.

Roosevelt’s illness brought him into contact with people who were also suffering. In the Depression, he saw more people suffering not from physical disorders, but from helplessness and hopelessness. He understood what it meant to be helpless. He channeled his compassion into programs to help rebuild the nation. Few presidents have faced the challenges he did, including an economic crisis and a two-front war. While it is true that Roosevelt did not publicize the extent of his paralysis, he often met with other polio patients to encourage them not to lose hope and to make the most of what abilities they still had.

Temple Grandin

- 1947—Born in Massachusetts
- 1950—Diagnosed with autism
- 1966—Graduated from Hampshire Country School
- 1970—Earned a B. S. in psychology from Franklin Pierce College
- 1975—Earned an M. S. in animal science
- 1986—Published *Emergence: Labeled Autistic*
- 1989—Earned a Ph.D. in animal sciences from University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana
- 1996—Published *Thinking in Pictures: and Other Reports from My Life with Autism*
- 1990—Became a professor of animal science at Colorado State University



Temple Grandin was diagnosed with autism at the age of three. Autism is a disorder that affects the brain's ability to develop social and communication skills. People with the condition vary greatly in their cognitive and communication abilities. Many suffer from "sensory overload" —extreme sensitivity to sounds, light, textures, and touch. Grandin did not speak until she was four, but her mother hired teachers and insisted that her daughter learn to function in society, as well as learn academics. Grandin attended Hampshire Country School in Rindge, New Hampshire, where she developed an interest in science and animals. Grandin has written extensively about her experiences as an autistic person. In the mid-1980s, she began a career as a much-sought after speaker to organizations and conventions about autism. She has written books aimed at helping those with autism and Asperger's Syndrome. Grandin first came to national attention when Dr. Oliver Sachs, a neurologist, wrote about her in his book *An Anthropologist on Mars*. Since then, she has made several appearances on television and was the subject of two documentary films. In 2010, HBO made a film based on her life that won five Emmy awards, including Outstanding Television Movie and Best Actress in a Drama.

Grandin maintains a website that offers advice to those with autism and other related conditions. One person wrote to her: "I live in South Africa and am now 30 years old. I never dreamt of getting a qualification or even being able to function in an adult world that I find so difficult." Through her courage and perseverance, Temple Grandin has demonstrated to the world what people with autism can accomplish, and has served as an inspiration to others around the world.

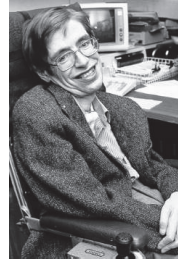
Picture source

- http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Temple_Grandin_at_TED.jpg

Stephen Hawking

"My goal is a complete understanding of the universe, why it is as it is and why it exists at all."

- 1942—Born in Oxford, England
- 1962—Received a B. A. from Oxford University
- 1963—Diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), a disease that destroys the nerves that control muscles. Doctors gave him two years to live.
- 1966—Earned Ph.D. from Cambridge; despite doctors' diagnosis, married Jane Wilde
- 1968—Inducted into Institute of Astronomy in Cambridge
- 1969—Started using a wheelchair
- 1974—Demonstrated that radiation can escape black holes, a new discovery that countered previous scientific thinking
- 1979—Named Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge
- 1985—Lost the ability to speak and started using a voice synthesizer to communicate
- 1988—Published *A Brief History of Time*, which sold 25 million copies
- 2009—Retired from teaching at Cambridge



Stephen W. Hawking was born in 1942 in Oxford, England. As a boy, he was always interested in science; he went on to major in physics at University College, Oxford, where he also was the coxswain of a rowing team. After earning his Bachelor's degree, Hawking went to Cambridge to pursue a doctorate. While in his first year at Cambridge, Hawking underwent several tests to determine the cause of some physical problems he was having. He had noticed that he would occasionally trip and fall or slur his speech. The doctors told his family that he had Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), a disease in which the nerves that control muscle function stop working. People with the disease lose the ability to walk, talk, and care for themselves. Eventually, they can no longer breathe and they die. Hawking's doctors said he had about two and a half years to live. This news horrified Hawking and his family, but he refused to give up on life. He went on with his studies and even married in 1965. He worked hard to complete his Ph.D., thinking that he had very little time left. Although ALS limited him physically, it did not affect his ability to think.

By 1969, Hawking was confined to a wheelchair, but the course of the disease seemed to have slowed a bit. He continued to study and publish. His first book, *Large Scale Structure of Space Time* (1975), was aimed primarily at other scientists, but he also had a knack for explaining complicated cosmological and astronomical concepts to the general public. During this time, ALS gradually robbed him of the ability to do many things for himself, including speak. By the late 1970s, his speech was so slurred that only those who knew him best could understand him. In 1985, he lost the ability to speak altogether. Hawking might have been left unable to communicate if not for a California computer programmer who developed software that allowed Hawking to communicate through a speech synthesizer. Hawking would choose words that appeared on a screen with a clicker he was able to operate with one finger, and the synthesizer would read them aloud. With the help of this program, Hawking continued to write and give talks at scientific conferences. He also appeared on many television shows that have been shown on PBS, as well as the Discovery and History Channels.

In 1979, Cambridge University named Hawking the Lucasian Professor of Mathematics, a position that was once held by Isaac Newton. In 1988, Hawking published *A Brief History of Time*, which aimed to explain the origins of the universe and cosmology to the general reader. It spent over two years on the *New York Times* bestseller list for nonfiction and sold more than 25 million copies worldwide. However, as Hawking himself noted, more people probably bought it than actually read it because the material it covered was still highly complex. To address this problem, in 2001, Hawking wrote *The Universe in a Nutshell*, which made for easier reading; this book was followed by *A Briefer History of Time*, which attempted to be even easier for the general reader to understand.

Hawking has long been a proponent of space exploration, and believes that life on earth will be endangered or extinguished by global warming, nuclear war, or some other cataclysmic event. He feels that the future of human beings depends on being able to travel and colonize beyond earth. In 2007, Hawking boarded a specially built Boeing 727 which, by flying in steep climbs and dives, is able to create a weightlessness for a few minutes such as one astronaut's experience in space travel. "The zero-G part was wonderful," Hawking said of the experience. "I could have gone on and on." He has reserved a seat on Richard Branson's Virgin Galactic spaceflight, which is due to lift off in 2013 and fly to the edge of space, 70 miles above the earth.

Today, Hawking continues to do research and publish. The ALS has progressed to the point where he can no longer use the clicker to operate his speech synthesizer and has to rely on a sensor attached to a cheek muscle. In a 2010 conference at California Institute of Technology, Hawking spoke of the effect ALS has had on his development as a scientist. Because he could not write out equations he had to do mental math, which increased his ability to picture spatial relationships. This ability proved crucial in his groundbreaking work on the early moments of the creation of the universe. He said that if it were not for his disease, he might never have made the discoveries that he has.



Bethany Hamilton

- 1980—Born in Kauai, Hawaii
- 1988—Entered first surfing competition
- 2003—Lost an arm due to a shark attack
- 2004—Returned to surfing competition; placed fifth in Open Women's Division
- 2005—Won first place, National Championships; received Courage Award from U. S. Sports Academy
- 2007—Turned professional
- 2008—Founded Friends of Bethany Foundation to aid shark attack victims
- 2009—Won second place in World Junior Championships



Jim Abbott

- 1967—Born in Flint, Michigan without a right hand
- 1986—Won the U. S. Sports Academy's Courage Award
- 1987—Won James E. Sullivan Award as best amateur athlete
- 1988—Won gold medal in baseball demonstration event at Summer Olympics
- 1989—Joined California Angels
- 1993—Threw no-hitter against Cleveland Indians while playing for the NY Yankees
- 1999—Retired with career 4.25 ERA

Bethany Hamilton entered her first surfing competition when she was only eight years old and won both the longboard and shortboard events. On October 31st, 2003, while surfing with friends off Kauai's north shore, Hamilton was attacked by a tiger shark. She lost her left arm and had to go through several surgeries. She was determined not to let the loss of her arm deter her from her goal of becoming a professional surfer. In January 2004, she entered her first surfing competition since the shark attack. She placed fifth in the women's division. She continued to enter competitions, and in 2005 she won her first national title, as well as the Mildred Babe Dirdrikson-Zacharias Courage Award from the U.S. Sports Academy.

In 2007, she turned pro. She has participated in competitions both in the United States and around the world. At the age of 19, she won second place in the Association of Surfing Professionals Junior World Championships. She told her story in an autobiography, *Soul Surfer*, which was published in 2004 and then made into a movie in 2011. She has written several books on faith, including *Devotions for the Soul Surfer* and the *Soul Surfer's Bible*, as well as several novels. Friends of Bethany, a foundation started by her family and friends, raises money to help other victims of traumatic amputation and shark attacks.

In 1967, Jim Abbott was born with no right hand. As a boy, he longed to play baseball, so he taught himself how to bat, catch, and throw with one hand. His father helped him invent a way to catch the ball with his glove on his left hand, quickly remove the glove from that hand, and then throw the ball. He would either drop the glove on the ground or tuck it under his other arm. He also taught himself to bat.

The Toronto Blue Jays drafted him in the 36th round of the 1985 draft, but he decided to go to college and improve his skills playing baseball at the University of Michigan. In 1988, South Korea hosted the Summer Olympics in Seoul; Abbott went there to pitch for the U. S. baseball team, although baseball was only a demonstration sport that year. In that same year, he was drafted by the California Angels and joined them at spring training. He lost the first two games he pitched, but he improved and ended his rookie year with a 3.92 ERA (earned run average). In 1992, he not only had a successful year as a pitcher but completed the season without a single fielding error—something not many two-handed players manage to do. Perhaps the highlight of his career came in 1993, when, pitching for the New York Yankees, he threw a no-hitter against the Cleveland Indians.

Since retiring from baseball, he has worked as a pitching coach for the Los Angeles Angels and as a motivational speaker. He published his autobiography, *Imperfect: An Improbable Life*, in 2012. He has also worked with the Department of Labor on programs to encourage businesses to hire people with disabilities.

Americans with Disabilities Act



President George H. W. Bush signs the Americans with Disabilities Act, July 26, 1990

July 26th, 1990—President George H. W. Bush signed into law the Americans with Disabilities Act, which:

- prohibited discrimination against people with “physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity”
- required making accommodations for the disabled in public transportation and in buildings
- Prohibited employers from discriminating against people with disabilities

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination against anyone based on race, religion, gender, and/or ethnicity. However, it did not recognize discrimination against people who were often overlooked when it came to employment, and who couldn’t even use public transportation or enter many buildings because of structural obstacles.

Lex Frieden, a Professor at the University of Texas at Houston, and Mitchell J. Rappaport of the Center for People with Disabilities, proposed legislation to remedy this. It was introduced as a Senate bill by Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa. The goal was to make sure that Americans with disabilities would not be excluded from the mainstream of American life and to give them access to jobs and facilities that at the time were often closed to them. The bill excluded poor eyesight that could be corrected by prescription lenses and current drug abusers.

With the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, cities, states, and companies had to refurbish their buildings by putting in bathrooms that were accessible to the handicapped, as well as ramps and elevators to help them get around. Handicapped parking spaces sprouted in parking lots, and workplaces had to make reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities who worked for them.

Because of the Americans with Disabilities Act, people who are handicapped or disabled can still live productive, fulfilling lives and achieve many of their dreams.