



LOUIS BRAILLE

Did you know that a 15-year-old French boy developed the braille system used by blind people to read and write? His name was Louis Braille and thanks to his innovation, blind people all over the world can lead productive and independent lives.

Louis Braille was born in the small village of Coupvray near Paris, France on January 4, 1809. His father owned a leather craft workshop, and Louis liked to visit there while his father worked. When he was three years old, Louis tried to use the awl (a sharp tool used on leather), but he had a terrible accident. He poked his eye with the awl! An infection developed in his injured eye and spread to his other eye. By the time he was four years old, he was completely blind.

Even though Louis could not see, he was very bright and curious. When he was about eight, he went to the village school. He was one of the smartest students there, but he could only learn a little. The school did not have ways to teach him to read or write. If he had not learned those skills he most likely would have had to beg on the streets, as many blind people had to do during those times.



With help from his father and the local priest, Louis was accepted at the National Institute for Blind Children in Paris, the world's first school for the blind. When he was only ten years old, he went away to school where he was the youngest student. The school was cold, damp, and very harsh, but Louis studied and worked hard.

There were only fourteen books at the school for blind children to read. The books had raised letters, which were hard to figure out; but Louis read them all and learned many subjects, including music. He learned to play the piano, organ, and cello. Eventually he played in churches all around Paris.

In 1821, a soldier named Charles Barbier visited the school and spoke about the system he had invented called "Night Writing." He had developed it for soldiers to use at night so they wouldn't have to talk and give away their location. It used 12 raised dots placed in various combinations to represent different sounds.

Louis, however, worked on it and adjusted it to a six-dot system. He simplified it and made it easier to use. He wrote a book about it, Method of Writing Words, Music and Plain Song by Means of Dots, for Use by the Blind and Arranged by Them. He worked on the system for many years and also developed a code for music and for mathematics.

Louis Braille became a well-respected teacher at the Institute. His braille system was not taught at the Institute while he lived. It had not been widely accepted during his lifetime, but he continued to work on it and he understood its importance to blind people.

Louis Braille died at the age of 43 on January 6, 1852 of tuberculosis. He was buried in his village of Coupvray. On the one-hundredth anniversary of his death in 1952, Louis Braille's grave was moved to the Pantheon in Paris where national heroes are enshrined. As a tribute to his hometown, his hands are still buried in Coupvray as a symbol of Louis' system of touch reading.

France and the rest of the world eventually realized what a valuable contribution Louis Braille had made to the lives of blind people. He became a hero in France and is now famous for enabling blind people throughout the world to read and write.

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