A Man of Vision

A Reading A–Z Level M Leveled Reader
Word Count: 748

L.ˢ BRAILLE
1809-1852

Reading a-z

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Written by William D. Hicks
Illustrated by Stephen Marchesi

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Correlation	
LEVEL M	
Fountas & Pinnell	L
Reading Recovery	19
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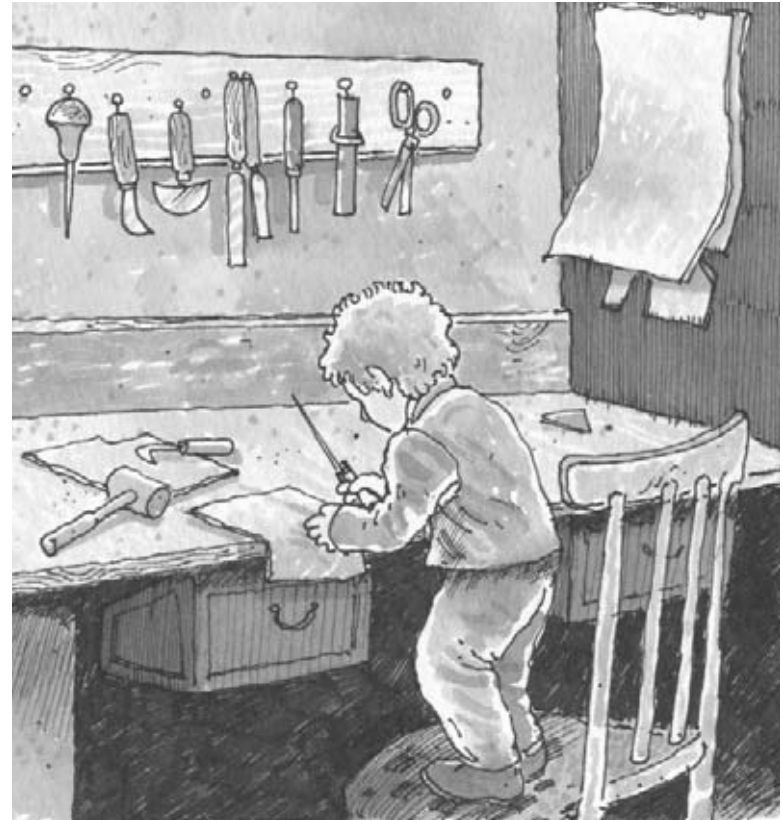
The Accident

In 1809, Louis Braille was born in a small town in the country of France. One day, at the age of three, Louis hurt himself. While playing in his father's shoe workshop, he tried to make his own pair of shoes.

Louis picked up his father's sharp **awl** and bent over. The awl went into Louis's eye. His hurt eye became sick.

Before long, the sickness spread to his second eye. And a short time later, Louis could not see. He was **blind**.

Still, Louis went to school with children who could see. But after two years, his parents took him out of school. They thought that there was nothing more for him to learn at school. He could not read or write.

As with many other parents of blind children back then, Louis's parents thought he would end up on the street. So they moved Louis from his small town to the big city. He was ten years old.

School for the Blind

Louis's parents sent him to a school for blind boys in the city of Paris, France. It was one of the first schools for blind people in the world. Louis learned many skills at this school.

He learned how to weave branches together to make chairs. He learned how to **sew** leather to make slippers.

Louis also learned how to read. He felt raised letters on a sheet of paper. The paper was pressed against copper wires shaped like letters. This made a raised letter on the paper. Blind people could feel these letters.

But the letters were difficult to read. Too many letters felt the same. Many letters had similar shapes. And the wire used to make these letters had to be shaped by people who could see. It seemed there had to be a better way for blind people to read.
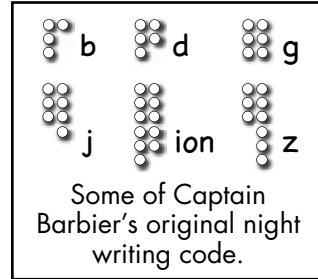
Night Writing

Charles Barbier, a soldier, invented a form of **night writing** for France's army. Night writing gave soldiers a way to read in the dark. Soldiers often hid in the dark. They did not want to use a light because they did not want to be found. Night writing also allowed soldiers to send messages to one another without using light or making a noise.

Night writing used twelve small raised dots to form each letter. But the army decided not to use it. It was too hard for most soldiers to learn; so, in 1821, Charles took the system to Louis's school.

b   d   g

j   ion   z

Some of Captain Barbier's original night writing code.

Louis believed a system of raised dots could be used to help blind people read. He had been trying to create a touch system of his own for reading and writing. When he tried night writing, he knew it was the right one. But he also thought that it was too difficult.

The night writing system did not allow fingertips to touch a whole letter. The readers had to move their finger to feel the whole **symbol**. Night writing also did not include periods, question marks, music signs, or numbers. Louis asked Charles to change his system to make it easier. But the soldier would not change it.

Louis's Own System

Over a few years, Louis made a shorter, easier form of this **touch system**. He used six dots instead of twelve to form each letter. It allowed a person's fingertip to feel the entire symbol without having to move. This difference let blind people read much faster and easier.
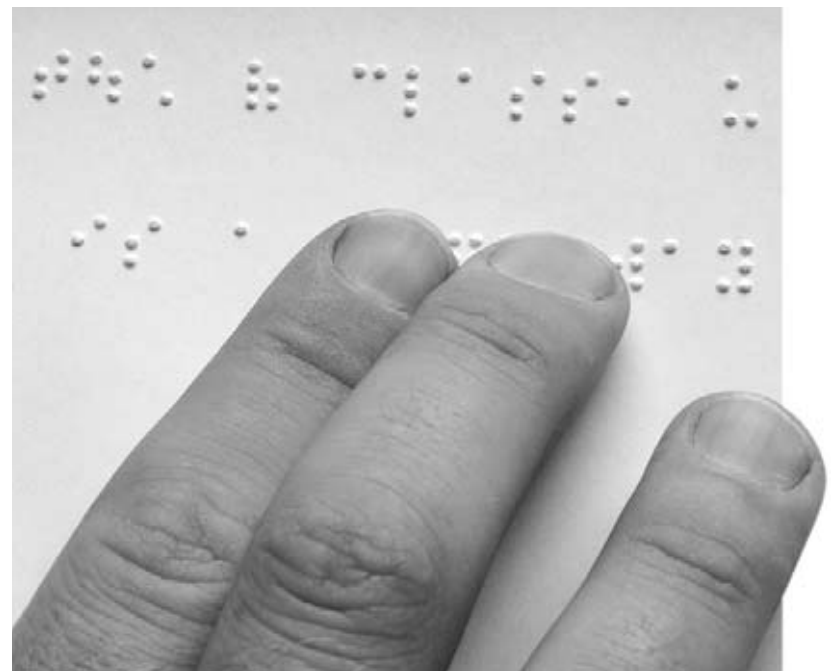
At age 15, Louis shared this new system with his classmates and the school. Several years later, Louis added a similar dot code for music and math.

Today, we call this form of written language Braille. It is named after Louis Braille, who helped invent it.

Today, blind people use a **stylus** and a **slate** to write braille. Dots are punched on the back of heavy paper with a stylus. A slate is used to keep the dots spaced correctly. Sentences are written from right to left. Then this paper is flipped over, and the sentences are read left to right. Braille can also be written using a Perkins Brailler, a typewriter-like machine. Braille gives blind people a way to both read and write.

A Loved Teacher

Louis died in 1852. However, before his death, Louis had become a teacher at the school he attended as a child. He was loved by his students. His form of written communication lives on. Even though Louis Braille became blind at a young age, he never gave up. Instead, he overcame his **obstacles**, which made it possible for blind people to read.

Glossary

awl	a sharp pointed tool used to make holes in leather (p. 5)
blind	unable to see (p. 5)
night writing	a system of reading and writing using twelve raised dots (p. 9)
obstacles	things that get in the way (p. 15)
sew	to weave thread into other materials to tie them together (p. 7)
slate	a guide used with a stylus to make sure each raised dot is properly spaced (p. 14)
stylus	a pencil-like tool used to make raised dots on heavy paper (p. 14)
symbol	something written that represents an idea, letter, or word (p. 11)
touch system	a way to read and write without vision by using your fingers (p. 12)