Title: History of Braille

Article:

Braille is a system of touch reading and writing for blind persons in which raised dots represent the letters of the alphabet. It also contains equivalents for punctuation marks and provides symbols to show letter groupings.

Braille is read by moving the hand or hands from left to right along each line. The reading process usually involves both hands, and the index fingers generally do the reading. The average reading speed is about 125 words per minute. But greater speeds of up to 200 words per minute are possible.

People who are blind can review and study the written word. They can also become aware of different written conventions such as spelling, punctuation, paragraphing, and footnotes.

Most importantly, braille gives blind individuals access to a wide range of reading materials including recreational and educational reading, financial statements, and restaurant menus. Equally important are contracts, regulations, insurance policies, directories, and cookbooks that are all part of daily adult life. Through braille, people who are blind can also pursue hobbies and cultural enrichment with materials such as music scores, hymnals, playing cards, and board games.

Various other methods had been attempted over the years to enable reading for the blind. However, many of them were raised versions of print letters. It is generally accepted that the braille system has succeeded because it is based on a rational sequence of signs devised for the fingertips, rather than imitating signs devised for the eyes.

Night-Writing

The history of braille goes all the way back to the early 1800s. A man named Charles Barbier who served in Napoleon Bonaparte’s French army developed a unique system known as night writing so soldiers could communicate safely during the night. As a military veteran, Barbier saw several soldiers killed because they used lamps after dark to read combat messages. As a result of the light shining from the lamps, enemy combatants knew where the French soldiers were inevitably led to the loss of many men.

Barbier based his “night writing” system on a raised 12-dot cell; two dots wide and six dots tall. Each dot or combination of dots within the cell represented a letter or a phonetic sound. The problem with the military code was that the human fingertip could not feel all of the dots with one touch.
Enter Louis Braille

Louis Braille was born in the village of Coupvray, France on January 4, 1809. He lost his sight at a very young age after he accidentally stabbed himself in the eye with his father’s awl. Braille’s father was a leatherworker and poked holes in the leather goods he produced with the awl.

At eleven years old, Braille found inspiration to modify Charles Barbier’s “night writing” code in an effort to create an efficient written communication system for fellow blind individuals. One year earlier he was enrolled at the National Institute of the Blind in Paris. He spent the better part of the next nine years developing and refining the system of raised dots that has come to be known by his name, Braille.

After all of Braille’s work, the code was now based on cells with only 6-dots instead of 12. This crucial improvement meant that a fingertip could encompass the entire cell unit with one impression and move rapidly from one cell to the next. Over time, braille gradually came to be accepted throughout the world as the fundamental form of written communication for blind individuals. Today it remains basically as he invented it.

However, there have been some small modifications to the braille system, particularly the addition of contractions representing groups of letters or whole words that appear frequently in a language. The use of contractions permits faster braille reading. It also helps reduce the size of braille books, making them much less cumbersome.

Braille passed away in 1853 at the age of 43, a year before his home country of France adopted braille as its’ official communication system for blind individuals. A few years later in 1860, braille made its way across the pond to America where it was adopted by the Missouri School for the Blind in St. Louis.

Legacy of Braille Benefits Millions

Louis Braille’s legacy has enlightened the lives of millions of people who are blind. As a result, blind individuals from all over the world benefit from Braille’s work daily. Today, we transcribe braille code in many different languages worldwide. Louis would be very proud to know his creation has given literacy to countless numbers of people over the decades. Consequently, people who are blind can enjoy all the printed word has to offer just like everyone else. The effect is tremendously empowering and helps them achieve success in school and their careers.

Braille Alphabet

Braille code is a writing system which enables blind and partially sighted people to read and write through touch. Braille consists of patterns of raised dots arranged in cells of up to six dots in a 3x2 configuration. Each cell represents a braille letter, numeral or punctuations mark. Some frequently used words and letter combinations also have their own single cell patterns.
Braille Code Versions

Grade 1: Consists of the 26 standard letters of the alphabet and punctuation. It’s mainly used by people who just started reading braille.

Grade 2: Consists of the 26 standard letters of the alphabet, punctuation and contractions. The contractions are employed to save space because a braille page cannot hold as much text as a standard printed page. Books, signs in public places, menus, and most other braille materials are written in Grade 2 braille.

Grade 3: Used only in personal letters, diaries, and notes. It is a kind of shorthand, with entire words shortened to a few letters.