

Louis Braille

Louis Braille invented a writing system for the blind called braille. To this day, braille is used all over the world.

Louis was born in a small town east of Paris. His father supported the family by making harnesses and equipment out of leather. At the age of 3, Louis was playing in his father's workshop and scratched his eye with a sharp tool called an awl. His parents took him to the doctor but there was nothing he could do. The scratch became infected and spread to the other eye, leaving him blind.

Louis' parents did their best to give him a normal childhood. His father made him canes, and soon Louis was able to find his way around town. He remained a curious and creative child, and impressed his teachers, who encouraged him to continue his education.

At the age of 10, he was accepted to one of the first schools for blind children. At his new school, the students were taught to read using a method that the school's founder had invented. The system used embossed, raised letters on paper that students would feel with their fingers instead of look at. However, it took a lot of time and work to have books and materials made using this method. The words had to be written on special paper that cost more money, and books at the school were never very interesting because in order for the school to afford them, they had to be short. There also was no way to write in the language, and Louis realized he couldn't send letters back home to his family in it. He began to wonder if there was a better way for blind people to communicate.

In 1821, he learned about an army communication system that used dots and dashes pressed into paper. Like the school's system, the letters could be read by feeling the paper, so that soldiers wouldn't have to speak or use light. It was a little bit complicated, but it inspired Louis to create a simplified version. He worked day and night on it and by 1824, at the age of just 15, he had completed the new writing system. He created the first braille writings using an awl, the same tool that had blinded him.

Although people liked his idea, braille was never taught at the school during his lifetime. But after the students demanded it, braille was adopted as the official writing system in the school in 1854. It is now the standard language of written communication in the blind community and has improved the lives of thousands of people all over the world. Louis Braille is a world-famous figure and is considered a national hero in France.



Invent a code! Create a new letter for each letter of the alphabet below.

Write a secret message in your new system. Give it to a friend and see if they can read it!

SECRET MESSAGE

A _____	N _____
B _____	O _____
C _____	P _____
D _____	Q _____
E _____	R _____
F _____	S _____
G _____	T _____
H _____	U _____
I _____	V _____
J _____	W _____
K _____	X _____
L _____	Y _____
M _____	Z _____

