

Louis's New System

When you learn to read, a new world opens. You can read signs. You can read stories. You can read directions. Reading is important in our society and helps you complete many tasks. But what about people who cannot see? How do blind people read?

Up until the 1820s, blind people read by touching letters that were engraved in wood. This method was very slow. It was very difficult. And there was no way for blind people to use this method to write.

A teacher at the Institute for Blind Youth in Paris was frustrated with this slow way of reading. He wanted to help his students find better ways to read and even to write. He began developing a system using six dots punched into cardboard.

The teacher's name was Louis Braille. He published his system in 1829. The students at his school loved it immediately. The teachers were slower to adapt. They didn't use the system at the school until 1954, two years after Louis had died. Once the school started to use the Braille method, it spread throughout the world.

Braille uses 63 dot patterns that are called characters. The characters represent letters, combinations of letters, common words, and grammar signs. Blind people can read the characters by gently touching the raised dots.

Numbers in Braille are depicted by the first ten letters of the alphabet with a number sign in front of them.

Blind people can write Braille by using a slate made of two metal plates. They put a sheet of paper between the plates and use a pen-shaped stylus to press the paper into the lower plate to make dots.

Braille is written from right to left. When the paper is turned over, the dots are read from left to right. Braille can also be written using special machines.

Louis's system opened a new world for blind people in the 1800s. Now, computers and other new technology are helping blind people navigate the world in even more exciting ways. The story of Louis Braille is a reminder that when you discover a problem you can be part of the solution.



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NAME: _____ DATE: _____

1. Why did Louis invent the Braille method?
 - a. The previous method of reading was too slow
 - b. He wanted his students to be able to write
 - c. He liked dots
 - d. A and B

2. What acts like a pen when writing Braille?
 - a. A slate
 - b. A stylus
 - c. Cardboard
 - d. Characters

3. Who embraced Louis's system first?
 - a. Blind students
 - b. Teachers in Paris
 - c. Teachers from around the world
 - d. Louis's mother

4. What does the author mean by a new world?
 - a. New challenges
 - b. New countries
 - c. New opportunities
 - d. New methods

Instructions for teachers:

These questions can be used to assess understanding of the reading passage.

The item in bold is the correct answer for each question.

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