

# Louis Braille

Louis Braille was born on January 4, 1809 to Simon Rene and Monique Braille. He was born in Coupvray, France. He was a very bright child and his parents thought he would grow up to be a great professor. But an accident would change his life forever. He is known especially for forming an alphabet of dots for the blind so they could learn to read and write.

Louis Braille was only three when he lost his sight for life. He stabbed himself in the eye with a sharp tool, which caused an infection in the eye. Soon the infection spread to both eyes, which eventually blinded him for life. By the time Louis was six, he was a competent and eager little blind boy who wanted to learn. A priest at the Coupvray church tutored Louis and told him many stories. But Louis longed to be able to read and write like the other children. When Louis was about 10, Father Palluy enrolled him in The Royal Institute of Blind Youth, where they were teaching blind boys how to read and write!

Louis loved learning at his new school, and had very good marks because of his great memory. But he was very frustrated with the way the boys were learning to read and write. The boys read through a system called embossing, or raised print. The letters of the alphabet were raised off the paper so the blind could feel the letters and read the raised words. But raised print was too difficult and took too long to read. Louis was determined to figure out an easier way for the blind to read.

Louis worked on different methods, trying to find the best way to let him learn to read. One day at the school, Captain Barbier came to the school with a system called sonography or, more commonly, night writing. This system dealt with turning different sounds of the French language into dots and dashes. Louis picked up on this idea. Reading with dots was a lot less work, but the Captain's system was still very difficult. Louis worked for years to simplify the system.

For some reason, Louis couldn't get the dots and dashes simple enough. He finally realized the dots should represent letters instead of sound. His work went much faster. He formed the alphabet using a cell of six dots, with a certain group of dots punched out to form each letter. Louis didn't take long to perfect his alphabet. He was only fifteen.

All the boys in the school were soon using Louis's alphabet. The director of the school gave permission to the boys to use the alphabet. But no one outside the school would accept the new alphabet. When Louis was 19, he graduated from the Royal Institute of Blind Youth and decided to stay there as a teacher. He was a natural leader, had a great sense of humor, and told wonderful stories. He also loved music and was very good at it. The boys continued to use his alphabet, which they now called Braille. During his time as a teacher, he developed tuberculosis and became very weak.

In 1844, Braille was finally shown to the outside world at the dedication of a new building for the school. The audience was informed of the alphabet, and then a young boy was brought out to demonstrate. The director of the school read a passage while the boy busily punched out holes. When Dr. Dufau was finished, the boy read back the passage exactly as the doctor had. The audience was amazed, but some believed they had been tricked. So the demonstration was repeated, this time having a member of the audience read a passage. The people couldn't believe their ears.

Braille would not be taught to the blind outside of the Institute until 1854, two years after Louis's death. He died on January 6, 1852 from the effects of tuberculosis when he was only 43. He was remembered for his beautiful music, his caring personality, and of course, his alphabet of dots. Braille is now used around the world for many blind people. Through Louis's perseverance, he has helped millions of people around the world learn to read.