Louis Braille

Humanitarian, Teacher, Inventor, and Friend

Background

Happy Birthday Louis Braille! The inventor of the Braille code is known throughout the world as a great humanitarian who believed in literacy for everyone. What a wonderful tribute “Braille Literacy Month” is to his legacy through the centuries.

Braille was born on January 4, 1809 in Coupvray, a village about 28 miles from Paris, France. Through an accident in his father’s harness shop, Louis injured an eye. At five years old, he became blind in both eyes.

When he was seven, he was allowed to go to school in his village. His teacher expected him to only sit among the sighted students and listen. But, young Louis quickly excelled, and his teacher realized he had a gift for learning. At age ten, Louis was given a prestigious scholarship to attend the Royal Institution for Blind Youth in Paris. There, in the austere city school, Louis had to overcome many obstacles. With the support of one teacher, Monsieur Andre Pigner, he learned to reach his highest goals.

Before the development of Braille writing by fifteen-year-old Louis in 1824, blind people had no satisfactory means for written communication. He did not take-to-heart the discouragement from those around him at school. He knew he would find a way to create an alphabet for blind people and learn to read from books.

Although his life was short and ended in 1852 at age 43, his accomplishments were remarkable. Because of this humble man, his zeal to learn, his gifts as a teacher to young boys and girls who were blind, and his triumphant spirit to not give up, millions of people who are blind or have low vision are literate. Today, people continue to read, write, and communicate through the six dot system. In fact, Braille is used throughout the world by people who read a variety of languages.

His legacy has become the essence of freedom for millions of people who are blind or visually impaired throughout the world. There is no better way to promote Braille literacy than to celebrate his 202nd birthday and relish in the resources that highlight literacy.
Among the many tributes paid him, Helen Keller wrote:

“Out of my personal experience I give deepest thanks to Louis Braille, who dropped upon the Sahara of blindness his gift of inexhaustible fertility and joy....Were it not for the Braille method of reading and writing, the world of the blind would be quite drab—worse than for the seeing without ink print books.”

In today’s information age, there can be no question that literacy is the primary tool enabling individuals to succeed in career and social arenas. Literacy is defined as the ability to read and write. For persons who are blind or visually impaired this requires the ability to read and write Braille, a communication system requiring skills and knowledge for interpreting information conveyed through touch.

Braille is a system of touch reading and writing in which raised dots represent the letters of the alphabet. An arrangement of six dots comprises what is referred to as the Braille cell. By arranging the dots in various combinations, 63 different patterns are possible.

Resources for Learning

In January, celebrate National Braille Literacy Month with your students, family, and friends! There are many wonderful resources to guide you.

**DCMP Resources**

Step back in history and enjoy DCMP’s unique video collection with Young Heroes: Louis Braille (http://www.dcmp.org/Catalog/TitleDetail.aspx?TID=6362). Masterfully captioned and described by DCMP, this video brings to light how courageous Louis was to keep alive his dream of reading, writing, and learning. Teachers and parents will enjoy the accompanying DCMP guide. http://www.dcmp.org/guides/brailleguide/

Also connect with DCMP’s Building Literacy Competencies in Early Childhood. http://www.dcmp.org/Catalog/TitleDetail.aspx?TID=4338

**Related Resources**

Read more about Louis Braille. Enjoy a book from National Braille Press titled Louis Braille: A Touch of Genius. It is a beautiful illustrated biography about an incredible young teenager in
post-Revolutionary France who changes the lives of millions through his invention of Braille. 
http://www.nbp.org/ic/nbp/LB.html

A good book is hard to put down. Books bring new meaning to favorite subjects. Don’t forget about enjoying print and Braille storybooks, which are often called “Twin-Vision” books. Enjoy giving them to your friends, students, school and community libraries, and family members. Visit National Braille Press.
http://www.nbp.org/ic/nbp/publications/category_browse.html#gift


American Foundation for the Blind offers fun at their Braille Bug Site. Sighted children are taught about Braille and to encourage literacy among all children. They offer a variety of learning opportunities from games to a reading club to descriptions of assistive technology used by people to read Braille. http://www.afb.org/BrailleBug

Braille Institute of America’s Braille Challenge is a national reading and writing contest in Braille. It motivates blind and visually impaired students to practice their literacy skills. http://brailleinstitute.org/braille_challenge

Braille Special Collection from Braille Institute of America was designed to increase Braille literacy by offering blind and visually impaired children ages 3-18 the opportunity to order a variety of free books throughout the year. Their Dots for Tots and Tac-Tales are programs offered for blind toddlers. http://www.brailleinstitute.org/multisensory_books


Young Heroes: Louis Braille is also in the DCMP YouTube collection. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OFyY7u95nxw

American Printing House for the Blind offers many Emergent Literacy resources including the Moving Ahead series which highlights Braille skills to young readers. https://shop.aph.org/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/Category_412A2B2C_10001_11051_20721_-1_20716

Membership Groups Offering Unique Literacy Resources

American Council of the Blind: http://www.acb.org

National Organization of Parents of Blind Children: http://www.nfb.org

**Braille Gifts**

At First Sight: http://braillejewelry.blogspot.com/

Secrets -- Braille Jewelry: http://www.christiansendesigns.com/braillej/


**About the Author**

Mary Ann Siller, M.Ed., is first and foremost an educator of children who are blind or visually impaired, ages birth through twenty-one. Siller has vast experience developing and leading national education initiatives and advocating for access to instruction and information. She is most at home when she is working with families to inspire their young children to dream big and find their special path to adulthood. She continues to address the most critical issues impacting the field of blindness and works as an advocate and curriculum designer. In previous career positions, she oversaw educational programming, curriculum development, and professional training at a state and national level for the Texas Education Agency and American Foundation for the Blind. Additional experience includes teaching/consulting for students with visual impairments and liaison with school districts to implement Federal and State laws. Mary Ann resides in Dallas, Texas.