

# **BRAILLE**

Louis Braille was born in France in 1809. His father had a small business. He made shoes and other things from leather. Louis liked to help his father in the store even when he was very small. One day when Louis was three years old, he was cutting some leather. Suddenly the knife slipped and hit him in the eye. Louis soon became completely blind.

When he was ten years old, he entered the National Institute for the blind in Paris. One day his class went to visit a special exhibit by a captain in the army. One thing in the exhibit was very interesting for Louis. It showed messages in code. Armies send messages in secret codes so no one else can read them. The captain wrote this code in raised letters on very thick paper.

Louis thought a lot about this code. Then he decided to write in the same way to blind people could "read" with their fingers. It is very difficult to feel the differences between raised letters. Instead of letters, Louis used a "cell" of six dots. He arranged the dots with two dots across and three down.

There are 63 possible arrangements of the dots in the Braille system. Each arrangement stands for one letter, punctuation mark, or number. He also used his system to write music. Louis Braille invented this system when he was only fifteen years old.

Blind people can also write Braille. They use a special kind of pen to make the dots.

Today there are Braille books in all written languages in the world. However, these books are large and expensive to make. They must be on special paper. Someone who can see must learn the Braille alphabet and make the raised dots in the paper by hand or with a special typewriter.

Now there is an easier way for blind people to "read."

"Talking books" are complete books or magazines on cassette tapes or phonograph records. Blind people listen to the book. Blind people can also write using a typewriter or a computer.

Louis Braille invented a way for blind people to communicate. He invented it before the time of phonographs, tape recorders, typewriters, and computers. When he died in 1852, he was buried in the pantheon in Paris. This is where the national heroes of France are buried, and Louis Braille was a national hero.