

THE ASTONISHING
ACHIEVEMENT OF
LOUIS BRAILLE
FRANCE



Twelve-year-old Louis was bored – bored with school, bored with not being able to read or write, bored with everything. If only he could look at an interesting book or go for a walk on his own.

HE COULDN'T DO THESE THINGS BECAUSE HE WAS COMPLETELY BLIND.

Louis had been able to see perfectly when he was born, but at the age of three he'd had a horrible accident. He'd picked up one of his father's tools to play with – a pointed tool called an awl, used for punching holes. It slipped and hit Louis hard, right in the eye. Poor Louis developed an infection in both eyes and lost his sight completely. When he was older, he went to school in Paris, France, but it was a struggle. Louis always had to listen so hard and try to remember everything, because he couldn't read or write.

One day, an ex-soldier called Charles Barbier was visiting the school to give a talk. Louis thought that would be boring, too. But when Barbier started speaking, Louis pricked up his ears. Barbier was describing his invention of a special code for soldiers. When soldiers were on the battlefield at night, they weren't allowed to make a sound or strike a match for light, in case the enemy spotted them.

Barbier had worked out a way that the officers could tell the soldiers important things. He put raised impressions of dots and dashes on to paper to represent letters. If the soldier knew the code, he could 'read' messages silently in the dark, just by using his fingers to touch the patterns.

As Louis listened, he felt a tingle of excitement. Could a touching system like this help him – and others like him – to read? Louis got straight down to work.

HE FELT SURE THAT HE COULD CREATE A CODE THAT WAS MORE SIMPLE AND EFFECTIVE.

It wasn't easy. Louis decided to use only dots, in groups from one to six. He spent months trying to work out different arrangements that could represent all the letters of the alphabet. The dots needed to be small and easily felt with one finger. Louis used an awl – the same tool that had caused him to go blind – to punch tiny raised holes in paper. It took a long time to get it exactly right but by the time he was 15, in 1824, he had found 63 ways to use a six-dot cell in an area no larger than a fingertip.

By 1829 he had come up with a brilliant system. It worked for every single letter



**IT TOOK A LONG
TIME TO GET IT
EXACTLY RIGHT.**

and number, as well as musical notes, all kinds of punctuation, maths symbols – and more.

Louis Braille's system was named after him and now Braille has been used by blind and partially sighted people all around the world. Louis's hard work and clever thinking has enabled them to read books,

newspapers, signs, do calculations and read music.

Louis Braille had played his part in opening up the world to millions of blind and partially sighted people worldwide.

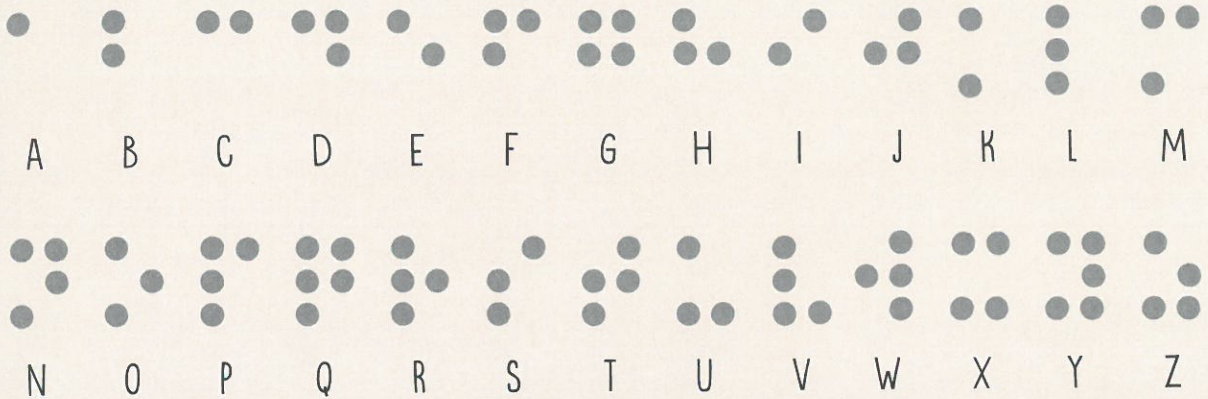
HELEN KELLER

USA

At just 19 months old, Helen Keller contracted an illness that left her deaf and blind. When she was six, her parents hired Anne Sullivan, who taught Helen that objects have names, and then how to spell them using her fingers. Next, she taught her to lip-read by touch, to read Braille, to write and to speak. Helen was the first deaf-blind person to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree and she went on to become a successful author, political activist and lecturer.

BRILLIANT BRAILLE

Have you ever seen or touched Braille? Imagine these dots as tiny bumps. Just by touching each group of dots, you can 'read' the letters:



HOW TO SEND A CODED MESSAGE

THE CAESAR CODE

Each letter of the alphabet is represented by a different letter.

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

1. Write all the letters of the alphabet neatly in a row.
2. Underneath the letters, write the alphabet again, but start three spaces in, so that D is written directly under A, E under B, and so on. When you get to the end, use A, B and C under X, Y and Z. Now you're ready to send a message.
3. Write a message to a friend using letters from the second alphabet and see how long it takes them to 'decode' it.

Here's an example:

WKLV LV D VHFUHW PHVVDJH!

(This is a secret message!)

4. Make new codes by writing the alphabet again. This time, change the number of places you 'shift' the second alphabet. Or write numbers underneath the alphabet and use those instead. See if you and your friends can crack each other's codes.