Young Inventors: Louis Braille

What do most people do at age 15? Maybe you have an older brother or sister who plays basketball or piano. Louis Braille was busy at 15, too. He was inventing Braille, the language that helps blind and visually impaired people read and write.

Louis Braille became blind accidentally when he was three years old. When he was seven, he was enrolled in a school for the blind. The school taught him how to read by feeling the raised shapes of alphabet letters. There were problems with raised alphabet letters, though. Few books were printed with this method, and those books were huge. In addition, blind and visually impaired people couldn’t write with this method.

One day a soldier came to Braille’s school to talk about a secret communication system used in the army. Soldiers need to communicate quietly and in the dark, so they invented a system that allowed them to write messages with raised dots. This system used 12 raised dots and dashes that the soldiers read with their fingertips.

Braille analyzed this system and found it too complicated. His system used only six raised dots. Braille arranged the raised dots into three rows, with two places in each row. Braille gave each letter and number a code. For example, the code for the letter “a” is one dot in the first spot in the first row.

Louis Braille’s language was easy to read and write. By using only six dots, all of the dots fit under a reader’s fingertip. This meant that books written in Braille were smaller and cheaper to make. Now, blind and visually impaired people had a language that allowed them to read and write easily.

Anyone can invent things. Look around you. What might you invent that could make someone’s life easier?
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At the bottom of the page is the Braille alphabet that Louis Braille invented. Use this code to read the message in the box. Then sign your name using this alphabet.

HELPING

OTHERS

Write your name in Braille here.

Comprehension Response Activities
FYI for Kids — Level 4
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Review

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Write keywords or phrases that will help you remember what you learned.