How the Blind Read

DIRECTIONS: Based on the reading, circle what you think each word means.

When Louis Braille was three years old, he was trying to imitate his father in his father’s tool shop and accidentally cut his eye with an awl. As the result of an unchecked infection, he became blind in both eyes. When he got older he still went to school, but it was difficult for him. He was unable to read, and it was hard to absorb everything being taught just by listening. When Louis was 12 years old, in 1821, a former soldier came to visit at his school and told the class about “night writing,” a code used by soldiers in the field to communicate secret information without having to talk. The code was made up of 12 raised dots that could be felt by the fingers, with each various configuration of dots having a specific meaning. The code had been abandoned by the military because it was too complicated for all of the soldiers to master, but it captured Louis’ imagination. He took the basic idea, reduced the number of dots to 6, and had set up a complete system of raised dots by which a person could “read” with their fingers by the time he was 15. In 1829, he published the first-ever book in braille.

A standard braille page is 11 inches by 11 inches and typically has a maximum of 40 to 42 braille cells per line and 25 lines on a page. There are two levels of Braille. Grade 1 Braille is transcribed by substituting a Braille letter of the alphabet for its printed equivalent. But more sophisticated and experienced readers use Grade 2 Braille, which employs a system of contractions to represent certain common words. This system reduces the amount of space required to produce a text in Braille, and makes it possible to read faster. The Grade 2 Braille contractions begins with a set of 23 words which are contracted to single characters. For example, the word but is contracted to the single letter b, can to c, do to d, etc. Portions of words can also be contracted. Grade 3 Braille includes many additional contractions and is almost a shorthand. Books are not published in Grade 3 Braille, it is mostly used by individuals for their personal convenience.

1. An awl is a: sharp, pointed tool  
   power tool
2. unchecked means: endless  
   not controlled
3. configuration means: arrangement  
   duplication
4. contraction means: to shorten  
   to shrink
5. Braille means: a secret code  
   a written language of raised dots

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