C O N S U L T A N T S' C O R N E R

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Editor: Riki Nitz

SD School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

TABLE OF CONTENTS

HAPPY 200TH BIRTHDAY, LOUIS BRAILLE

Louis Braille was born 200 years ago on January 4, 1809 in Coupvray, France. January is celebrated annually as "Braille Literacy Month" and January 4th is celebrated annually as "World Braille Day" in commemoration of Louis Braille.

Because of the momentous impact Louis Braille had on the world of the blind, and in celebration of his 200th Birthday, we are devoting much of this issue of our newsletter to information about both Louis Braille and the Braille system of reading and writing.

We hope you enjoy reading and learning about this remarkable man.

> "We, the blind, are as indebted to Louis Braille as mankind is to Gutenberg."
>
> Helen Keller

ABOUT LOUIS BRAILLE (1809-1852). . .

Six dots. Six bumps. Six bumps in different patterns, like constellations, spreading out over the page. What are they? Numbers, letters, words. Who made this code? None other than Louis Braille, a French 12-year-old, who was also blind. And his work changed the world of reading and writing, forever.

Louis Braille was born on January 4, 1809, in a small town near Paris called Coupvray. The youngest of four children, he was from a poor family and his father worked as the village saddler.

One day, when he was a small boy, he crept into his father's harness workshop to play. He picked up an awl, a sharp tool used for making holes in leather. As he bent over, the awl slipped and pierced his eye, damaging it forever. The wound became infected, the infection spread to his other eye, and soon, Louis was blind in both eyes. He was just four years old and his future must have seemed uncertain. However, Louis Braille was to become one of the most famous Frenchmen ever to have lived.

Despite his difficult start in life, Louis was an intelligent boy and excelled at the local school, but he couldn't learn everything just by listening. Noticing his potential, the local landowner offered to arrange a scholarship for Louis at one of the first schools for the blind. Reluctant to send Louis away from home but worried about his future, his parents agreed. At age ten, Louis left for Paris to attend the Royal Institution for Blind Youth.

Life at the school was hard, the building was damp and unhealthy, and discipline was severe. Pupils were mainly taught practical skills like chair caning and slipper making so that they could make a living when they left school.

Being so far away from his family was difficult for Louis, but he always retained his thirst for knowledge. But even at this school, most of the teachers just talked at the students. The boys were taught to read using a system called 'raised type' where letters were created by pressing shaped copper wire onto a page. The library initially had 3, and eventually, 14 huge books with these raised letters, but they were very hard to read. Louis learned quickly, but found the system frustrating and slow, and he was impatient. It was impossible for people with sight loss to write anything for themselves using raised type and it could take months to read a single book.

It was at the Institute in 1821 that Louis was first introduced to the idea of using a coded system of raised dots. Charles Barbier, a captain in Napoleon's army, visited the school to demonstrate his invention called 'night writing'. This was a tactile system designed for soldiers to send and receive messages on the battlefield without speaking. It used dashes and 12 raised dots rather than actual letters. Unfortunately, the code was too hard for the soldiers, but not for 12-year-old Louis!

Louis quickly realized how useful this system could be, but thought it was too complicated. Over the next few years, he worked hard to develop his own version of the code, using just six dots to represent the standard alphabet.

By 1824, just 15 years old, Louis had found 63 ways to use a six-dot cell in an area no larger than a fingertip. He had also perfected his 'planchette', or writing slate, which gave precise placement for the pattern of raised dots when writing braille. And in 1829, he published the first-ever braille book. But did he stop there? No way! In 1837, he added symbols for math and music. But since the public was skeptical, blind students had to study braille on their own. Even at the Royal Institution, where Louis taught after he graduated, braille wasn't taught until after his death. Still, Louis spent his life teaching his system to as many people as possible, first as a fellow student at the school and then later when he became a teacher there. He translated many books into braille and was much liked and respected by his students.

Spending so much of his life in such poor and damp conditions probably contributed to Louis Braille contracting tuberculosis in his twenties. He battled with the illness for the rest of this life. Despite encountering much resistance to braille, he never stopped believing in his system. He died on January 6, 1852, just two days after his 43rd birthday, unaware that his invention would one day be used all over the world.

Braille began to spread worldwide in 1868, when a group of British men, now known as the Royal National Institute for the Blind, took up the cause. And now practically every country in the world uses braille. Braille books have double-sided pages, which saves a lot of space. Braille signs help blind people get around in public spaces. And, most important, blind people can communicate independently, without needing print.

In 1952, Louis Braille's accomplishments were finally recognized by the French government and his body was exhumed and reburied in the Pantheon in Paris, with other French national heroes. Today he is celebrated as a hero for all blind and partially sighted people. He gave the gift of independence and the joy of reading to thousands of people around the world.

Louis Braille proved that if you have the motivation, you can do incredible things.

Sources:
http://www.afb.org/braillebug/louis_braille_bio.asp
http://www.rnib.org.uk

ABOUT BRAILLE . . .

For hundreds of years, people have experimented with different sorts of raised type which can be read by touch. The earliest known method was invented by a blind Arab professor in the 14th century who improvised a method of identifying his books and making notes. In Louis Braille's lifetime, there were over 20 different systems of embossed type. Most were invented by sighted people. They were often easier to read by sight than by touch and usually could only be produced in a printing house. This meant that blind people had no means of writing for themselves. Today, for many blind people, Braille is invaluable. Personally being able to read information makes a big difference to someone's sense of independence.

Braille is a code based on six raised dots known as a braille cell, arranged and numbered vertically in two columns of three dots, like the design on a domino. It consists of 63 symbols made up of all the possible variations of these dots. 26 of these represent the letters of the alphabet and 10 punctuation marks, while other variations of these six dots are used to represent commonly-occurring groups of letters such as "the", "and", "for", "ch", "sh", "ing", etc.

There are two major "grades" of braille—Grade 1 (uncontracted braille) and Grade 2 (contracted braille):

- *Grade 1 Braille* is a straightforward letter for letter translation from print. It includes the alphabet, numbers, and punctuation marks, and is great for labeling canned goods and CDs, making grocery lists, taking messages, etc. However, it takes up a lot of space and is comparatively slow to read.
- *Grade 2 Braille* is used by more experienced braille users. It uses the same letters, numbers, and punctuation marks as Grade 1, but also uses a contracted system or shorthand where groups of letters may be combined into a single braille cell. This reduces the size of books, taking up less space and reducing the size of documents by about 25%, and makes reading and writing faster than Grade 1 Braille. Almost all books and magazines are printed in Grade 2 braille.

There are also other special and technical Braille codes, including a braille music code, which shows musical notation and score, a computer braille code, a braille code for mathematical notation, and even a braille code for chess. In addition, variations of the braille code have been developed to incorporate many different alphabets and foreign languages, including Welsh and most European languages.

Braille can be produced in a variety of ways. An individual may use a slate and a braille stylus to make each dot separately, or a braille machine, resembling a typewriter, to produce any combination of the six dots in one action. Increasingly, braille is produced via a computer and a braille printer (or embosser).

Braille that is written or embossed onto paper or similar materials, sometimes called paper braille, is still used everyday. Paper braille is often the most pleasant to read for leisure purposes and has the advantage of being low-tech and reasonably portable. It means people can label items around the home and take notes on the go. Familiarity with paper braille is also important when learning braille and for developing literacy skills in children.

Paper braille takes up considerably more space than printed words. An average book or novel will be made up of five volumes of braille.

Braille is no longer purely a paper medium. Computers are increasingly used to produce braille. Users can type words in, either using a standard keyboard or using braille keys. Computers can also translate standard text into braille using special translation programs. This digital braille can then be outputted using a printer or embosser to create paper braille, or using a refreshable braille display, a piece of equipment next to the keyboard, to allow the user to read directly from the computer. This refreshable braille display produces braille by raising and lowering pins in response to an electronic signal. As you read through different sections of text, the braille display constantly updates the braille. Digital braille can also be used alongside 'synthetic speech' screen readers.

These changes have served to make braille far more usable for blind people. Apart from making it easier to convert, it also makes braille far more portable. A whole braille book can now be stored on a small disk or memory stick, rather than taking up reams of paper and shelves of storage space.

Source: http://www.rnib.org.uk

A Braille Cell:

1 • • 4
2 • • 5
3 • • 6

The Braille Alphabet:

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
⠝	⠕	⠏	⠟	⠗	⠎	⠞	⠥	⠧	⠺	⠭	⠽	⠵

The capital sign is dot 6. When this sign is placed before a letter, it makes that letter a capital letter.
The number sign is dots 3, 4, 5, and 6. When this sign is placed before the letters 'a through j', it makes these letters the numbers 1 through 0.

Video Views

YOUNG HEROES: LOUIS BRAILLE

The Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) has produced a wonderful DVD on the life of Louis Braille that is very well done and well worth watching. And it can be downloaded for free! The video is approximately 30 minutes in length and would be an excellent resource for the classroom and for in-services.

To download *Young Heroes: Louis Braille*, go to:
http://www.cnib.ca/en/living/braille/louis-braille/Default.aspx

For further information on this video, or on other videos previously viewed in this column, please contact your area Outreach Vision Consultant.

APH Educational Materials

http://www.aph.org

Braillable Labels and Sheets—These clear, blank self-adhesive labels can be brailled and used to label items around the home and school, such as books, CDs, canned goods, greeting cards, folders, etc. The pre-cut, peel-off labels come in various sizes and can also be cut to the desired size.

Word Associations Print/Braille Labels—These large print/braille stickers consist of 12 sheets of 91 self-adhesive labels containing common words. For example, the label "chair" can be placed on a chair to associate the word with the object.

Fun with Braille—This book of entertaining activities is designed to provide additional practice for children who are already familiar with the braille contractions. The activities can be done in any order and can be chosen to practice a specific problem contraction or just for fun. A list of contractions and the activities in which they appear is included for reference, as well as an answer key.
The print edition includes selected activities in simulated braille so that print users learning braille can practice their skills. A complete print transcription of the simulated braille is included for non-braille readers.

These products are available from the American Printing House for the Blind (APH) for purchase and can also be borrowed from your area Outreach Vision Consultant. For more information on these products or other APH products, please contact your area Outreach Vision Consultant.

BOOKS ABOUT LOUIS BRAILLE

A Picture Book of Louis Braille **
David A. Adler, Illustrated by John and Alexandra Wallner, Holiday House, New York, 1990.

Louis Braille
Beverly Birch, Gareth Stevens Children's Books, Milwaukee, 1989.

Louis Braille: A Touch of Genius **
Michael C. Mellor, National Braille Press, Boston, 2006.

Louis Braille and the Baker's Daughter **
Arthur Jackson and Hendrik Booraem, 1998.

Louis Braille (Great Lives)
Stephen Keeler, Bookwrights Press, Virginia, 1986.

Louis Braille: The Boy Who Invented Books for the Blind
Margaret Davidson, Scholastic, New York, 1971.

Louis Braille: Windows for the Blind
J. Alvin Kugelmass, Julian Messner, New York, 1951.

Out of Darkness: The Story of Louis Braille
Russell Freedman, Illustrated by Kate Kielser, Clarion Books, New York, 1997.

Seeing Fingers: The Story of Louis Braille
Etta DeGering, David McKay Co. Inc., New York, 1962.

The Reading Fingers: Life of Louis Braille, 1809-1852
Jean Roblin, Translated from the French by Ruth G. Mandalian, American Foundation for the Blind, New York, 1952.

The Story of Louis Braille **
Louis W. Rodenberg, 2007.

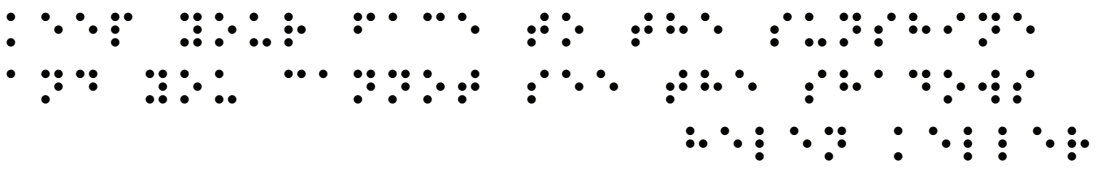
The World at His Fingertips: A Story About Louis Braille
Barbara O'Connor, Illustrated by Rochelle Draper, Carolrhoda Books, Inc., Minneapolis, 1997.

Touch of Light: The Story of Louis Braille
Anne E. Neimark, Harcourt, Brace and World, Florida, 1970.

Triumph Over Darkness
Lennard Bickel, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, Australia Pty. Ltd., 1988.

***These 4 starred books are available through the SD Braille and Talking Book Library. To borrow them, contact the State Library at 1-800-423-6665.*

Can you crack the Braille Code and read the following message?



(Answer on page 11)

SDSBVI Celebrates Louis Braille's 200th Birthday

The students and staff members of the SD School for the Blind and Visually Impaired celebrated the 200th birthday of Louis Braille on Wednesday, January 7, 2009, with a variety of activities. As part of the festivities, participants spent time reading in the library, singing in music class, and working on art projects. They also completed word puzzles and researched questions on the life of Louis Braille. Prizes were awarded to winners in both the student and staff categories. And refreshments, including birthday cake, were served at the end of an enjoyable afternoon.

SDSBVI Students Celebrating Louis Braille's Birthday

STUDENT CORNER

Poems by Leanne Joy Wurtz
October 5, 2008

The Summer has now ended
And autumn has begun
The leaves will start a fallin'
And then we'll have great fun.
I Love Autumn!

As I sit here a thinkin,'
I can hear some water trinkling
Oh! I look out the window pane,
And then I see the pouring rain.

Leanne is a 4th Grade student at Brentwood Colony School in Faulkton SD, and we thank her for her contributions.

In honor of Louis Braille and the celebration birthday party at SDSBVI, four students wrote the following song. It is set to the tune of "Frere Jacque" or "Are You Sleeping."

Louis Braille, Louis Braille,
Needed to read, needed to write.
Six dots in a pattern,
Letters, numbers, words,
Thank you, Sir! Thank you, Sir!

Written by:
Randy Baseler
Lacey Killingsworth
Emery Long Crow
Jeremy Neuheisel

We welcome any and all special presentations, awards, writings, etc. achieved by our outreach students. If your student/child has such a contribution and would like to be featured in our Student Corner, please contact your area Outreach Vision Consultant or email the contribution directly to Riki Nitz, Editor, at riki.nitz@sdsbvi.northern.edu.

DAKOTAS AER CONFERENCE — "Adventures in Vision"
featuring
TOM SULLIVAN

The annual Dakotas AER Conference is scheduled for April 30-May 1, 2009, in Fargo, ND at the Country Inn Suites. The featured speaker on Thursday evening is Tom Sullivan.

Blind from birth, Tom Sullivan has followed "Sullivan's Rules" (developed by Tom and his father when Tom was a boy) to live a life filled with enviable achievements. As a musician, Tom has performed on *The Tonight Show*, composed scores for film and television, and performed *The Star-Spangled Banner* at the Super Bowl. As an author, he started with the best-selling *If You Could See What I Hear* and has most recently published *Seeing Lessons: 14 Life Secrets I've Learned Along the Way*.

Many people know Tom as a special correspondent for ABC's *Good Morning America*, for whom he contributed countless reports that embodied his "you can do it" attitude.

Tom has recently added a partnership with Allergan to his substantial list of accomplishments in a unique medical education program featuring the relentless energy and inspiration of Tom himself. He's thrilled for the opportunity to reach out to the eye care community with his own story to highlight the importance of eye care professionals to patients struggling with lost or diminished sight.

Listening to Tom speak at the Dakotas AER Conference will be a wonderful experience that will entertain and inspire all who attend. All are welcome, including parents and children. So plan now to attend.

For further information, please contact your area Outreach Vision Consultant.

EIGHTEENTH ANNUAL ART COMPETITION FOR ARTISTS WHO ARE BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED

The American Printing House for the Blind (APH) invites visually impaired and blind artists of all ages to submit artwork for its Eighteenth Annual International Art Competition, *APH InSights 2009*. *APH InSights* is an art competition and exhibition exclusively for blind artists and draws entries from across the United States and around the world

April 1, 2009 is the deadline for entries from preschool through high school.
April 15, 2009 is the deadline for entries from adult artists.

To enter, artists must meet this definition of blindness: corrected visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye, or a visual field limited to 20 degrees or less.

Last year, over 425 entries were received. From these, jurors selected eighty-three pieces for the exhibition, which was shown in Louisville KY in October 2008.

Artists may enter a single artwork created in any visual art medium, including (but not limited to), painting, drawing, printmaking, fiber, metal, or wood. Award winners receive a cash award and a ribbon. They are invited to come to Louisville to receive their awards at the October meeting of APH Ex Officio Trustees. Last year, nineteen award winners attended the presentation. (While APH cannot pay the full travel cost of those attending, a stipend to assist with travel is available.)

By early March, competition rules and entry forms will be posted on the APH web site: www.aph.org. Artists may also contact APH to request a copy of the entry form and rules by calling 800-223-1839, ext. 357, 502-895-2405, ext. 357, or by sending email to rwilliams@aph.org.

BOOKSHARE

Bookshare is an online library of accessible media (scanned books and periodicals) for readers with print disabilities. A print disability is an impairment that prevents or makes difficult the use of printed text. This could include a visual impairment, a severe learning disability, or a physical disability.

Through a grant from the Office of Special Education Programs, Bookshare is able to provide students with qualifying print disabilities free access to their collection. A large variety of materials is available through Bookshare, including textbooks, books for leisure reading, newspapers, and periodicals. Books can be accessed at school or at home. Students can be registered through the school they attend or through an individual subscription directly from their home. Proof of disability needs to be provided.

Bookshare can be utilized in a number of ways. Braille or large print readers can get their materials embossed or printed by the school. Digital content can be put on media such as CDs.

Individual membership options are also available for non-students for a fee of $50.00 per year along with a one-time registration fee of $25.00

For more information, visit Bookshare's website at:
http://www.bookshare.org/web/SupportOrgSignUpInfo.html

Valentines for 2009!
"Secret Message"

This year's print/braille Valentine from National Braille Press tickles the funny bone with a new take on the knock, knock joke. On the front, the joke setup appears in print and braille; on the inside, the answer is written in "secret code" - beautiful braille! It's funny and not mushy—perfect for passing out to classmates, for mailing to family and friends, or for anyone who needs a good laugh!

To order valentines (and see this year's design), or to check out discounted 2008 Valentines, go to: **http://www.nbp.org/ic/nbp/VAL07-32.html**

SUMMER PROGRAMS 2009

Dates for the Summer Programs offered at SDSBVI in June and July 2009 are:

Session I		Session II	
Week 1:	June 8-12	Week 4:	July 13-17
Week 2:	June 15-19	Week 5:	July 20-24
Week 3:	June 22-26	Week 6:	July 27-31

SDSBVI Summer Programs specifically address and provide opportunities for students to focus on the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) for Students with Visual Impairments. Areas addressed include:

- Compensatory Academic Skills, including Communication Modes
- Orientation and Mobility
- Social Interaction Skills
- Independent Living Skills
- Recreation and Leisure Skills
- Career Education
- Assistive Technology
- Sensory Efficiency Skills (auditory/tactile/visual)
- Self-Determination

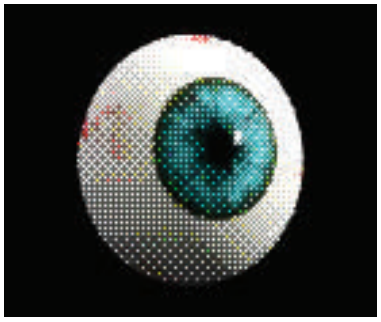
For more information, please contact SDSBVI at 1-888-275-3814.

SEE YOU THIS SUMMER!

CLASSROOM ADAPTATIONS FOR THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED

LIGHTING

- Lighting is always a *primary*, never a secondary, consideration.
- Benefits of good lighting:
  - More effective use of vision
  - Better concentration
  - Better posture and comfort
  - Less fatigue
  - Greater neatness, accuracy, and achievement
- Good lighting is not always *bright* lighting.
- Good lighting is not always *more* lighting.
- Factors to consider when making decisions about lighting:
  - Amount
  - Placement
  - Ability to control
  - Glare reduction
- Different eye diseases require different levels of light. Thus, the lighting needs of each student who is visually impaired will vary.
- Position students according to their specific visual conditions and difficulties and subsequent lighting needs.
- Avoid glare:
  - Arrange desks and working areas so students do not face a window – windows should be behind or to the side.
  - For viewing a computer, TV, or CCTV screen, position the screen so that neither the screen nor the student faces a window.
  - Stand and sit in positions that direct students' vision away from the windows – avoid standing between the student and the window.
  - Use blinds or shades to control the amount of light entering a room.
  - Snow and sunlight can cause glare – close blinds or pull shades down.
  - Cover glass doors on cabinets and remove pictures covered with glass.
  - Use lampshades to prevent glare from bare bulbs.
  - Minimize glare from shiny surfaces, polished metal surfaces, glossy paper, tabletops, desks, and floors – cover surfaces with dark, non-glossy cloth or construction paper.
  - Provide colored filters / acetates.
- Arrange desks and working areas so light falls on the desks and working areas without shadows.
- Position lamps directly onto the task.
- Plan for periodic adjustments of desks and working areas to provide for the best use of available light.
- Allow students to change their seat whenever they desire or need more or less light.
- Keep windowsills free of all obstructions to light.
- Provide reading stands / slant boards to maintain good posture and optimum lighting for near vision tasks.
- Replace light / lamp bulbs when dim or defective.



FOCUS ON THE EYE

ANIRIDIA

Description

Aniridia is characterized by complete or partial absence of the iris, resulting in reduced visual acuity and nystagmus presenting in early infancy. Frequently associated ocular abnormalities, which often occur later, include an underdeveloped retina, cataract, glaucoma, lens dislocation, optic nerve hypoplasia, and corneal opacification and vascularization. The impact of such secondary conditions can worsen one's sight.

Aniridia is rare. Its incidence is between 1/50,000 and 1/100,000. Vision may vary from 20/40 to 20/400. All aniridics will have challenges with seeing detail, due to an underdeveloped retina. Most pediatric ophthalmologists will tell parents of an aniridic child "we will have to wait until he/she can tell us what he/she can see". This can be very scary and frustrating. However, an aniridic child's sight can develop and get better over time.

Nystagmus (involuntary eye movements) is present in varying degrees in people with aniridia and typically decreases with age. Nystagmus may be from side-to-side, up and down, or rotary. It tends to increase when the person is upset, excited, or tired. Although people with nystagmus are not aware that their eyes are moving, it does make it more difficult for them to focus clearly on details. In fact, they often will find a "null point", which is the point where their nystagmus is the least. They will move their head to the position necessary to focus on this spot, consequently slowing their nystagmus and allowing for their best vision.

Causes

Aniridia is a genetic condition which can be passed on from one parent or can just happen sporadically. Unlike most genetic conditions, aniridia is autosomal dominant, meaning it takes only one mutated gene to cause this condition. There is a fifty percent chance of an aniridic passing it on to one's offspring.

Treatment

Aniridia is treated with spectacle correction of refractive errors, tinted or photochromic lenses to reduce light sensitivity, occlusion therapy for amblyopia, and low-vision aids such as closed-circuit television. Cataract extraction may improve visual acuity. Glaucoma is initially treated with topical anti-glaucoma medication and may require surgery (trabeculectomy or drainage tube surgery). Annual glaucoma screening done throughout life should include measurement of intraocular pressure, optic disc examination, and, when possible, a visual field assessment should be done. An eye examination in infancy is recommended for offspring and siblings of individuals with aniridia.

Educational Implications

- Large print books / materials
- CCTV and magnification
- High contrast materials
- Due to sensitivity to light, wearing sunglasses is important for both comfort and to protect the retina
- Braille is typically not necessary for people with aniridia; a few may learn to use it in order to give their eyes a rest
- Regular visits to the eye care specialist need to be scheduled

Sources

http://www.visionfortomorrow.org/aniridia-questions/
http://www.aniridia.net/whatis.html

"Things turn out best for the people who make the best out of the way things turn out."
Art Linkletter

Answer to Braille Code Message

Keep your face to the sunshine
and you cannot see the shadows.
Helen Keller

Life is what you make of it...
kinda like Play-Doh.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Statewide Special Education Conference
Sioux Falls—March 26-28, 2009

Sioux Falls Area Family Support Group
Sioux Falls—April 18, 2009

AER Dakotas Chapter Annual Conference
Fargo ND—April 30-May 1, 2009

NAPVI's Connecting with Families 2009 International Conference
Costa Mesa CA—July 17-19, 2009

Books Featuring Characters with Blindness and Visual Impairment

Night Search by Kate Chamberlain

Grades K-3

Heather, who is blind, resists using her white cane until she tries to find her puppy outdoors at night, an experience that helps her accept her cane as a valuable helper.

Carver by Ruth Yaffe Radin

Grades 4-7

After his father dies, ten-year-old Jon goes to public school in his home town instead of returning to a school for children who are blind.

Murder at the Spaniel Show by Lynn Hall

Grades 7-12

Sixteen-year-old Tabby works as a kennel girl for a dog breeder who is blind.

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