



## Discussion Guide

### *Six Dots: A Story of Young Louis Braille*

Written by Jen Bryant  
Illustrations by Boris Kulikov

Knopf Books for Young Readers; ISBN: 978-0-449-81337-9  
A Junior Library Guild Selection

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*But I didn't want people to feel sorry for me. I just wanted to read and to write on my own, like everyone else.*

### About the Book

Jen Bryant tells the story of Louis Braille's boyhood in his voice, capturing the interest of readers of all ages. Along with Louis, Jen's readers experience a range of emotions from anger and despair to hope and joy.

Louis Braille lost his sight at the age of five in an unfortunate accident in his father's leather shop. Suddenly, the world became a dark and scary place for Louis. How would he ever be happy again? Through his family's support and encouragement, Louis learned how to adapt. His only wish was to be able to read and write on his own. Through hard work, Louis created the Braille system of reading and writing that is still in use today.

Jen Bryant teams with illustrator Boris Kulikov to create an extraordinary tale of determination and perseverance, helping readers understand how it may have felt to be the young Louis Braille.

\*References to standards refer to the College and Career Anchor Standards for Reading, Writing, and/or Listening\*

### Vocabulary

1. With a partner, choose five nouns to explore using a Concept of Definition Map or Graphic Vocabulary (resources can be found on the internet). These nouns might include: code, healer, message, pattern, symbol, freedom, empathy. (Vocabulary Acquisition and Use Anchor Standards for Language #5 and #6)
2. Use a vocabulary journal to illustrate five adjectives with a drawing or cartoon and write a definition for them in your own words. These adjectives could include: noble, brilliant, sharp, waxy, strict, curious, clever, rough. Make sure your definition matches the meaning as used in this book. (Vocabulary Acquisition and Use Anchor Standards for Language #5 and #6)

### Things to Think About Before Reading the Book

1. Have you ever faced an unexpected challenge where you have had to struggle and persist in order to succeed? Explain.

2. Why is it important to be a reader? How does reading affect your knowledge of the world around you—and beyond? Can reading help you understand other people? How? Do you consider reading to be a joyful experience? Why or why not? Express your thinking in some way – an illustration, a poem, a graphic organizer, or a paragraph. Share your thinking with a partner or in a small group.
3. What do you think is the significance of the title of this book? What can we infer from the two words *six dots*?

### Things to Think About After Reading the Book

1. Describe Louis Braille through two or three character traits. Cite evidence using both text and illustrations from the book to support your answer.  
(Key Ideas and Details Anchor Standards for Reading #1)
2. The text is written in first person. Why do you think the author chose to tell Louis Braille's story in this way?  
(Craft and Structure Anchor Standards for Reading #6)
3. How do the author and illustrator show how Louis used his other senses to experience the world?  
(Key Ideas and Details Anchor Standards for Reading #1; Integration of Knowledge and Ideas Anchor Standards for Reading #7)
4. How did the use of French words and phrases contribute to the author's craft? How did these words/phrases impact the author's target audience?  
(Craft and Structure Anchor Standards for Reading #4)
5. Compare and contrast Louis's life as a young boy in the opening pages of the book to Louis's life at the Royal School for the Blind. How does he change? How does he remain the same?  
(Key Ideas and Details Anchor Standards for Reading #3)
6. How do the illustrations and page layouts contribute to the understanding of Braille's story?  
(Integration of Knowledge and Ideas Anchor Standards for Reading #7)
7. How is Louis like the neighbor's chained-up dog? How is he different? What is the significance of Louis's dream about the dog?  
(Key Ideas and Details Anchor Standards for Reading #1 and #2)
8. How do the phrases "too small," "don't touch," "poor Louis Braille," and "I'm sorry" affect Louis's emotions and actions? How do these phrases act as a thread to pull the reader through the text?  
(Craft and Structure Anchor Standards for Reading #4 and 5)
9. What do you think was the most important moment in Louis's life as presented in this book? Read other informational texts (biographies, essays, newspaper articles, etc.) to examine Louis Braille's life after the years depicted in Bryant's book. Does your thinking change? Why or why not?  
(Key Ideas and Details Anchor Standards for Reading #1; Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity Anchor Standards for Reading #10)
10. Examine the back matter (Author's Note, Q and A, additional resources) included in Jen Bryant's book. What was most helpful in deepening your understanding of Louis Braille's life? Explain your thinking.  
(Craft and Structure Anchor Standards for Reading #5)

11. Obtain a copy of Bryant's other book about Louis, *Louis Braille: Teacher of the Blind* (New York: Chelsea House, 1994). Compare the approach the author takes in the two texts in order to build knowledge and address her theme.  
(Integration of Knowledge and Ideas Anchor Standards for Reading #9).
12. Return to your notebook entry about the importance of being a reader and how you feel about reading (see Things to Think About Before Reading the Book #2). Based on new understandings from *Six Dots*, revise your thinking in some way. Share.  
(Production and Distribution of Writing Anchor Standards for Writing #5)

## Activities

1. Write a friendly letter to the author explaining why the title of the book is or isn't the best one. Would you suggest an alternate? Explain your thinking.  
(Production and Distribution of Writing Anchor Standards for Writing #4)
2. Use Jen Bryant's book to create a timeline for Louis Braille's early life. Do some research to add key events for his later years.  
(Research to Build and Present Knowledge Anchor Standards for Writing #7)
3. Write an argumentative essay in the persona of Louis Braille summarizing your contributions to the world for acceptance in a "Who's Who" book of famous people.  
(Text Types and Purposes Anchor Standards for Writing #1)
4. Read a picture book or biography about the life of Helen Keller or Annie Sullivan. Compare and contrast Annie or Helen's life with Louis Braille's life in a graphic organizer of your choice. Share with a partner.  
(Integration of Knowledge and Ideas Anchor Standards for Reading #9)
5. After reading Jen Bryant's Author's Note, make a list of your top ten inventors. Do some research to find out if any of your choices created an invention as a teenager or a child.  
(Research to Build and Present Knowledge Anchor Standards for Writing #7)
6. Examine Bryant's uses of quotation marks, ellipses, dashes, and variation in print. Discuss how these choices helped you to deepen your comprehension during independent reading.  
(Knowledge of Language Anchor Standards for Writing #3)
7. Look through your writer's notebook and drafts to find your own examples of dashes, variation in print, ellipses, and quotation marks. How did you use them? Are there places where you could revise to use any of these forms of punctuation to make your writing clearer?  
(Conventions of Standard English Anchor Standards for Language #1 and #2)
8. Try writing a short message using Braille. Exchange with a partner and "read."  
(Range of Writing Anchor Standards for Writing #10)
9. Write a review for *Six Dots* to post on Amazon, Barnes and Noble, or a blog.  
(Production and Distribution of Writing Anchor Standards for Writing #4; Range of Writing Anchor Standards for Writing #10)

*This guide was prepared by Rose Cappelli, Independent Literacy Consultant, and Lynne Dorfman, a Co-director of the Pennsylvania Writing and Literature Project. They are co-authors of the Mentor Texts series published by Stenhouse.*