# The BEE: Early Literacy and Movement for Young Blind Children

# NFB Braille Reading Pals Club & NFB Early Explorers

February-2016

## What’s Buzzing with the National Federation of the Blind?

## Happy Valentine's Day from all of us at the Jernigan Institute! We are still very busy with all kinds of programs to help blind people live the lives they want! We have just completed our Washington Seminar, which gave blind people and parents of blind children from all over the country a chance to come together and tell their members of Congress about issues that are important to the blind of the nation. Now, state affiliates will work to follow up with their legislature in their home districts to try to get these bills passed.

## February is a short month, but a lot of work will still be done by members of the National Federation of the Blind. Many people at the Jernigan Institute are working hard to coordinate quality programs for the summer in various locations throughout the country. Many states are also planning their Braille Enrichment Literacy and Learning or BELL programs. Quality programs for blind students are important and must be planned in advance! Enjoy this short but important month!

## Literacy Hints from the Hive

## It's so much fun to read words, that we often overlook another important component of Braille, numbers! Numbers are very important to learn, and it is also important to learn math symbols. With the transition to Unified English Braille, it is important to remember that Nemeth code is still the preferred code for mathematics. Math symbols have changed for literary Braille, but for mathematics, they will be the same. Your child will probably need to be familiar with both types of symbols, since he or she will encounter numbers while reading and while doing math in school. Remember that when writing Nemeth numbers in Braille, they are lowered in the cell so that the number one is dot 2, the number two is dots 2 and 3, and so on. Whether you decide to write literary or Nemeth numbers for now, there are lots of fun ways to practice numbers in Braille and math concepts. Here are just a few:

## Braille number flashcards and have a race to see who can put them in order the fastest, you or your child.

## Give your child objects to count and have him or her write the number of objects in Braille.

## Make up a story that has lots of numbers in it. See if your child can Braille every number he or she hears.

## Think about things in your house that have numbers. Have your child write down everything in the house they can think of that has numbers on it. See which one of you can come up with more.

## Count backwards as you take objects out of one place and move them to another. Then start counting backwards from higher numbers. See how high you can count backwards.

## Travel Tales

## As children grow up they have more and more demands on their time. It becomes increasingly necessary for them to move quickly to get from one place to another. For blind children, this often means walking quickly from one class to another, or moving quickly to catch some form of public transportation. It can be hard to balance this need for speed with a child's curiosity and the need for exploration. But there are times when it can be fun and a challenge to foster that need for speed. If your child concentrates on proper cane technique while moving quickly, it will serve her well throughout her life as she travels. I remember being very frustrated as a child with my cane because it was short with a slanted tip. It kept getting caught in sidewalk cracks and impaling my stomach. I liked to walk fast, and this painful way of being stopped kept slowing me down. I asked my mobility instructor what to do solve this problem and his solution was even more upsetting. He told me to just slow down! Years later, a longer cane with a round tip completely fixed the issue. Here are some tips for increasing speed while keeping good cane technique and keeping travel fun.

## Shorten your cane. When you walk faster, you hold the cane a bit closer to your body and continue to move it in an arc across your body. You don't need it as long in front of you because you are quickly covering the distance.

## Some people prefer to slide rather than tap their cane, finding this a bit quicker when going faster. This also covers the arc in a fluid motion back and forth.

## A Taste of Honey

## A Heart is not Heart-Shaped and Other Life Lessons

## By: Jennifer Wenzel

## Growing up as a blind child I learned many skills. I was fortunate enough to learn Braille at a young age. I learned to use a cane, although I was not encouraged to use one regularly and did not begin to do so until I was nineteen. I was lucky enough to have parents who expected me to do chores around the house, and a mother who taught me to cook and bake. But, there were things I did not learn and that I found out through embarrassing social blunders. They were little things, but they were things that I think might be important for young blind children to learn. So, I pass them on to you as parents so that you can teach them to your children. These are things that sighted children pick up from observing the world around them. I think that blind children can learn these things, but in a different way. They can hear, touch, and smell to gain some information from the world around them.

## Since I have had children, I understand more fully how much information sighted children do pick up via their vision. This does not mean that blind children cannot get this information, it just means that some of it needs to be given to them and that people around them need to make an effort to make sure they get it. I will give a few examples of things I remember.

## It was near Valentine's Day, and I was in third grade. Everyone was cutting out paper hearts to decorate the classroom. I was having trouble cutting as usual, but finally managed to come up with a decent heart. As I began to cut another, I started talking to my friend. We'd been studying the circulatory system in science, so I said that if we put veins on these hearts, we could just put them up and they'd work for science too. She said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "You know, they just need the blood and stuff and then they're hearts for science." She started laughing. Then she told me something that I couldn't believe. Hearts weren't shaped like a heart at all! I had always thought they were. After all, every time we celebrated Valentine's Day we made hearts, ate hearts, traced hearts, and baked heart-shaped cookies. I thought the human heart was shaped like that too. It was a revelation, and I was embarrassed that everyone seemed to know this but me. I felt like I was a little kid and my friends had grown up in some way without me. My friend told some other people around us, and they thought it was funny too. I laughed with them, but inside I felt a little sad and kind of embarrassed. Other incidents like this have involved hand gestures. I have struggled for most of my life with gestures that other people make naturally. I know that people wave hello and goodbye, but when I do it, apparently it does not look right. People have tried to explain why this is but usually end up giving up and telling me it is fine. It's not fine, because I want to wave like anyone else. I have to keep trying and working on it and working to find a person who can explain to me what I'm doing wrong. The point is that at least I now realize the importance of gesturing. I did not really understand this until I wanted to be in theater. It's important to be able to make natural-looking gestures when acting. If I had not given up at an early age working on natural gestures, this might be a skill which I could do with more grace today. So as parents, keep working with your children to make gestures such as waving, thumbs up, and ok. Gestures are an important part of the visual world too often ignored for blind kids.

## One last example of things I wish I had learned younger has to do with branding. Often blind children do not know how brand names of items are spelled. For example, I didn't know that Kool-Aid was spelled with a K until I was in late middle school. I was quiet about that one, and just figured it out by listening.

## When you are out with your kids, try to remember to point out things that are odd or different. Play fun spelling and word games so your child knows how strange brand names are spelled. It is important to make your child aware of the information available in the world around her so that she is not left out and can participate in conversations with her peers. Being on a level playing field will empower your child throughout his or her life.

## Buzzes and Tweets

Follow [@NFB\_Voice](https://nfb.org/sites/all/modules/civicrm/extern/url.php?u=3730&qid=568205) on Twitter to get news and information from the NFB.

Follow [@BrailleLiteracy](https://nfb.org/sites/all/modules/civicrm/extern/url.php?u=3731&qid=568205) on Twitter to get timely Braille news, information, and tips.

Like the [National Federation of the Blind on Facebook](https://nfb.org/sites/all/modules/civicrm/extern/url.php?u=3732&qid=568205) to stay current with all of the new things happening at the NFB Jernigan Institute.

## Books for Busy Bees

If you are looking to expand your child’s Braille library, check out the [Braille storybook resources webpage](https://nfb.org/sites/all/modules/civicrm/extern/url.php?u=3733&qid=568205) for information on free books, lending libraries, and Braille book retailers.

[The NFB Braille Reading Pals Club](https://nfb.org/sites/all/modules/civicrm/extern/url.php?u=3734&qid=568205) and [NFB Early Explorers](https://nfb.org/sites/all/modules/civicrm/extern/url.php?u=3735&qid=568205) programs are sponsored in part by the National Organization of Parents of Blind Children and the American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults. For more information please contact:

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