

ally have no linguistic relation to the dominant spoken language of the people, and the national sign languages are independent of national dominant spoken languages. For example, American Sign Language is derived from French Sign Language and is different from British Sign Language.¹

In manual sign language, a hand gesture may stand for an alphabet, a word, or a sentence.

Figures 1 to 4 depict hands on stamps with the theme of sign language from different countries.

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Hands on Stamps: Braille Scripts

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FIGURE 1: A hand reading Braille script. Netherlands. Commemorating the 150th anniversary of Braille. Day of issue: January 22, 1975. Value: 35 cents.



FIGURE 2: A child's hands reading Braille script. Belgium. The disabled child. Day of issue: September 22, 1962. Value: Post value 40 centimes + 10 centimes for charity.

Louis Braille (1809–1859) invented a tactile print system that has been used by blind and visually impaired persons. Braille codes are found in books

and on elevator buttons, signs, menus, and currency. Braille codes are small rectangular blocks called *cells*. They contain tiny palpable, raised dots. The number and arrangement of these dots distinguish characters of Braille script. Braille characters vary from language to language.^{1,2}

When reading Braille script, the pulp of the index finger is often used and the pulps of the other fingers are used as a guide to keep the finger on track. Braille reading exploits tactile features of the pulp.^{1,2} Hand surgeons are keenly aware of the function of the hand, especially how fingertip and nerve injuries alter the tactile features of the pulp and make finger reading difficult. Figures 1 to 3 depict reading by fingers: “the touch of genius.”

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FIGURE 3: A pair of hands reading Braille script. East Germany. World Braille Year, 1975; Sesquicentennial of the invention of the Braille system of writing for blind, by Louis Braille (1809–1852). Day of issue: October 14, 1975. Value: 35 pfennig.

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Hand Made: The Carver

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This piece (Fig. 1) was inspired by the symbiotic relationship of man and his tools. It took 3 to 4 weeks of part-time work.

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FIGURE 1: Walnut base; mahogany hands; cherry chisel. Dimensions: base, 33 × 17 cm; height, 25 cm. Photograph by Bruce Newman.