

# SCHOOL LIGHT LINES



CHRISTIAN LIGHT  
EDUCATION



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Part 1 of this series focused on the blessing teachers enjoy by being in a position to learn so much. This part focuses on a subject that results in joy.

## Joys of Teaching: Opportunity to Sacrifice | Joe Beiler

**Joy #2:** We have a wonderful opportunity to sacrifice.

Sacrifice is one of the most beautiful parts of the Christian life. The greater the sacrifice the greater the resulting blessing. We frequently underestimate this joy. Is this because the path to reach it is so involved? Or could it be because the “sacrifice” part of teaching goes largely unnoticed?

We love delivering creative, dynamic class presentations. We delight in the discovery of a hands-on science experiment. What is more enjoyable than reading a true story in such a way that causes even the biggest and bravest students to wait with bated breath for the conclusion? Or how about introducing a new song that allows the students to sing harmonies they have not appreciated before? It is real interaction with the students that we love. It’s watching their eyes open with wonder and then light up with understanding that makes our work seem so satisfying.

We tend to forget that dynamic class presentations, riveting stories from history, and delightful science experiments are the result of countless hours behind the scenes. Hours of studying a concept so thoroughly that it practically emanates from our being. Hours of combing the dusty archives of history and

rooting through countless “sawdusty” stories just to find the one that teaches a point perfectly. And hours of scouring songbooks and music platforms for the song we hope will inspire our students to better worship.

Sacrifice has a relationship-cementing quality about it. This is true in most relationships, including those in school. The party sacrificing the most loves the most.

Question: Do parents love their children more, or do children love their parents more? You might say the answer is debatable, but I don’t believe it is.

Parents are constantly sacrificing. They stay up at night with sick children when everyone else is sleeping. Dads go to work every day to pay bills, buy groceries, and put braces on the children’s uneven teeth. Moms are home all day washing clothes, cooking food, and settling squabbles while attending to countless other details. In addition to the normal pressures of life, many parents juggle school board, ministry, and other church responsibilities into their schedule.

While the parents are basically giving, the children are basically receiving. The parents sacrifice; the children soak it



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up. Although children love, parents love much more deeply. Likewise, while students may love a teacher, the sacrificing teacher has the joy of loving much more deeply.

Like the proverbial rolling snowball, the more we sacrifice, the more we love. The more deeply we love, the more willingly we sacrifice; the overwhelming joy that results grows disproportionately to the sacrifice invested.

If we still have trouble understanding this concept, we should consider Jesus. Yes, we love Him! We would even die for Him! But we cannot justly claim to love Him as He loves us. He sacrificed everything and endured everything this sin cursed earth inflicts on mankind, to give us the ultimate gift of salvation. We have merely received it.

In teaching we get the chance to turn the tables. We give and the students receive. As a teacher who cannot begin to

comprehend the debt I owe, I thank God for the opportunity to pour my time back into the kingdom no matter how small the trickle may be. [\[1\]](#)

*Joe lives with his wife and three children in Fairland, Oklahoma. He taught seven years and is currently serving as the upper-grade teacher/principal at Grand Lake Mennonite School. His passion is relationships—God, wife and family, church family, students—although he will go out of the way for soft vanilla ice-cream cones and carefully brewed coffee. He appreciates a well-researched book and believes that everything he needs to know is in a book somewhere.*

*The first of three articles on relating to children with special needs*

## A Call to Love | Lynita Lauver

**A** young man shuffles toward you in the grocery store, clutching what appears to be his favorite snacks. He is uncoordinated, his eyes appear unfocused, and he is mumbling to himself. You smile a kind, pitying smile and walk faster. Averting your eyes, you make sure your path through the store avoids his. Why does he make you feel uncomfortable?

The little girl slowly climbed the steps to the slide. She seemed to get agitated when other children got too close. Finally reaching the top of the slide, she suddenly broke into high-pitched, hysterical crying. When the supervising adult tried to encourage her to slide down, she only clung tighter to the side of the slide. When the adult reached to help her down, she began to thrash wildly. Why didn't she accept help?

"So why is \_\_\_\_\_ in your classroom? He seems fine to me," a curious friend asks.

"Why is your child still in school? At that age, he should not be there anymore," someone criticizes a parent.

"Why does \_\_\_\_\_ need to be on our team? He should just go and play with the younger students," a classmate complains.

"When I was in school, we didn't even have a special ed class. We just made it work," an older person informs.

You may have experienced or observed similar scenarios—whether in town or in school. The Scriptures state that God created man fearfully and wonderfully and in His own image (Psalm 139:14, Genesis 1:27). This does not apply only to children who respond well to traditional parenting, who succeed in

school, and who lead wholesome adult lives. Every child is made fearfully and wonderfully in the image of the Creator. We are called to love and accept each child and to see them through the eyes of God.

When you meet a special-needs child, what do you see? The label or the child? The idiosyncrasies or the personality? The needs or the potential?

Those of us who have been raised in Christian homes untouched by disorders, mental delays, disabilities, and childhood trauma may look into hard situations and not understand the day-to-day struggles some families and children face. We tend to be more gracious with children who have common mental disabilities than with children who have deep behavioral and emotional needs. While it often is a challenge to include a mentally handicapped child in your community, such a child is usually easier to accommodate than a child with significant behavioral or emotional challenges.

Parenting for a child with trauma often looks different than for a typical child. Children who have been adopted can have some of the most misunderstood and unique needs of all. Looking on, some can be quite critical of the parenting they observe. Parents may seem unnecessarily strict, not allowing their child to participate in peer activities. Others may criticize parents for seeming too lenient and allowing "bad" behavior. Some children can cope well in public but fall apart at home.

Finding a network of support is a challenge. Because of misunderstandings, critical mindsets, and lack of knowledge, families with special-needs children can be carrying incredible burdens. Amid these special needs arises a call to love, support, and accept. How can you lovingly support such children and their families?

**Acknowledge the child.** Learn what they love and what excites them. In relating to and conversing with them, make sure that you treat them appropriately for their age. Just because a child is developmentally delayed does not mean he or she does not deserve dignity. Nobody wants to be treated condescendingly. Make sure you model respectful, age-appropriate interactions so that children can look on and know how they should relate.

**Make yourself available.** Ask if there are ways that you can bless their families and lighten their load. Offer your time. This might mean being available to babysit a younger child or to spend time with an older child. Young children with special needs are often easy to relate to because of their energy and love for life. Teens with special needs often have a harder time finding love and acceptance. They need safe peers and adults who will love them in spite of their challenges. Everyone wants to participate in the life around them. Look for ways to help those with special needs to use their strengths to serve others. Be prepared to stay involved long-term.

As you become involved with children affected by trauma consider these things. Reinforce their parents' authority and love for them. Understand that a common trauma response is to be on their best behavior with new people. Do not assume that because they behaved well with you that the challenges their parents face

are not grounded. Attempting to control is also a common response of such children. Be prepared to stand your ground.

**Seek to understand.** This is of great importance to showing love in any situation. When we seek to understand, we acknowledge the other's journey. Research the needs in the children you know. Read books to gain a deeper understanding.

**Don't judge.** Many times, parents of children with special needs are pouring endless amounts of energy into their children. Respect what they are doing and encourage them. Even if you do not understand, remember that most have received knowledge and perhaps training to equip them.

**Look for every child's strengths.** "When we look for what's best in a person, we're doing what God does all the time" – Fred Rogers. It is beautiful to see young people with special needs participating in community life and using their gifts.

The call to love is here. My prayer is that our communities can answer that call and support and empower children with special needs and their families. In following articles we will explore ways to help such children thrive in our schools. [u](#)

*Lynita is from Lebanon, Pennsylvania, and is in her tenth year of teaching special ed at Myerstown Mennonite School. Besides teaching she loves shopping for and reading books, spending time with family, camping, and most of all—anything with children.*





# I Am a Special Ed Teacher | Angela Yoder

I show my students how spelling can be made simple even when they thought it was the hardest thing ever. I teach them sounds. I teach them blends. I teach them how to put them together.

I am a special ed teacher.

I teach one a spelling rule and teach it to him the next day again. And the next. And the next. We worked on it for two weeks and still needed to go back and do extra because he got a 50 percent.

I am a special ed teacher.

I give my students spelling tests even though they have a phobia about spelling tests. I thought they were well prepared, but then realized they must have forgotten a lot. I don't despair when *unity* is spelled *you-n-i-ty*, or *able* comes out as *a-bull*, and we have a *sune* (sunny) day.

I am a special ed teacher.

I do not feel offended when my students all say their favorite part about school is recess, free time, or subjects that I don't teach. Their warm love, perseverance, and smiles are what I really treasure.

I am a special ed teacher.

I do not give up (even though it's tempting at times) when my third grader mixes up *th* and *wh* words, can read *peacemakers* and *coliseum* but constantly mixes up *a* and *the* and says, "it's basically the same thing, as in *a gift, the gift*." My student pauses

again and again at the words *of* and *from*, thinks, and still says the wrong one.

I am a special ed teacher.

I have a student who comes for reading/spelling help, but I discover the main thing I get taught is how to pay attention! We work on one word, but the middle letter in it reminds my student of her name, and that reminds her of her sister, which makes her think of their dog, and the fun they had with their dog last night, and then, oh! *Where were we?* We forgot the word!

I am a special ed teacher

My heart almost melts when I think of the "thank you" I got today. I can still almost see the glow on my student's face as we talked about words, life, the funny things vowel suffixes do, or the things he and his brothers have tried when we had the word *risky*. I wouldn't trade \$1000 for the connections I have made with my dear students.

I am a special ed teacher [LL](#)

*Angela is from Minerva, Ohio. She wrote, "I really enjoyed the 'I am a Teacher' writing in the fall 2021 LightLines. When that writing came, I was teaching in my special ed room and I wrote one similar in style but specifically for special ed teachers. As a special ed teacher, I felt like I was facing challenges uniquely different from those of my co-teachers."*



## Elitist Schools? Indifferent Churches?

Dr. Alan Pue has extensive experience in Christian school administration and consulting and is the author of several books on Christian education. In an interview with Joel Belz with *WORLD* magazine, they discussed whether Christian schools have become elitist (catering to the wealthy and upper class.) He acknowledged that while elitism is not the intent, it is obvious that the cost of Christian schooling is beyond most families' reach.

Dr. Pue bluntly declared this to be a huge failure of the evangelical church. "This is where the evangelical church could make a huge difference. If local churches would make even the slightest effort to assist Christian schools by providing scholarships for genuinely needy families, the challenge of delivering

a quality Christian education for every student regardless of their financial condition could be addressed." He continued, "Sadly, however, the church chooses to ignore the current reality of the children and young people who are forced to attend their local, state-funded public schools, schools which do more to turn the minds of our [children] from Christ than anything other than the pervasive media that inundates our [children] on a daily basis. I've seen this reality up close and find the utter indifference within the American evangelical church to step up and fulfill their mandate to express God's love to the 'least of these' disheartening and maddening." To counter that current issue Dr. Pue recently authored the book, *Rethinking Discipleship: Why Christian Schooling Matters* (available from Amazon and Christianbook.com and other booksellers).

Source: *WORLD*, July 16, 2022

## Flashing Flash Cards | Peter Whitt

Using flash cards benefits students by developing rapid retrieval of facts and information that is stored in their brains. To be able to quickly retrieve information without slowing down to ponder or to calculate answers, becomes a great help in efficiently working their lessons. As we consider the role that flash cards play in this retrieval process, let's consider what is taking place in the child's brain.

We will liken it to pitching a ball back and forth to the student. If the ball is pitched slowly, the natural response to catch the ball will be slower movement. However, if we increase the pace and speed of the pitch, the child's movements will be more rapid. The speed of the pitch sets the pace for the brain's reaction to catching the ball.

The same thing applies to practicing with flash cards. It will help train children's retrieval processes and will help them develop a natural pace of rote retrieval. So, if we hold up the flash card and allow a child to stare at the card until they retrieve (or calculate) the correct answer, this sets the pace of retrieval of the answer. Retrieval of information is a learned response.

A different approach that will help develop a more rapid retrieval of a correct answer to the card is to "flash" the card. Hold it up only long enough for the child to be able to make eye contact and correctly interpret what is on the card. Then lay the card out of sight until the child is able to give the correct answer. This method of "flashing" the card will give the same response as pitching the ball faster and will require faster retrieval of information.

Consider each child's ability to retrieve information. Remember that you are helping them develop a method of finding and retrieving information rapidly. In this method of

"flashing," we are asking the child's brain to respond quickly in recognizing the information on the card as well as producing the correct answer. This way of doing flash cards seems to cement the fact in the child's brain and adds to their ability to quickly retrieve the facts.

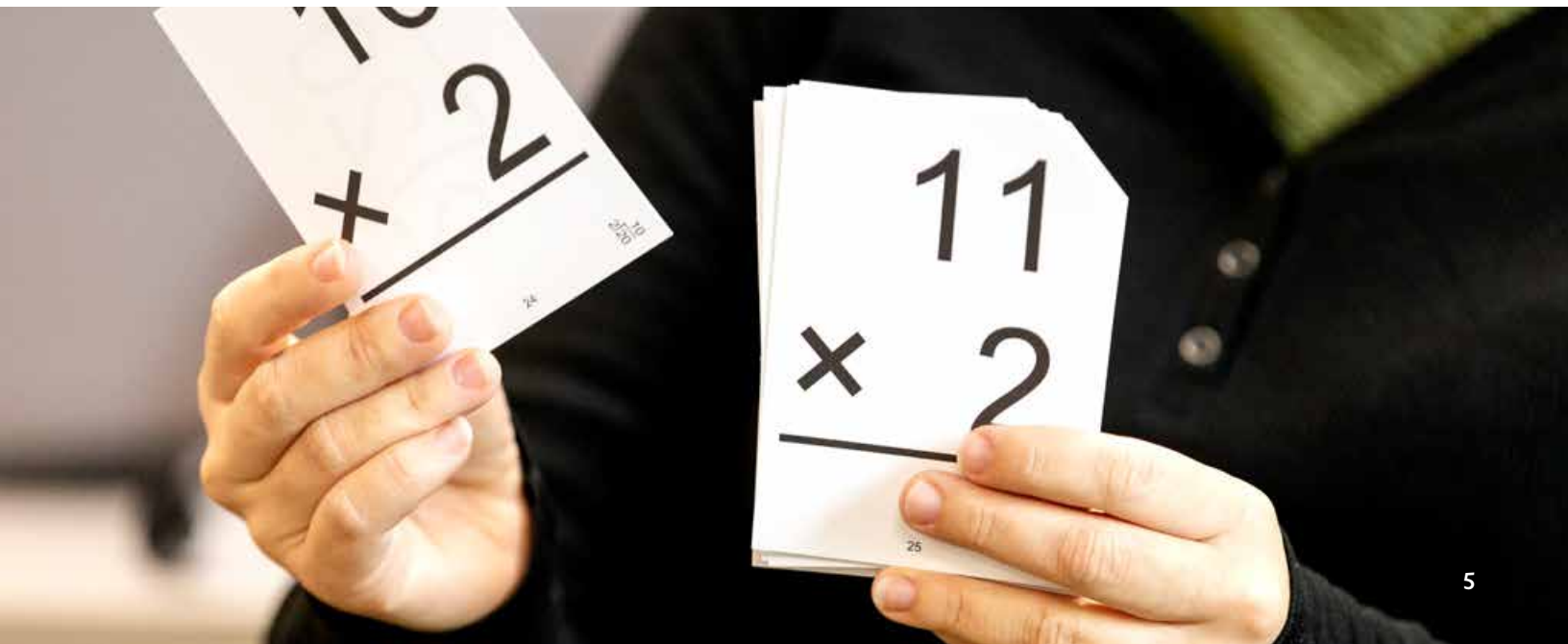
We have observed flash cards being done in the traditional style; allowing the child to stare at the card until they produce the answer. After we shared the tip of "flashing" the card, teachers later told of a marked improvement in the students' speed and ability to retrieve the facts. [\[1\]](#)

*Peter was a teacher for more than twenty years and administrator for twenty-two years. He currently serves as a school representative for Christian Light. He and his wife Martha live in Georgia.*



### Here's a tip!

Teachers, share your tips for effective teaching. Tell us about a technique, method, or activity that works well for you. Consider sharing your tips on classroom and time management, teaching methods, personal management, keeping discipline and order, and anything else you'd like to share. Type it out (450 words or less) and email to [lightlines@christianlight.org](mailto:lightlines@christianlight.org) or mail to LightLines editor, P.O. Box 1212, Harrisonburg, VA 22803-1212.





# “A Rolling Stone Gathers No Moss”—Glacier Mice

“A rolling stone gathers no moss.” This quote may have first been spoken by Publilius Syrus (85–43 B.C.), who was known for his proverbs and pithy sayings. It was cited by Erasmus in 1508 in his third volume of Latin proverbs. In 1546 John Heywood published the quote, “The rollyng stone neuer gatherth mosse” in a book titled *A Dialogue Conteinyng the Number in Effect of all the Prouerbes in the Englishe Tongue*. The phrase was originally meant to denote a wanderer, a person not settling down anywhere permanently, who would consequently be poor.

### Proverb Disproven

Then in 1950 a man named Jón Eythórsson wrote to the *Journal of Glaciology* about an interesting find on a glacier in Iceland.

*In July Last I was crossing Hrutárjökull when I noticed some scattered moss-covered stones some 7 to 10 cm in diameter lying on the ice among other small, ordinary debris. This was about 1000 meters up from the snout of the glacier. The ice was otherwise quite free of sand or dust and sloped gently towards southeast. Some of the stones turned out to be completely covered with moss, but in most cases a corner of the stone kernel protruded through the moss cover, mostly at the point*

*of contact with the ice . . . I call these mossy balls Jökla-mýs, literally “glacier mice,” and you will have noted, Sir, that rolling stones can gather moss.*

31 October 1950

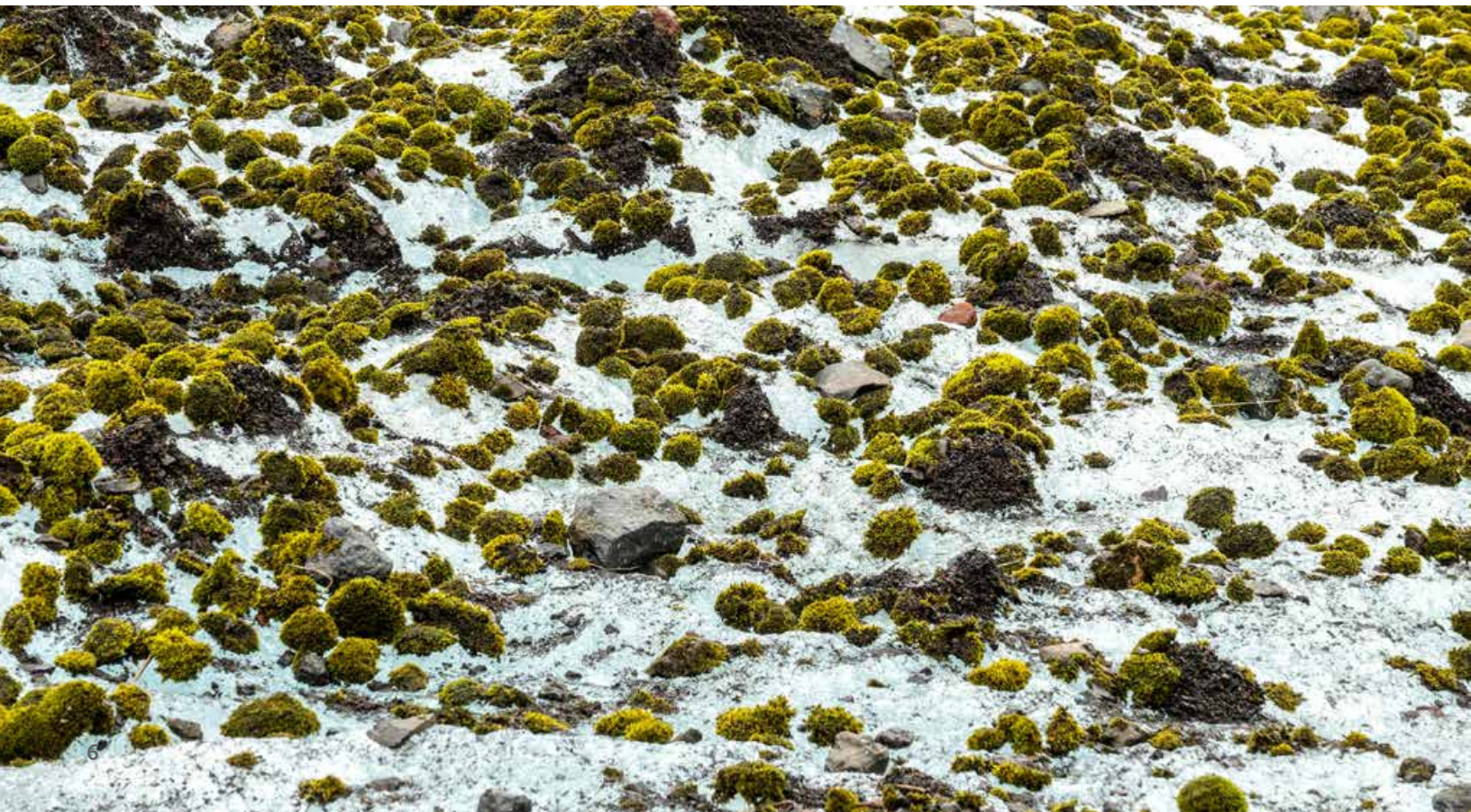
### Movement

Researchers came to look and more have recently studied them. It was discovered that these moss-covered balls ie. *glacier mice*—actually move! They move up to an inch per day, choreographed, all in the same direction, and switching directions frequently.

Most, if not all, of the glacier mice contain a small rock or pebble. Even if their movement would not have been documented, one could assume they’re rolling because moss would not grow on a surface that rests on the ice.

### Microscopic Life Inside

Although these small, wet, squishy balls of moss live in one of the coldest environments on earth, the temperatures inside glacier mice are relatively warm. Internal temperatures of the glacier mice measured up to 58.4°F (14.7°C), much higher than the 32°F (0°C) of the icy surface.





This internal warmth provides a unique ecosystem for other life, such as microscopic animals that researchers were surprised to discover living on a glacier. These included springtails (small insect-like animals), water bears (also known as tardigrades, the only animals known to have survived in space), and roundworms. This discovery only added to their mysterious existence and movement.

### Rare Finds

Glacier mice are rare, in the global picture. But where they are found on glaciers in places such as Alaska, Svalbard, and Iceland, they are usually abundant and in dense groups.

### Mysterious

Researchers are still puzzled. All their theories have either been disproven or made invalid. Theories that wind, gravity, sunlight, or ice melting patterns are the cause have not been sufficient to explain the phenomenon. Therefore, the mystery is still alive and research continues. What causes their movement?

(Meanwhile, rolling stones *do* gather moss.) [u](#)

*Ken Kauffman - editor*

Source: Wikipedia

<https://www.npr.org/2020/05/22/858800112/herd-like-movement-of-fuzzy-green-glacier-mice-baffles-scientists>  
<https://theconversation.com/glacier-mice-these-herds-of-moss-balls-roam-the-ice-and-were-uncovering-their-mysteries-139695>  
<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-glaciology/article/joklamys/E6AB707070CB9F7C15B4D043CC9A018A>  
[http://tbartholomaeus.org/papers/Hotaling\\_etal\\_2020\\_Polar\\_Bio.pdf](http://tbartholomaeus.org/papers/Hotaling_etal_2020_Polar_Bio.pdf)  
<https://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/a-rolling-stone-gathers-no-moss.html>

### Learning Box

- Have students speculate and theorize what could cause the movement of the glacier mice.
- Study glaciers and how they are formed.
- Where is Svalbard?



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## Louis Braille: The War of Dots | Angela Freed

Educators must be fighters, because learning difficulties, behavioral difficulties, and relationship difficulties continually surface to hinder our teaching. Usually, we conquer these in a matter of weeks or months, and keep on educating. How could a handicapped teacher battle the same obstacle for twenty-three years?

Louis Braille had been blind since he was three years old. To most people in France during the 1800s, blindness meant beggary. But Louis didn't want to beg. He wanted to learn. *I'm going to go to school*, he decided.

"Our school is crowded," the village teacher said. "It wouldn't be fair for you to take the place of a child who can see. But you *are* little. We'll squeeze you in."

So Louis sat in the packed schoolroom, listening intensely. He almost never forgot what the teacher said. In no time, he could work math problems in his head as fast as the others could figure on paper. By ten years of age, he had learned everything the village school offered. He would have to find another school that would take a blind boy. But was there another one?

There was, in Paris—the first of its kind. It not only taught school subjects and trades, but best of all, it taught students to read raised-print letters with their fingers. Louis was ecstatic. If he could read with his fingers, he could teach himself!

The Royal Institute for the Blind gave Louis a new life. His studies were easy, except for the one he cared about most—reading. Raised-print letters were massive, three inches from top to bottom. Even so, the shapes of Qs were too much like Os, and the Rs felt like Ps. And, because only a few words fit on a page, reading raised print was painfully slow. Louis was one of the smartest boys in school, but even he forgot what the beginning of a sentence said by the time he got to the end of it.

"There's got to be a better way for the blind to read!" he told his teachers.

"But it's the best we've come up with," his teachers said. "People have made letters out of string, out of wax, and out of wood. One man even tried pins. None of them worked."

Undeterred, Louis racked his mind for a better system. He brainstormed with his friends until they were sick of it. But it

wasn't until his third year at the school that anything worthwhile occurred to him.

Captain Charles Barbier visited the institute to present his invention of night-writing, a code he had made for his soldiers to send messages in the dark, using raised dots. Dots! They were much more sensible than three-inch letters. Many of them could fit under a fingertip and still be distinguishable from each other. *This is it!* Louis decided.

But there was a downside. Captain Barbier's system was phonetically based, using a different pattern of dots for each sound in French. The patterns took up a lot of space, which, while effective for short military messages, made it impractical for anything longer like letters or books.

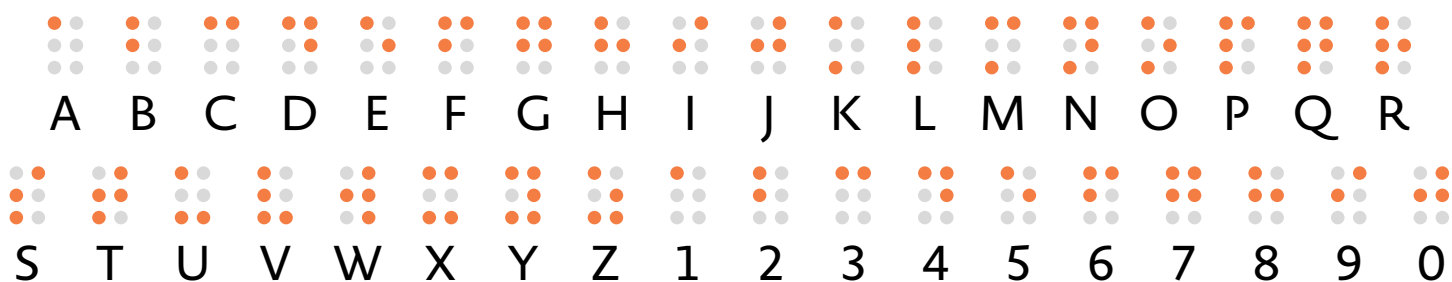
But those dots! Their potential dominated Louis's mind until he decided that he would wrestle them into simplicity. And so began the twenty-three-year War of Dots. How did Louis keep his stamina and courage steady for that long?

**Louis accepted strenuous fighting.** He kept his ammunition with him constantly—paper, a board for a desk, and a stylus for punching the dots. He tried to reduce night-writing to patterns that could be "read" with the touch of a finger. In every spare moment and long into the nights, he battled those dots, rearranging them again and again.

**Louis accepted that others would peter out.** His friends had long ago lost hope in conquering night-writing. So he soldiered solo. "There's Louis, still making his pinpricks," they'd joke when they caught him hunched over his board.

**Louis accepted that his strategy might need to change.** After three years of constant work, a new idea leaped into his brain—the French language had so many sounds, so, of course, it took hundreds of dots to make a word. What if he made dot patterns that stood for letters instead? There were only twenty-six of them.

Instead of mourning three years of wasted effort, Louis immediately employed this new strategy in the War of Dots, developing and redeveloping it. At last, the dots fell into an orderly formation, and he was ready for others to survey his troops. The simplicity of the system elated his friends. In a shockingly short time, they memorized the dot patterns. They started taking







## The Great Backyard Bird Count

The global Great Backyard Bird Count is planned for February 17-20, 2023. Your school could participate. Students can individually or collectively watch birds at home or during school and report their sightings. Reports must be submitted through mobile apps or on a computer.

In the 2022 event approximately 3/4 of the world's known species were reported—a remarkable record. The statistics:

- 7,099 species of birds were identified
- 192 participating countries
- 384,641 estimated global participants

For more information visit [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org). If someone wants information and materials by mail or email, please email

[lightlines@christianlight.org](mailto:lightlines@christianlight.org), or mail request to LightLines/Great Backyard Bird Count, P.O. Box 1212, Harrisonburg, VA 22803.

## Bottle Schools

Some schools in Latin America are being built with “eco-bricks,” which are plastic (mostly pop) bottles stuffed with trash such as plastic bags, etc. Hug It Forward is a U.S. based organization that operates in Latin American countries, with a special focus on Guatemala. In the last twelve years they have built 326 bottle classrooms at a cost of \$8500 USD per classroom. The whole community comes together to build the school buildings, collecting trash and stuffing bottles, and in the process, cleaning up their village. The stuffed bottles are tied in place between two layers of chicken wire and then plastered with layers of concrete. This provides a level of insulation that concrete alone would not.

Source: [hugitforward.org](http://hugitforward.org)

notes in class, keeping journals, and writing letters. Louis himself “translated” many books into dots for the school library. He also became an Institute teacher, a popular one because he was so effective—he taught from notes instead of from memory like most blind teachers. He gave the students raised-dot textbooks to study so that they didn’t need to rely on their memories either.

**Louis accepted that new methods, even if effective, are adopted sluggishly.** Those whose eyes functioned and whose pockets funded the school shot all sorts of arrows at Louis’s dots:

“Raised print has been used for fifty years! This new system isn’t proven.”

“All the teachers will have to be retrained.”

“We might lose our jobs if this system gives the blind as much reading efficiency as you say it does.”


“Abandoning raised print means throwing out the books I helped buy. You won’t get another cent from me.”

But a new school director was the worst. He hated changes, and he not only outlawed the use of the dot alphabet, but he also burned all the books that Louis had worked so hard to translate.

**Louis accepted that he needed help.** He couldn’t fight alone anymore. If his students hadn’t clung so tenaciously to the dot system, using it and teaching it to every new student despite the director’s punishments, Louis may never have seen the end of the war. It took a whole

year before another teacher convinced the director that he was fighting a losing battle. Reluctantly, the director repealed his edict, and once more the school adopted the dot system.

At last, when Louis was thirty-five, he was permitted to demonstrate his alphabet to the public. Immediately, the dot system proved its worth. Other schools for the blind began to adopt it, and its popularity soared. In nearly every country and every language, *Braille*, as it came to be called, worked.

On January 6, 1852, a wind and rainstorm howled all day. Thunder and lightning split the air. Louis, surrounded by his friends from the Institute, lay desperately sick with pneumonia. Even so, he turned toward the window, listened to the wild sounds of the clashing elements, and smiled. A good fight had never scared him. He died, contented that his own war had made a better world for the blind. 

Sources: *Out of Darkness, The Story of Louis Braille*, Russell Freedman. Copyright 1997 by Russell Freedman. Published by Clarion Books, 3 Park Avenue, 19th Floor, New York, NY, 10016. *Louise Braille, The Boy Who Invented Books for the Blind*, Margaret Davidson. Copyright 1971 by Margaret Davidson. Published by Scholastic, Inc, 730 Broadway, New York, NY 10003. National Institute for Blind Youth, Institut national des jeunes aveugles, INJA. <https://museelouisbraille.com/en/institut-des-jeunes-aveugles>

*Angela found schooling difficult, so a lifework of education was not her dream. It still shocks her that she taught for ten years—eight in traditional classrooms and two in ESL environments—and worked for two curriculum publishers, including Christian Light currently. She lives in northern Utah, and teaches in a tiny elementary church school. Now that education is part of her blood, she dreams of starting a vacation Bible school for the children of her town. When she is not teaching or writing or dreaming, she enjoys exploring Utah’s canyons and deserts with her friends.*



Louis Braille

## Developing Reading Fluency | Carolyn Martin, Joyce Beachy

### **F**lu-en-cy...

Reading fluency is the ability to read material with accuracy, proper phrasing, expression, at a rate that is close to normal conversation. Students vary widely in their fluency levels—from the halting beginner to the accomplished orator.

Fluent readers help create a pleasant experience for their listeners. They read smoothly, observing punctuation and proper phrasing. They do not pause at inappropriate places. Listeners can become absorbed in the story because the words make sense and flow naturally in meaningful phrases. A fluent oral reader is also a fluent silent reader.

Fluent reading aids comprehension for both the reader and the listeners. Accuracy and rate especially play a part in comprehension. If the reader says the wrong words, the story loses its meaning both for the one reading and the ones listening. If the reader reads too slow or too fast, it is difficult to visualize the story as it unfolds.

Fluency does not necessarily develop as students advance through the grades. Beginning readers can soon become fluent readers of material within their reading range. Likewise, high school students can still stumble over the text.

### **Strategies for fluency**

Numerous issues can cause a lack of fluency. Students may not have the skills they need to decode written text. They may struggle to automatically recall words, or they may have a vision problem. Some students may need specific interventions to help them overcome these impediments. But there are ways to help all students become more fluent. Many of the following suggestions apply especially to beginning readers but will help any struggling reader.

**Lay a solid foundation** of intentional decoding instruction and practice. For most beginning readers, Christian Light's Learning to Read and Language Arts 100 will provide the foundation they need. However, the foundation is not the end product. Students need to practice the skills they are learning until those skills become automatic.

**Word list practice** in the early stages of reading helps students develop automatic word recall. A student with poor decoding skills will benefit from practicing lists of similar phonics

sets, such as a list of words that have the same vowel sound.<sup>1</sup> High-frequency word lists also build automatic word recall. Phrase drills, using lists or cards, can be helpful fluency builders. A target speed for word lists is around 30 words per minute for young readers.

**Introduce potentially difficult words** such as names and places before students read. Have students repeat words that may be difficult to pronounce or that don't follow regular phonics patterns. This builds confidence and helps them read smoothly instead of stumbling over unfamiliar words. Teaching vocabulary words aids comprehension and helps students read more fluently.

**Model correct phrasing and punctuation** for students who struggle. Demonstrate both proper and improper phrasing. Use parentheses to mark phrases in the text. Demonstrate what it sounds like when you run through the stop sign (period) or do not inflect your voice for a question. Then have students mimic the correct phrasing and punctuation intonations you modeled for them.

**Oral reading** is vitally important in the beginning grades, but don't skip it in higher grades. While the intensity of practice may be less, it is still important. Practice can take various forms, both at school and at home. For example, students can read a story at home that they read in school or read storybooks to younger siblings. After the beginning reading stage, a variety of reading material is valuable for fluency and comprehension. Students should read both narrative stories and expository texts on subjects that interest them. Rereading familiar texts, such as much-loved storybooks, aids fluency. With practice, most students can become more fluent readers.

**Whisper the text.** During "silent" reading some students may find it helpful to whisper the text to themselves. They should listen to themselves to see if what they are saying makes sense, and go back and reread if they make errors. Good readers think about the meaning of what they are reading and self-correct their mistakes.

**Choral reading**—reading a text as a group—is another effective technique for increasing reading fluency. This can be done as a whole class or in smaller groups. Poetry is a good choice



1. *Victory Drill Book*, available from Christian Light, is an excellent resource for such word lists. This book of practice drills helps students develop fluency and the ability to rapidly sound out words. Drilling brings instant recognition of words as students compete against themselves to beat their previous time and score. For use as a supplement to Reading.

845255 **\$21.00** 112 pages, 7¼ x 9¾, Victory Drill Book



## Evaluating Reading Fluency

Because reading involves more than phonics taught and tested, it is important to evaluate fluency also. Rubrics can be used to assess reading ability that cannot be measured by quiz and test scores alone. The following rubric was developed especially to evaluate students using Christian Light's *Learning to Read* program, but can be used profitably with other programs too.

For more on when/how to assess fluency by using the rubric, please read the introduction to Christian Light's *Learning to Read* Teacher's Guide. The Rubric and the Student Assessment Record can be copied from Appendix K of the Teacher's Guide.

	1	2	3	4	5
Rate	Reads slowly; word by word; frequent pauses or hesitation between words	Reads slowly; uneven; word by word	Mixture of slow and fast	Reads well; reads smoothly most of the time	Reads at a rate close to normal conversation; few unnecessary pauses
Word Recognition	Sounds out most words	Sounds out many words and/or makes many careless mistakes	Sounds out some words; makes some careless mistakes	Infrequently sounds out words	Knows most words; usually self-corrects mistakes
Phrasing	No sense of how words are connected	Does not sense proper word connections; little observance of punctuation	Few pauses at inappropriate places; observes some punctuation	Uses two or three word phrases; observes most punctuation	Uses sensible phrasing within the sentence structure; observes punctuation
Expression	No expression; monotone	Uses little expression; saying the word is more important than understanding the concept	Attempts expression at times	Reads with expression, but does not always use correct expression	Uses appropriate expression throughout the reading; sounds like natural conversation

because the rhythm makes it easier to stay together. Read a selection several times: once to become familiar with the piece, once or twice for practice, and at least once more for enjoyment. Have students read directions chorally, rather than taking turns. Those pesky story problems in math—read them chorally. When poor readers need help understanding a question, have them read it chorally with you. Choral reading provides feedback for the stumbling reader, keeps them engaged with the text, and models proper fluency.

Monitor choral reading carefully. The teacher needs to be in charge. Read at a rate that allows the slower readers to keep up. For beginning readers, this will be slower than normal speed. Make sure everyone is participating—you are doing this to benefit slower readers, not to excuse them. Walk around the group and see if you can hear everyone. Keep an eye out for students who get lost. To make monitoring and pacing easier, create smaller groups of readers. Choral reading gets easier the more it is done.

**Reading along with audiobooks** is another way to build fluency. As students listen, they should follow along with a copy of the text. The point is to practice with a good reader, not just to listen.

**Target weak areas.** If your students struggle with fluency, listen to them read and observe their weak areas. Target those

problem areas with some of the strategies listed here. Don't waste time teaching students to decode if their problem is with phrasing. By targeting their weak areas, you can help them make progress more quickly.

Being intentional in working toward reading fluency benefits students in their comprehension, helps them become better readers, and provides a pleasant experience for listeners. [11](#)

*Carolyn Martin has taught first grade at Hickory Hollow Christian School in Dayton, Virginia, for the past thirty years. She enjoys seeing the enthusiasm of young learners as step-by-step they learn about the printed word, and their enjoyment of simple things such as watching a butterfly hatch. Outside of school she enjoys learning about other times and places, photography and design, and reading good books.*

*Joyce Beachy lives in Stuarts Draft, Virginia, where she taught school for four years. Since 2011, she has been employed at Christian Light, where she writes curriculum, edits, and proofreads. She enjoys discussing literature, language, and ideas about life.*



*"Ask Another" is a question-answer space for teachers. Teachers are invited to pose questions on school-related subjects, offer responses to questions, or reply to responses. (LightLines will occasionally assign questions to experienced teachers for their qualified response.) Send questions or responses by email to [lightlines@christianlight.org](mailto:lightlines@christianlight.org) or by mail to LightLines Editor, P.O. Box 1212, Harrisonburg, VA 22803. (Try to limit responses to fewer than 400 words.)*

## Ask Another

### Question (From Ask Another Summer 2022):

In Social Studies and Science I feel that the massive amount of content to cover—fraught with dates, vocabulary terms, and names, etc.—is a deterrent to student interest, curiosity, engagement, and ultimately, to meaningful learning. I would rather cover less content but at a greater depth. For instance, take two weeks for a chapter rather than the prescribed one week, taking time to expand on the content through discussion, hands-on activities, projects, etc. However, if I do this, the amount of material covered is compromised. Is this a problem? What is the greater goal? Is quantity of material or quality of coverage more important? *—Daniel Strahm, KS*

History is like that! A lot of things happened in the last 6,000 years. Most of those events have names, dates, and terms. It's the nature of the study. And science is a nearly endless study—so much to be observed! A few things to keep in mind:

1. There's certainly more than one way to learn, as the question mentions. A publisher needs to package a course of study. Many meaningful ways to study history cannot be packaged, as they rely heavily on teacher inspiration to make them work. Don't feel bound by your curriculum—understand it.
2. If the question is coming from the context that the teacher doesn't really care for social studies or science or finds them too difficult to teach, then the alternatives suggested in the question will likely fail to produce a good learning experience. However, if the teacher is excited about these subjects, the alternative paths mentioned likely have merit.
3. Consult with your board about quality vs. quantity; both are important. Curriculum designers do give attention to a well-rounded scope of study. A student graduating from our schools should have a workable understanding of the things that happened yesterday that make today what it is. And they should understand cause and effect in the fascinating world in which we live.

*—Jonathan Erb, MT*

In our school we don't necessarily plan to finish the entire Social Studies/Science textbook—especially once a teacher has taught a few years and has developed some ideas of his own. Teachers should choose carefully what is skipped. Students may never learn about the history of the past 100 years if they merely proceed chapter by chapter from the beginning of the book, and don't get to the

end. Some teachers skim through certain chapters in order to have more time with others, perhaps reading and discussing the material but not working in the Lightunits or testing it.

Some sense of time chronology is important to get a feel for the big picture. We encourage the important dates such as 1517 - Reformation; 1492 - Columbus; 1607 - founding of Jamestown, etc. The small incidental dates can be readily found if needed – memorizing them doesn't seem as important. (Time lines are very helpful in establishing chronology.)

A teacher isn't bound to only the information and layout of the textbook. A textbook can only contain selected portions of available material.

We do caution that this doesn't become an excuse for not teaching the material. *—Carolyn Martin, VA*

One goal of history is to appreciate cause and effect. Memorizing names and dates, unless they are quite significant, does not necessarily contribute to an understanding of causality. [My history professor] focused on chronology—American Revolution before the French Revolution, for instance—and relationships between events. You can understand history quite well if you understand trends, reactions, and causes. Lists of names and dates do not serve nearly as well. *—Willis Witmer, VA*

**Next question:** *"I don't have to love my students to be a good teacher."* True or false? Why? Share the rationale for your answer in five sentences or less.

**Please send your responses to LightLines by December 15, 2022.**

Answers will appear in the Summer 2023 issue of LightLines. 

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