

Accessible libraries: Talking about accessible literacy

How can you help when a customer has a child who is struggling with reading?

Parents, teachers, and caregivers can tell a child is struggling and they may not know how to help, so they come to the library. When library staff know about print disabilities and the types of books to recommend, they can give families the tools they need to keep their children engaged in reading.

Choice is a key component in keeping kids involved in reading. What works for one reader won't necessarily work for another. Give the child lots of options in genre, content, and style which allows them to select what works best for them, and leaves control with the child. Below are some options to offer adults supporting children with print disabilities.

Print disabilities

A print disability is any disability that prevents someone from reading conventional print. The types of print disabilities include:

- **Learning disabilities** that impact the reader's comprehension.
- **Physical disabilities** that prevent the reader from holding a book or turning pages.
- **Vision disabilities** including severe or total loss of sight or the inability to focus or move one's eyes.

Visit celalibrary.ca for more information.
1-855-655-2273 or help@celalibrary.ca



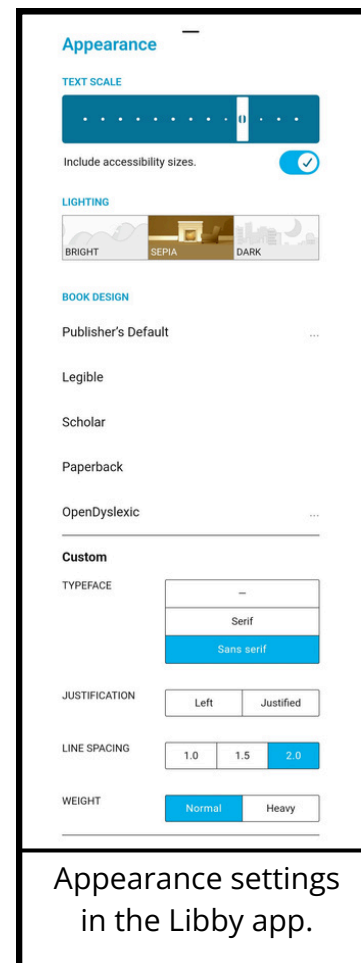
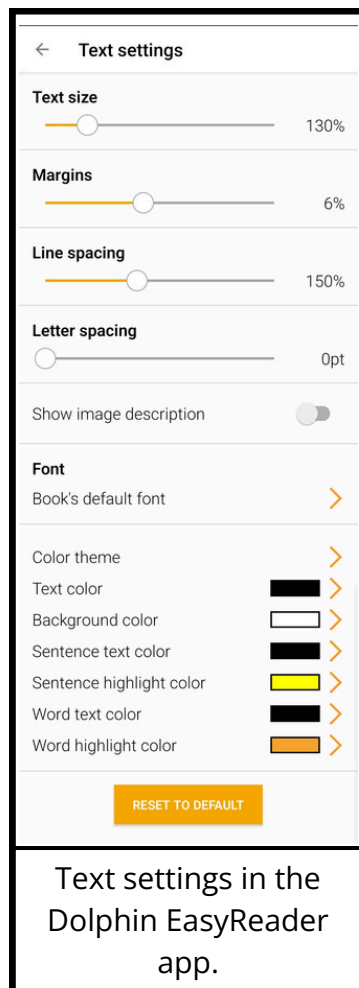
Centre for Equitable
Library Access

Accessible reading options

Accessible ebooks

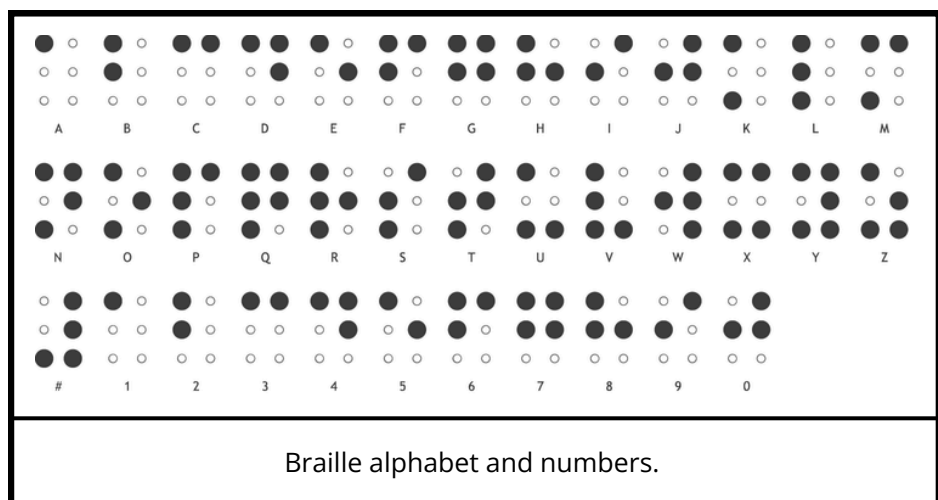
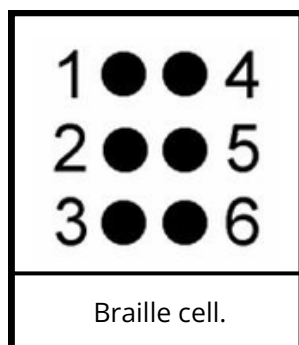
Reading a book's text on a screen can be more accessible than a physical print book. Here's why:

- Customizable formatting allows the reader to adjust the font size and style, line spacing, margin size, and text and background colour.
- Read along with ebooks like DAISY Text formats allow the reader to listen to the words and see them at the same time. This can help some readers process and understand the words and improve fluency.



Braille

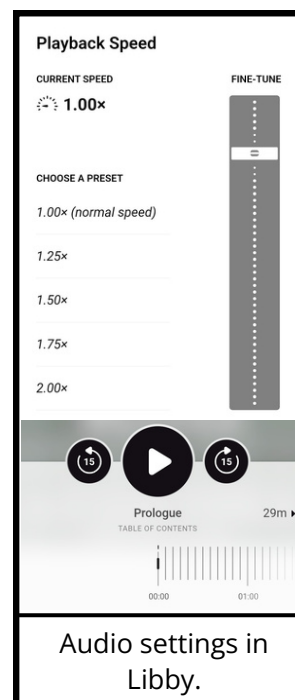
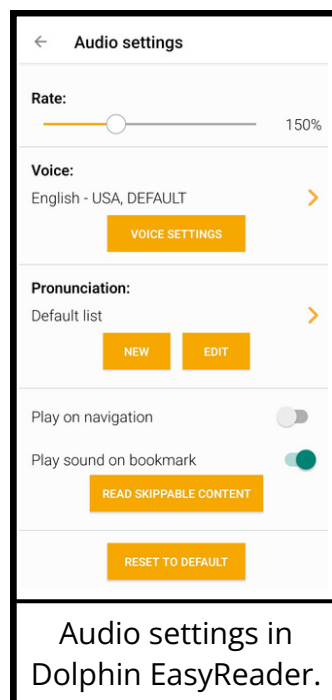
- Braille is an important literacy tool for children who are blind or have low vision.
- Braille is a series of raised dots that allow someone to read using their fingertips. Each letter or number is made up of a combination of up to six dots placed in a grid called a braille cell.
- Learning to read braille helps readers learn letter recognition, phonics, grammar, punctuation, numeracy and writing skills.
- Knowing how to read braille also fosters independence and imagination and allows the child to read at their own pace.
- Printbraille books are children's picture books with see-through braille sheets added with each page. They help sighted and blind readers to enjoy a book together.
- Braille is available in both physical and electronic formats. Physical braille refers to paper with the raised dots. Electronic braille is digital content that can be read using a refreshable braille display device connected to a smartphone, tablet or computer.



Audiobooks

There are lots of studies which show that “ear reading” using audiobooks provide the same benefits as reading traditional print. Don’t hesitate to offer an audiobook as an equitable reading experience.

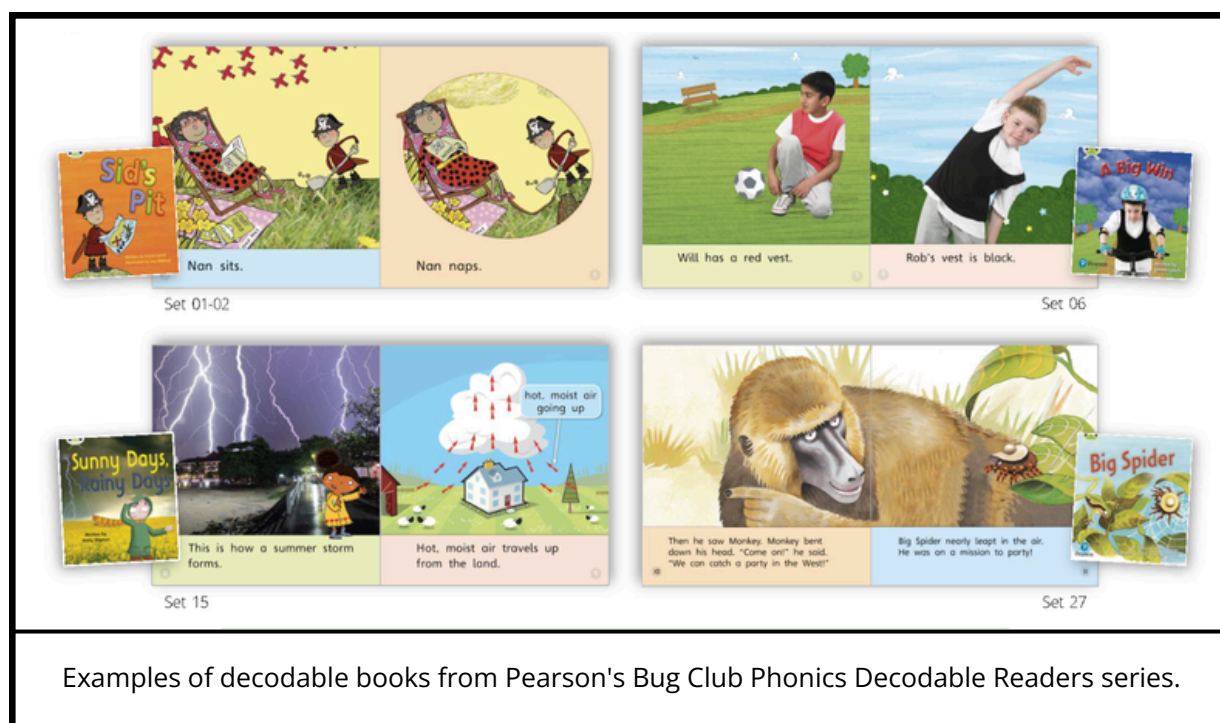
- Audiobooks are fun for lots of readers but are particularly great for many readers with print disabilities.
- Audiobooks help readers stay current with school material and read the same book as their friends.
- Audiobooks help develop critical listening skills.
- Listening to a book while reading printed text can help with reader comprehension while decoding the text.
- Audiobooks can help improve readers’ vocabulary and pronunciation.
- Customization options allow the reader to pause, add bookmarks, repeat sections, skip forward or backward by section, and speed up or slow down the playback speed.
- Some audiobooks provide an immersive listening experience with sound effects, ambient noise, and a full cast of voice actors.



Decodable books

Decodable books are beginning reader books. They are often a more accessible option than mainstream leveled books, especially for readers with dyslexia. Here's why:

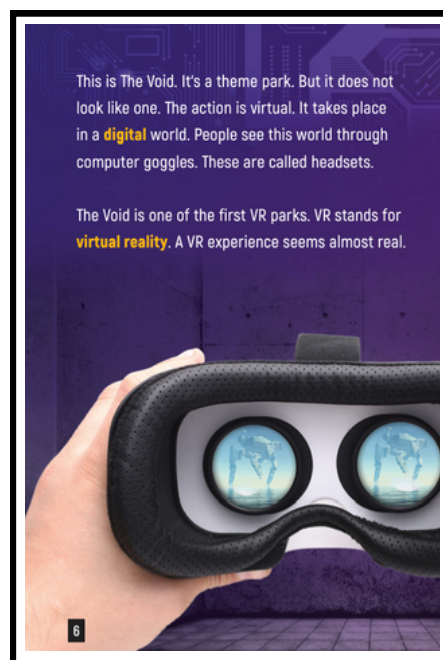
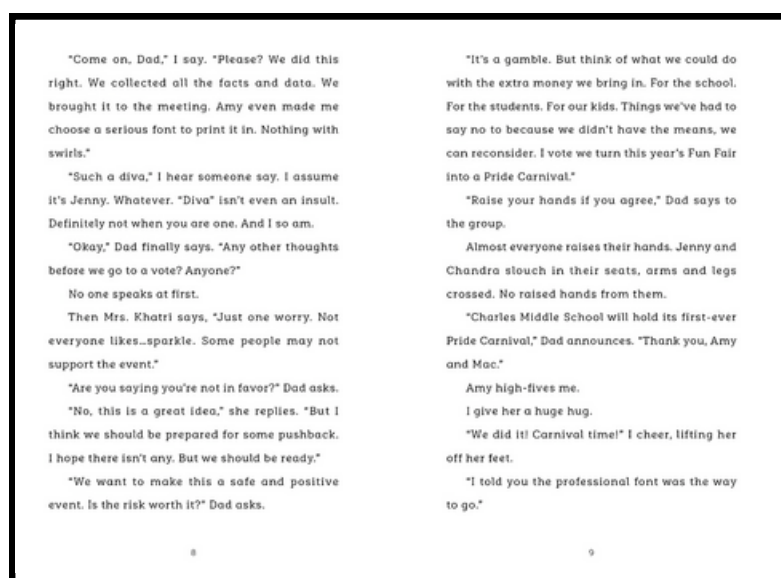
- They are rooted in principles of phonics: the instruction of the sounds associated with individual letters or letter combinations.
- They use words that can be sounded out rather than encouraging readers to guess at words based on the images or context.
- Decodable books still progress in difficulty, like leveled books, but intentionally build on the skills learned in previous books rather than just adding more complex words. A new book is only introduced when the child can comfortably read the current book independently.
- They are intentionally simple to develop the child's confidence. As the child moves through the series of books, the storylines and vocabulary become more complex.



Hi-Lo books

The term Hi-Lo refers to books written with high interest stories but at a lower reading difficulty level. They can be a great option for older kids and teens who are struggling to read. Here's why:

- They have age-appropriate content with fast paced stories, interesting characters, and relevant subject matter.
- They are shorter in length than other novels, so they don't feel daunting and give the reader a sense of accomplishment.
- They have simpler vocabulary that helps build decoding skills.
- They include short sentences, paragraphs, and chapters.
- Some contain illustrations to help support interpreting the text.
- Well-written Hi-Lo books allow older kids to read books at their reading level without feeling like they are reading books meant for younger children.



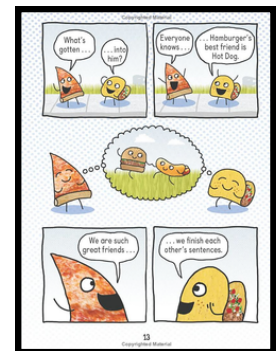
Examples of hi-lo books.

Left: *I Got You Babe* by Paul Coccia (Orca, 2023). Fiction for middle grade readers with reading level 2.1.

Right: *Digital Worlds* by Emily Schlesinger (Saddleback, 2019). Nonfiction for middle grade readers with reading level 2-3.

Graphic novels

- Many graphic novels are high quality literature with well-developed characters, complex plots, and new vocabulary. They are not lazy reading!
- Graphic novels can help the reader improve visual literacy, which refers to the ability to interpret and understand images.
- Readers can use the images to provide context and help them better understand the text.
- Graphic novels that use typed text, rather than hand drawn lettering, are typically more accessible because the size and spacing of the letters stays consistent.
- Remember that graphic novels are not universally accessible, particularly for readers with low vision or who are easily distracted.
- Many graphic novels are now available as audiobooks.

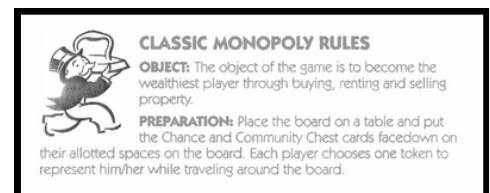


Tips for selecting and recommending books

Reading is more than just novels!

Reading includes:

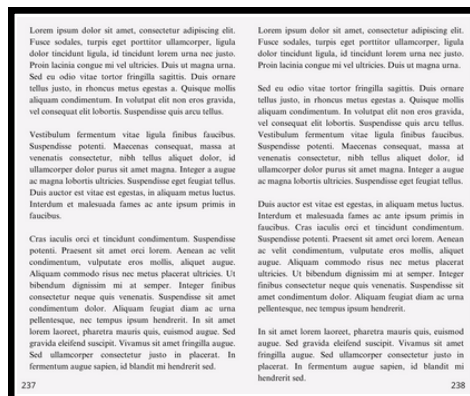
- Recipes in a cookbook.
- Narratives and dialogue in video games.
- Writing and reading poetry and song lyrics.
- Closed captions on TV.
- Instructions for board games, activities, experiments, etc.
- Maps and travel directions.
- Joke books.



Design and layout matter

When you're choosing books for storytime, book clubs, reading lists, or just recommending a book to a customer, remember to consider the design and layout of conventional print books too.

- Sans serif fonts are typically more accessible than serif fonts. The “dyslexic friendly” fonts are not universally accessible. They may help some dyslexic readers but not others.
- Picture books:
 - Avoid books with a cluttered or busy design, text in lots of different places on the page, and text that overlaps with textured backgrounds or images.
- Novels:
 - Choose novels with wider margins and line spacing. This creates more white space on the page, which helps with tracking and gives readers' eyes places to rest.
 - Choose novels with left aligned text rather than justified margins. This ensures that the spacing between words and letters stays consistent.
 - Avoid novels with long paragraphs and sentences:
 - Long paragraphs or dense blocks of text can be visually overwhelming. Shorter paragraphs can feel more manageable and provide the reader with a natural place to take a break.
 - Long, complicated sentences can be difficult to process. Short, simple sentences allow the reader to process a single thought or point at a time.



The pages from this fake picture book (left) and novel (right) were intentionally designed to be overwhelming and have text that is difficult to read.