

**Handbook for Transcribing  
Navajo Braille  
By  
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### Background & Acknowledgements

This braille code was developed in an effort to make the Navajo language more readily accessible and easier to read for anyone of any age or nationality. It came in a question posed to Judith Dixon who at that time was with the Library of Congress and Francis Mary DeAndrea who was then president of the Braille Authority of North America. I asked the question at a Getting in Touch with Literacy conference in Rhode Island in 2013. I myself am half Navajo and have been studying Navajo off and on since I permanently moved to the southwest in 1989. I took my first Navajo language class at Northern Arizona University from Irene Silentman. At that time I could see and was more or less considered low vision. In 2013 I was in my 3<sup>rd</sup> year as a teacher of the blind and visually impaired in Farmington, New Mexico when I inquired after a braille code for Navajo, my braille fluency was building along with my students' abilities. I have kept most of the Navajo language books I have acquired over the years as an elementary teacher on the Navajo Nation and from Navajo language classes. I can no longer see them and had a desire to continue to learn and study Navajo as I have yet to master this very difficult language that my father was raised speaking before going to boarding school and is the only language my grandparents speak. Although I may never achieve this desire to master the language, I have always been good at reading it and in desire to read it and write it, I thought it would be of benefit to others as well. Although I had not begun creating the code right away, I contacted Francis Mary DeAndrea in the Spring of 2015 and she recommended that I contact Dr. Robert Englebetsen of Rice University in Houston, Texas who is a linguistics professor and braille user. As we consulted through the summer, we had a code by August and I presented it to the Navajo Nation Board of Dine Education in September of 2015. It was approved in October the same year.

I hope this handbook is useful to those in the community who will use it to teach others and prepare materials for those who will enjoy learning a beautiful and rich language that is beginning to disappear from among us. It is my hope and desire that someone who is a braille user may add to the preservation of this language among our people and others. I would like to thank Margaret Bateman for encouraging me to develop this code and my team at Farmington Municipal Schools. I would also like to thank my family for their support particularly my husband Kevin Green Sr. who works tirelessly behind the scenes. He is the wind beneath my wings.

- Carol Begay Green

## 1.1 The Alphabet

Navajo was not traditionally a written language. It became a written language in the 1930s and uses the Latin Alphabet. The consonants with their braille equivalents are as follows:

b	⠠	h	⠠	m	⠠	w	⠠
c	⠠	j	⠠	n	⠠	x	⠠
d	⠠	k	⠠	s	⠠	y	⠠
g	⠠	l	⠠	t	⠠	z	⠠

In addition to the consonants, there are additional symbols used in Navajo. One is another consonant called the Slash L. the sound is made by voicing while the tip of the tongue is touching the back of the teeth and the back of the tongue is pressed against the roof of the mouth.

Another symbol is the glottal stop. It looks like the apostrophe. Navajo grammar does not use the apostrophe so for Navajo braille we will use the same symbol as for apostrophe but call it the glottal stop. this convention is a quick stop of the air in the throat.

. Following is the print braille and dot equivalents.

ł	⠠	Dots 1456
‘	⠠	Dot 3

## 1.2 Vowel Signs

In Navajo there are three types of vowels: the low tone, the high tone & the nasal tone. These are differentiated by symbols as well as tones. The high tone has a slight raised pitch whereas the low tone remains neutral. The nasal tone is achieved by annunciating the vowel in the nasal cavity is either a raised pitch or neutral tone.

This table summarizes the Bowel Signs in Navajo print, braille & the dots:

Low Tone	⠠	Low Tone	⠠	Low Tone	Braille	Low Tone	Braille		
High Tone	⠠	Dots	High & Nasal	Braille	Dots	Low & Nasal	Braille	Dots	
a	⠠	e	⠠	I	⠠	o	⠠		
á	⠠	12356	á	⠠	46 12356	ḁ	⠠	46 1	
é	⠠	2346	é	⠠	46 2346	ḙ	⠠	46 15	
í	⠠	34	í	⠠	46 34	ḭ	⠠	46 24	
ó	⠠	⠠	ó	⠠	46 346	ḭ	⠠	46 135	





