

Librarian's Shelf

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Talking Book & Braille Service

Do you or someone you know struggle to read print materials such as books or magazines due to visual or physical limitations? Perhaps the text is too small, the item is hard to grip, or it is difficult to turn the pages. If so, then the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS) likely has programs to help!

A division of the Library of Congress, NLS administers a free national braille and audiobook (talking book) library service for people with temporary or permanent low vision, blindness, or a physical disability that prevents reading or holding the printed page. This includes those who have a perceptual or reading disability and are unable to read standard print materials to the same degree as a person without an impairment.

Through a national network of cooperating libraries, NLS offers books the way you want them: in braille or audio formats, mailed to your door for free or instantly downloadable. The Nebraska Library Commission's Talking Book and Braille Service (TBBS) is Nebraska's NLS partner, managing the service and circulating materials to eligible patrons of all ages in our state. Eligibility for the program must be certified by a doctor, nurse, optometrist, therapist, professional staff of public or welfare agencies (such as an educator, social worker, or librarian), etc. A full list of certifying authorities can be found on the NLS website <https://www.loc.gov/nls/>.

More than 281,000 book records, of which more than 74,000 are braille books and braille music scores, and 207,000 are talking books are available to borrow. These materials and the free playback equipment needed to read them, such as refreshable braille displays, are circulated to patrons by postage-free mail. Audio players are available in two models (standard and advanced) to fit a user's technical preferences and include optional accessories such as lightweight headphones, adapters to facilitate the use of commercial USB flash drives, and a breath switch. Readers with significant hearing loss may request a high-volume player and headphones.

The NLS collection contains books for youth (from toddlers to teens) and adults across a wide range of interests. Registered borrowers learn of new books added to the collection through two bimonthly publications: Braille Book Review and Talking Book Topics.

Currently 51 audio and 40 braille magazine titles are available through NLS by subscription. A variety of magazines for children are also available. Current issues are mailed to readers shortly after print issues are released.

Nebraska's TBBS provides additional material for loan using in-house sound studios to record and produce audiobooks and audio magazines from either Nebraska and regional authors or about Nebraska and the Great Plains. A newly added title recorded by TBBS is the 2022 One Book One Nebraska winner, *The Bones of Paradise* by Jonis Agee. Visit <http://nlc.nebraska.gov/tbbs/> to learn more or search the catalog of available titles.

Digital audio and ebraille materials are also available through NLS BARD (Braille and Audio Reading Download) for eligible patrons. This free online service provides access to thousands of special-format books, magazines, and music materials. BARD can be used on iOS and Android devices in a mobile app or in tandem with NLS provided (or personally owned) playback devices. A refreshable braille display connected via Bluetooth can be used to read ebraille materials. Digital audio materials can be played on an NLS audio player using BARD Express, a simplified way to transfer books and magazines to an NLS cartridge or USB drive.

For questions about the talking book and braille services, including eligibility, visit the Talking Book and Braille Service website <http://nlc.nebraska.gov/tbbs/>, email nlc.talkingbook@nebraska.gov or call (402) 471-4038.