



# **Tactile picture books in Sweden**

## What is a tactile picture book?

Basically, tactile books communicate information through touch. The illustrations in a tactile picture book are in relief so that they can be read with the fingers. Tactile picture books come in a wide variety of materials: textiles, swell paper, or combinations of a variety of techniques. Most tactile picture books are based on an existing printed book.

The Swedish Library of Talking Books and Braille (TPB) has been producing tactile picture books for children with different types of visual impairment since 1992. Since 2005, children with other types of impairment can also borrow these books.

The TPB's tactile picture books are almost always based on an existing printed book. The pictures in the tactile version, however, are simplified to facilitate perception by touch, which means that certain details in the original illustration have to be eliminated, leaving only the most important features. Tactile pictures are produced in a range of structures, textile material or screen print, contrasting colours, etc. The text of the printed book is transferred to Braille or large print or printed in screen.

*Tactile books communicate information through touch.*





*The illustrations in a tactile picture book are in relief*





*Picture books are of vital importance*

## Importance of pictures for the child's development

Picture books are of vital importance in the child's development and equally so for the child with visual impairment. Young children are constantly exposed to images and texts in their environment; texts and picture symbols are all around us, on hoardings, cereal boxes, shop-windows, etc. The child therefore quickly learns to recognise different letters and picture symbols and what they stand for. This recognition of letters and symbols is the first stage in the development of reading.

Visually impaired children are often less familiar with letters and words when they start school than their sighted peers, since Braille is rarely a familiar element in the children's environment, although they may perhaps have encountered it on elevator buttons. Books in

Braille thus play a very important role in the visually impaired child's development, even before they learn to read.

Tactile pictures can also explain things the child cannot touch such as volcanoes or dinosaurs, and a picture of a tree can give the visually impaired child an idea of what it looks like, as trees can be touched but never be perceived as a whole.

There is still very little known about how children with other types of impairment may be helped by tactile picture books; there has been no research into this area. But parents of disabled children report that their children's ability to understand the story in a book increases when they are able to touch and feel simplified tactile pictures.



## How to read tactile picture books

When reading a tactile picture book to a child, it is essential not to rush things. A calm atmosphere is vital. The child must be allowed to ask questions; the pace must be decided by the child, who should be allowed to take as much time as he or she needs. It may be helpful to talk a little about the story before the reading starts, so that the child already has an idea of what it is about. The child could be asked about his or her own experiences of what is described in the text. Objects that appear in a tactile picture could be produced for the child to compare the real object with the one in the picture. This is especially helpful for very small children.

Tactile books vary in difficulty and age-range. It is impossible to state the best age for starting to read tactile picture books as this

depends on the individual child. You might, however, start with a simple picture book without text for small children. The next phase could be books containing rhymes or a simple story, after which books with longer texts and more complicated tactile books could be introduced.

For children who have outgrown picture books, there are books with individual tactile pictures, often portraying objects or events which can be difficult for a visually impaired person to understand.





## Production methods

Every year TPB selects three or four books to become tactile picture books. These represent a very small part of the vast number of picture books produced by the publishers each year. A specially qualified designer is then commissioned to work on the pictures to make them readable by touch. The designer determines the colours and materials to be used. Some picture structures and Braille texts are produced in screen print. Finally, the various materials are cut by laser and glued together onto the pages.

Other tactile picture books are produced entirely in screen print. In this case materials such as flock may be used to produce soft, woolly surfaces for pictures of animals.





## Lending and purchase

TPB books can be borrowed by visually impaired individuals at libraries all over Sweden. If you want to find out about existing tactile picture books, visit TPB's catalogue at its website, [www.tpb.se](http://www.tpb.se), where you can access general information on tactile picture books in English and Swedish.

New titles can be purchased by Braille readers and public libraries in Sweden. The children's department at the local library stocks tactile picture books; many libraries display tactile picture books on their "Apple Shelf," where children's literature in adapted media is available.