THE BRAILLISTS FOUNDATION

INTRODUCING BRAILLE ON THE AMAZON FIRE TABLET

Matthew Horspool: Welcome back to Braillecast Extra. My name is Matthew Horspool. We'll shortly be hearing a session about using braille on the Amazon Fire range of tablets but before we get into that, some news which we couldn't tell you on the day that the session was recorded but we can tell you now, namely that the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, who you might remember from previous episodes of this podcast donated £10,000 to the Braillists Foundation around about this time last year, are very impressed with the work that the Braillists Foundation are doing and have agreed to donate a further £26,000 to the Braillists Foundation, in order to continue Braillecast and Master Classes and maybe do some more stuff around braille for beginners and a whole lot of more stuff which we will be announcing in due course.

 So, this particular Master Class was not sponsored by the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, but the Master Classes that follow definitely will be.

 With that said, this Master Class deals with braille on the Amazon Fire range of tables. It's introduced by Dave Williams and it was recorded on Tuesday, 15th of June 2021.

Dave Williams: Good evening and a very warm welcome back to the Braillists Foundation. I'm Dave Williams, chair of the Braillists Foundation and I see we've got a couple of new people joining us this evening, so a very warm welcome in.

 Tonight we will be exploring all things Kindle Fire and braille. The Kindle Fire is a low-cost tablet from Amazon and we think it is one of the most affordable ways to get access to a very large selection of Braille reading material. We'll be describing the Kindle Fire, doing a bit of an unboxing and showing you how to get braille set up and then we'll be moving on to showing you how you can read a book on the Kindle Fire and where you can get books from. Then of course, towards the end of the session, we will allow probably about 20 to 25 minutes or so to take your questions.

 As ever this evening's event is run in line with the Braillists moderation policy so we run a fairly family-friendly show. If you have a question, you're very welcome to raise your hand and the person who's going to be taking care of moderation duties this evening is our good friend and Braillists Foundation trustee, Matthew Horspool. Good evening, Matthew.

Matthew Horspool: Good evening, everyone. Good evening, Dave. Bit of a role reversal tonight but, yes, it'll be good to be sitting in the other chair this evening.

Dave Williams: Excellent. When we get to the Q&A part, if you raise your hand, and Matthew will give us all the instructions and what keys to press, I'm sure many of you already know them by now but we want to make sure that we're as inclusive as possible, so we will make sure that we give you those details.

 I should also remind everyone this evening's session is being recorded and will be made available from the Braillists Foundation Media page, braillists.org/media, and will also be available as part of our Braillecast Extra series from wherever you get your podcasts.

 Our presenter this evening is something of a technology expert. I first met him when he was on work experience from an assistive technology company I was working for at the time. He became very involved in screen reading and scripting and testing and then moved on to work for a large media organisation, developing accessibility, testing resources there. I'm sure he'll tell you a bit more about himself and he's going to be guiding us through the topic this evening of the Kindle Fire and braille and reading books in braille with a refreshable braille display connected to your Kindle Fire, it's Ben Mustill-Rose. Good evening, Ben.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Good evening, Dave. Don't be silly, no-one wants to know anything about my incredibly dull history. But, yes, I'm feeling rather old. I think it was about 15 years ago now that we were sat there in that office, trying to get screen readers working on Windows Mobile. How times have changed.

 I guess, in a way, that's quite an interesting segue to this evening's session because we are of course, as you say, going to be looking at braille on the Amazon Fire tablets and just to reiterate, the reason that we've chosen these tablets isn't necessarily because they're that unique. There are many ways that you can read electronic braille paired with some kind of Internet-enabled device. You've got your iDevices from Apple, other Android tablets, Windows laptops, Windows tablets and Mac Laptops. But, of course, all of those devices are actually incredibly expensive, particularly if you add in the cost of a braille display.

 In contrast, the Amazon Fire tablets start from around about £50 and actually if you don't mind waiting for a while, when they go on offer, you can get them for a lot less. In fact I managed to buy one for £29, which I just think is incredible, given the quite mature set of accessibility features that are built into them these days.

 They started off experimenting with accessibility in around 2014 and I think it would be fair to say that at that stage, it maybe was a bit of an experiment. Now, however, they feature a fairly mature set of capabilities. You've got a screen reader called VoiceView. You've got screen magnification. You've got colour contrast. You've got options around hearing. And of course what we'll be focusing on this evening is VoiceView's fairly complete braille support.

 As Dave said, we're going to be looking at various parts of the Fire, setting it up, pairing a braille display, some of the hot keys and then we'll be focusing on reading.

 A couple of bits of housekeeping before we get started though. First thing to point out is that typically when we learn a new technology, it's a multi-hour endeavour, because these things are pretty complicated, but we don't have multiple hours here. We've got half an hour, 40 minutes, absolute tops. So, this is by no means an in-depth tour of the Fire tablets but I hope it will nonetheless prove useful in a couple of ways. Hopefully it's going to be useful for you if you're trying to figure out whether to buy one or not. So, you just want a bit of a demo and if you like what you hear, then that's probably a fairly good indication that you should pick one up or maybe do a bit more research.

 Secondly, it's going to hopefully be useful for people who buy one off the back of this demo and just want a bit of a push in the right direction to help you get started and hit the ground running.

 Of course, we are going to have a handout available on our Media page, braillists.org/media where we will include everything that we've covered in this Master Class along with a couple of extra titbits to help you along the way.

 Last bit of housekeeping, quickly, technology has this wonderful habit of working really well and then not working really well when you need it to work really well and Master Classes and presentations in general are one of those times where it tends not to work really well, given that we're jinxing it by doing live demos. So, we are going to be doing some pre-recorded segments this evening but of course we are all here live as well and the Q&A will be live, thankfully.

 Now, as Dave said, we're going to cover the unboxing first. I actually bought an Amazon Fire just for the Master Class this evening as my current one was a couple of generations old and I thought it would be interesting to start with an unboxing to see exactly what you get for your money.

 So, the Amazon Fire arrives in what is actually quite a nice quality gift bag. It's the sort of thing you might expect a bottle of wine to come in, but instead we've got a tablet computer, although, to be honest, I wouldn't say no to either.

 Looking at what we get, we get the tablet itself, thankfully. We get a micro USB cable for charging which is about one to two metres long by the feel of things. We also get a standard USB charger which we can connect to the cable. We also get various pieces of paper-based documentation which are mainly going to be Getting Started guides, which you won't really need because you've got the Braillists Getting Started guide, which is of course going to be far, far better than the Amazon option.

 The Fire itself comes in a polythene wrapping, so let's just unwrap that now and see what we get.

 I'm now going to give you a brief orientation of the Fire in terms of what buttons and ports you will find as you explore it. The Fire is a rectangular device and I currently have it situated so that the short side containing the majority of the buttons is facing me and the screen is facing upwards.

 Starting on the shortest side facing me and going from left to right, we first encounter the lock/power button. When the tablet is turned off, pressing this button will turn it on, but when it's turned on, it will do a couple of different things, depending on the state that it's in. When you're using the device normally, pressing it will lock the device, in the same way that you would expect it to do on a phone or any other tablet, but when the device is locked, pressing it will take you to your lock screen, where you will find your notifications and depending on the model that you've purchased, you'll maybe also see some adverts.

 To the right of that we have a micro USB port, which you can use for charging and connecting to a computer and to the right of that we have a standard headphone jack.

 Lastly, for this side, we have two buttons in fairly close proximity to each other and these are the volume controls, the leftmost one is volume down and the rightmost one is volume up.

 Moving on to one of the longer sides, the only thing that you'll find here is a speaker towards the end of the device.

 Moving on then to the second short side, there's actually nothing on this side so we'll quickly move on to the last longer side which also doesn't contain much, but towards the end of the device that is facing me, you'll feel a cutout for a micro SD card slot which you can use to expand the storage of your tablet.

 Now, the one that I've purchased has 16 GB of storage which is going to be plenty for basic usage, if you're downloading a few apps and maybe you've got a couple of books and stuff like that. However, if you do have, let's say, a large music collection, or you are downloading large quantities of books, then you might wish to upgrade the storage. I believe that you can install microSD cards of up to 512 GB, so more than ample amounts of storage for a device like this.

 Now, as I say, I'm not going to go through the entirety of the set-up process with you here. That's not necessarily because it's hard but it is a multi-step process and would take quite a bit of time. I will however explain to you how to independently turn on the VoiceView screen reader so that you can carry out the rest of the set-up yourself.

 The first thing that you want to do is to plug your micro USB cable into the USB charger and then plug the charger into the wall, which thanks to the magic of audio editing I've already done. Next, you're going to need to plug the micro USB end of the micro USB cable into the Fire, press the power button for around about one second and wait until you hear a sound [chime]. Okay, so that's the sound that we want although I should point out that I have sped that up a little bit due to time constraints.

 When we hear that sound, we know that the Fire is ready to be set up and in order to do that, we are of course going to have to turn on speech, so to do that we're going to press the Lock button three times in quick succession. Some might say that is similar to how you might turn on speech on an iDevice.

Fire device: [chime] Swipe left or right with one finger to select language.

Ben Mustill-Rose: As you can hear, it's going through the language selection screen, with a wide variety of languages. I'm not going to go through the entirety of the set-up process here, so let's come back when the Fire is all set-up and ready to go.

 I'm now going to demonstrate how to pair a braille display with your Fire tablet. The Fire supports braille displays from a wide variety of manufacturers, including BAUM, Humanware, Orbit Research and many, many more but today I'm going to be using my Orbit Reader 20.

 It's probably worth pointing out a couple of things here, before we get going. Firstly, the instructions that you will need to follow will of course be dependent on the braille display that you have and secondly, as I say, I'm going to be demoing the Orbit but I'm not really going to make this a lesson in how to use the Orbit. I am assuming that you are moderately familiar with how it works.

 In order to get braille working on the Fire tablet, we have to do two things, essentially. We first of all have to tell our braille display that we want it to connect to a device, so we need to tell it to get ready to be paired and then we need to hop over to the Fire and tell the Fire to search for braille displays.

 So, I've got my Orbit on my lap here and the first thing that I'm going to do is press space with dot 4 and dot 7 to turn on Bluetooth and I don't know if you can hear that but I now have Bluetooth turned on, on the Orbit, and it says, "Bluetooth" on the display.

 I'm going to go back over the Fire which is unlocked and sat on my desk.

Fire device: App Amazon music, app store, row one column three, double tap to activate.

Ben Mustill-Rose: What we need to do now is go to the Quick Settings pane which we can do by performing a three-finger scrub down from the top of the screen.

Fire device: [chime] Ben's third Fire.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Now, there are quite a few things on this screen but the one that we are interested in is VoiceView.

Fire device: VoiceView, VoiceView settings tab.

Ben Mustill-Rose: There we are. That's the one that we want so we're going to double tap there.

Fire device: [chime] VoiceView is on. To disable select this option and then double tap anywhere on the screen, one of six.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Then we need to find the braille option.

Fire device: Braille, four of six [chime], braille pair bluetooth braille display, one of four, double tap to activate.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Sounds like what we want.

Fire device: [chime] Pair VoiceView wants to turn on Bluetooth, deny button, allow button.

Ben Mustill-Rose: We'll do "Allow".

Fire device: [chime] Turning on, pair Bluetooth, allow VoiceView. Allow button.

Ben Mustill-Rose: We'll do allow again.

Fire device: [chime] Pair Bluetooth braille display, navigate up button, double tap to activate. Please make sure your braille display is on discoverable. Select scan and then select your display below to connect. Scan button Orbit Reader 25,219, one of one, double tap to activate.

Ben Mustill-Rose: And we can see that it's found my Orbit Reader 20 so we'll just double tap on this now.

Fire device: [chime] Braille, pair Bluetooth braille display, one of four, double tap to activate. [chime] Pair with Orbit Reader 25,219, cancel button, pair button.

Ben Mustill-Rose: We want to do pair.

Fire device: [chime].

Ben Mustill-Rose: And there we have it. Our braille display is now successfully paired.

 Now that we've paired our braille display, I'm just going to quickly go through some of the settings that we now have access to on the braille page that we navigated to a moment or two ago.

Fire device: New, speech and sounds is off, disable VoiceView, sounds and speech, two of four.

Ben Mustill-Rose: If you enable that setting, VoiceView will stop speaking but still send braille to your braille display, which might be useful in a quiet environment where you don't want speech and equally if you're using braille, you might not need speech whatsoever.

Fire device: Braille table, Unified English braille, three of four

Ben Mustill-Rose: So, this lets you choose the braille table and I'll just give you a quick overview of the tables that we have available.

Fire device: Computer braille, tick box, not ticked, one of four. Uncontracted English braille, tick box, not ticked, two of four. Contracted English braille, tick box, not ticked, three of four. Unified English braille, tick box, ticked, four of four.

Ben Mustill-Rose: And as you can hear, UEB is the default table in this instance.

 Last but by no means least, we have:

Fire device: Show accessibility focus on braille displays of raised dots 7 and 8 beneath the time with accessibility focus, four of four

Ben Mustill-Rose: Which is a useful setting to toggle if you want to keep track of where your focus is.

 Now that we've familiarised ourselves with the settings that are available to us once we've paired a braille display, let's spend a bit of time looking at the various key commands that are now available to us to control the Fire directly from the braille display.

 I'll just point out once again here that this is by no means an in-depth tutorial on the Fire tablet. This is just a high level overview, so I'm only going to be presenting a relatively small number of key commands during this Master Class.

 Now, each of these key commands works by pressing the space button and then an additional key or keys. As you progress with the Fire, what I would suggest you start to do, is to get into the habit of holding space down and then pressing the other keys as and when they are required, because that will drastically speed up your ability to navigate the device.

 So, if we want to navigate to our right, which is the equivalent of a flick to the right, we press space and 4.

Fire device: Files, row four, column two, back button, home button

Ben Mustill-Rose: If we want to navigate to the left which is the equivalent of a left flick, we press space and 1.

Fire device: Device, dashboard, button, Amazon Kids, row one, column five

Ben Mustill-Rose: And if we find an item that we want to activate which is the equivalent of doing a double tap, we press space and E. In this instance, we've activated Amazon Kids.

Fire device: [chime] Loading. Loading.

Ben Mustill-Rose: If we want to get back to the Home screen, we can press space and H.

Fire device: [chime] Search.

Ben Mustill-Rose: If we want to access the app switcher to go through the apps that we have running, we can press space and S.

Fire device: [chime] VoiceView, braille, five of six.

Ben Mustill-Rose: And if we want to mute the speech output of VoiceView but still get braille, which was the setting that I explained a little bit earlier, we can press space and M.

Fire device: Mute on.

Ben Mustill-Rose: And you can hear that I'm still getting braille but no speech but if we want to turn that on again, we can press space and M once again.

Fire device: Mute off.

Ben Mustill-Rose: A few more quick fire key presses now that I'm not going to demo but will hopefully still be useful to you. If you want to access your notifications, you can press space and N. If you want to find a piece of text that is currently on screen, you can press space and F. If you want to toggle the input between computer braille and your chosen braille table which is useful when you're typing, depending on your scenario, you can press space and G.

 Once again, not a complete list, but hopefully enough to get you started and to give you an idea of some of the things that are possible. If you do want a complete list, definitely keep an eye on our Media page, braillists.org/media, and look out for the handout that accompanies this Master Class, as we will be providing a link to an Amazon Help page within the handout that does go into a lot more detail about all of the key presses that are available to you.

 So, I think you've heard enough from me for a while now, so let's hand it back over to Dave.

Dave Williams: You're with the Braillists Foundation and if you have a suggestion for a future Master Class, we'd really love to hear from you. You can get in contact with us at any time by email, help@braillists.org, or you can reach out to us on Twitter, we are @braillists, and you'll also find us on Braillists forum which is a Google group and you can sign up to our forum from braillists.org/forum.

 We are in the middle of demonstrating braille on the Kindle Fire tablet and we've heard an unboxing and an introduction to some of the braille commands. We're now going to get into how you might get books on your Kindle Fire tablet. We think that the Kindle Fire tablet with a budget Braille display is potentially one of the most affordable ways to get braille access to a very large range of titles.

 So, without any further ado, we're going to hand it back to Ben and then in about 15 minutes from now, we will be taking your questions and we'll give you instructions on how to raise hands and all of that good stuff at that time.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Yes, let's do some reading.

 Now, this is one of the main reasons that we really, really rate this tablet at the Braillists Foundation. As blind people, we're actually incredibly fortunate today to have a wide variety of platforms available to us if we want to read ebooks using a braille display. We can pair a braille display with an iDevice from Apple, an Android device, a Windows laptop, a Windows tablet or a Mac, so plenty of options, but once again, it comes back to the price. None of those devices are £50 or less, unless you get one donated to you and if you don't get one donated to you, they're often a lot more than £50. So, the Amazon Fire is a really, really great budget option.

 This is the part of the Master Class where I really hope to try and sell you on the Fire, if I haven't done so already. So, what we're going to be doing here is taking a brief tour of the Kindle store. Again not an in-depth tour, I'm just going to give you an overview of the different sections of the store. We're then going to explore the Home page to find a book that we're hopefully going to be interested in. We're going to look at the description of the book and take you through some of the contents of the details page. We're then going to download a free sample of the book and then we're going to look at reading it with our braille display.

 Just another little bit of housekeeping before we get started with this segment. The more observant amongst you might notice that I'm now going to be controlling the Fire using a mixture of the touch screen and my braille display. It is perfectly possible to do all of these things with a braille display on its own, however if you know whereabouts things are on the screen and you can touch them directly, that does make it a little bit quicker, which is why I'm doing it in this instance.

 Equally, if you knew the exact name of things, you could use the Find command which Fire OS supports, see the list of hot keys in the handout if you want to learn how to do it.

 If you want to access the Kindle store, funnily enough the first thing that you have to do is open up the Kindle app, so let's do that now.

Fire device: Kindle, row two, column two, [chime]. Search Kindle, double tap to activate

Ben Mustill-Rose: We're now on the main Home page of the Kindle store. To give you a bit of an overview of this app, there are three tabs along the bottom. You've got Home which is a sort of curated list of books for you. You've got Library, which is where all of your downloaded books are stored. You've got Store which is where you can buy books. The Home page also lets you buy books but that also contains some books that you already own. Then you have a More section, which is where you'll find things like settings and the help pages.

 As you heard when we opened it, we also have a search option on this home page. We're not going to search for anything right now. Instead let's just explore the page a little bit and see what we have available to us.

Fire device: Your recent books, magazines and comics will appear here. To get started browse recommended books below or shop the store

Ben Mustill-Rose: So this is where our recommended books will appear once we've bought them but we do have some suggestions already.

Fire device: Discover books, heading two, heading.

Ben Mustill-Rose: And now we have a selection of categories to choose from.

Fire device: Tap on a category or cover below. Bestsellers, romance, literature and fiction, biographies, business, health, mind and body, new releases.

Ben Mustill-Rose: And so on and so on. These are just different categories. However, if we go past these categories, we'll see that we have a selection of books that Amazon thinks that we might like, present on the Home page already.

Fire device: The Family Upstairs, the pound one bestseller and gripping Richard and Judy book club pick by Lisa Jewell, button.

Ben Mustill-Rose: That's the first option.

Fire device: The Night Hawks, Doctor Ruth Galloway Mysteries 13, the Doctor Ruth Galloway Mysteries by Elly Griffiths. Button. The Survivors, small town, dark secrets, by Jane Harper. Button. The Pull Of The Stars, the Richard and Judy book club pick and Sunday Times bestseller by Emma Donoghue. Button.

Ben Mustill-Rose: But I reckon The Family Upstairs sounds quite interesting. So, let's give that one a go.

Fire device: The Family Upstairs, the pound one bestseller and gripping Richard and Judy book club pick by Lisa Jewell, five.

Ben Mustill-Rose: We're going to activate this item now. I'm not going to give you a fully fledged tour of the description page but we will go through some of the elements of it so that you know what to expect.

Fire device: Five of 20, navigate up, button. Prepare to be hooked, underscore, a twisty and engrossing story of betrayal and redemption, Ian Rankin. Rich, dark and intricately twisted, this enthralling whodunnit mixes family saga with domestic noir to brilliantly chilling effect.

Ben Mustill-Rose: So, as you can hear, we get the description automatically spoken as we navigate onto the page. You might have also spotted a few mispronunciations that the text to speech engine has made there, which is yet another reason to read in braille. But we'll now just navigate right through the page and see what kind of things we get. I'll interrupt and cover anything that is not obvious.

Fire device: Kindle store, notifications, button, The Family Upstairs, the pound one bestseller and gripping Richard and Judy book club pick by Lisa Jewell, download sample, button.

Ben Mustill-Rose: So, that's useful if we want to download a sample of a book before we buy it. What I would say is that unfortunately some books are easier to read than others, depending on how they've been created. So, particularly if you're new to reading on the Kindle, I would always suggest you download the free sample first. The clue's in the name, it's free, you're not going to be charged and then obviously hopefully it's going to be easy to navigate but worst case scenario, if it isn't, you haven't lost any money.

Fire device: Audible sample, link.

Ben Mustill-Rose: That's what we can use to get an audiobook version of the sample.

Fire device: Audible sample. The Family Upstairs, the pound one bestseller and gripping Richard and Judy book club pick, heading, Lisa Jewell, link.

Ben Mustill-Rose: That's the author information.

Fire device: Double-- Author. 4.5 out of 5 stars. 23,537 ratings. Link. 4.5 out of 5 stars. 23,537 ratings.

Ben Mustill-Rose: So that's the ratings and review section.

Fire device: Amazon charts, pound three this week, link.

Ben Mustill-Rose: So that doesn't mean it's £3. It actually means that it's number three in the bestselling list.

Fire device: Amazon charts, pound three this week, buy now for pound sterling 0.99, button.

Ben Mustill-Rose: And you can hear that we can buy it for 99p. But we're actually not going to do that. We're going to be slightly cheap and just download the free sample instead.

Fire device: Download sample, button. Download sample, button.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Then we get a little confirmation message.

Fire device: Thanks, Ben. The free sample for The Family Upstairs, the pound one bestseller and, will automatically appear in your library when the download is complete.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Okay, that sounds good. So, we've got a couple of options now. We can either:

Fire device: Read now, button.

Ben Mustill-Rose: We can either read now which is useful for people who just want to jump in and read straight away but I'm not going to do that, I'm going to go to the library tab just to give you a bit of an overview of how the library works. So I'm going to press the...

Fire device: Continue shopping, button.

Ben Mustill-Rose: ...continue shopping button although we're actually not going to continue shopping, we just want to get out of this dialog.

 Okay, so now we want to move to the bottom of the screen and find the library tab.

Fire device: Library tab. Library tab selected. Double tap to activate.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Now we want to go to the top of the screen which we can do by pressing space with dots 1 2 3 and 7. Again, a complete list of these hot keys or key presses is available in our handout.

Fire device: Search Kindle. Double tap to activate.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Now we're at the top of the screen so I'm just going to once again go through the contents of the library. It's a fairly under-resourced library at the moment because it's only got two books in it and both of them are free samples.

Fire device: Notifications, button.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Notifications again.

Fire device: Filter. Double tap to activate.

Ben Mustill-Rose: This lets you set various options around what books you want to see in your library.

Fire device: All, shows titles from the cloud, toggle button, ticked. Downloaded, shows titles on the device, toggle button, not ticked.

Ben Mustill-Rose: So, again, you can have books downloaded to the device or stored in the cloud, hence those options.

Fire device: View and sort options. The Family Upstairs.

Ben Mustill-Rose: And view and sort options, that's to sort the list by things like when we last read the book, how far along we are in the book and lots of other things like the ratings of the books.

 So, now we have:

Fire device: The Family Upstairs, Jewell, Lisa, new book downloaded, book is a sample, one of four.

Ben Mustill-Rose: So, that's the first one. It's saying one of four, that's actually incorrect. As I say, there's only two. The other one is:

Fire device: The Pull Of The Stars, Donoghue, Emma, book downloaded, reading is zero percent completed. Book.

Ben Mustill-Rose: That's just another one that I downloaded to illustrate having multiple books in the library.

 We want to read...

Fire device: The Family Upstairs.

Ben Mustill-Rose: ...The Family Upstairs, so we'll activate this item and explore how we read it.

Fire device: [chime] Jewell, Lisa, new book downloaded, book is a sample, one of four. Use your screen reader's continuous reading gesture when menus are off-- for reading or swipe down with two fingers for simple continuous reading starting from the top of the page or start from the current focus point with an L gesture. Tap once to switch from continuous to granular reading then double tap for menu. Double tap and hold to select text.

Ben Mustill-Rose: As you've heard, we were given some hints about how to read text with the VoiceView screen reader. Unfortunately no braille hints but it is possible to read books almost exclusively using braille if that is what you want to do.

 The way that I find this works best in my experience is to touch a part of the screen so that VoiceView knows where you are, essentially, and then you can proceed to navigate using your braille display.

 Now, most books have a table of contents section. This one is actually quite long, it's got 68 chapters, so I'm not going to go through all of the table of contents, you'll be pleased to hear. What I am going to do is move to the About The Author section.

Fire device: [chime] About the author.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Then what I'm going to do next is press space and M to mute VoiceView's text to speech functionality.

Fire device: Mute on.

Ben Mustill-Rose: I'm going to do some semi-live reading using my Orbit reader. Now, to do this, I'm going to use the pan buttons on the Orbit reader. Specifically, I'm going to use the right pan down button but I can also use the right-hand pan up button to go backwards in the book. Note that the left pan button doesn't seem to be functioning within the Kindle app.

 So, about the author. "Lisa Jewell was born in London. Her first novel, Ralph's Party, was the bestselling debut novel of 1999. Since then, she has published another 17 novels, most recently a number of psychological thrillers, including The Girls, Then She Was Gone, and The Family Upstairs, all three of which were Richard and Judy book club picks."

 There we are. That's probably enough reading. If you want to do more reading, join the book club.

 I hope this has shown what it's possible to do using nothing but a braille display. Once again, speech was completely muted so you could conceivably have the Fire tucked away in a bag. Of course, no speech means that it's ideal for a quiet environment.

 There you have it, a whistle-stop tour of the Fire tablet and some of its capabilities. I'll be honest and very transparent with you, there were a couple of times during the recording where I had to maybe play around with the Fire a little bit because it perhaps wasn't doing exactly what it should have been or it was a little bit slow and I did have to edit those out. I guess, what I'd say there, is that we're not doing this Master Class just on these Fire tablets because we think they're the perfect device because they're not. We're doing it because we think it's a really, really good value option. Lots of people tend to compare these to an iPad and on the one hand, that's understandable as they're both tablets but on the other hand, many iPads are ten times or sometimes 20 times the price of a Fire tablet from Amazon. So, I would argue they are really two different devices in their own right.

 I hope you've enjoyed that but I'm going to hand over to Dave now for the next part of the session.

Dave Williams: We'd be glad to hear your questions for Ben, and Matthew Horspool is our moderator this evening and is going to guide us through the various options that you've got to raise your hand to ask any questions about using braille on the Fire tablet.

 Before we go to Matthew, I just wanted to let you guys know that next week at 7:30 on Tuesday, the Braillists Foundation will be opening our Braille Bar for an open Q&A. So, if you've got any general questions about braille and you'd like to check in with our panel, it can be questions about the code or braille production or a particular braille device, then do join us next week for that, and then the following week on the 29th at 7:30 UK, we will be assembling a panel of braille education specialists. This was following up from a question we received a couple of weeks ago about the differences between educating children and adults in the use of braille and how that's changed over the years. So we'll be looking at braille education with a panel and that's going to be in two weeks' time.

 So, Matthew, it's over to you with the moderation and raising hands.

Matthew Horspool: Thank you, Dave. We have no hands up at the moment, so please be the first. You can press Alt+Y on Windows, Option+Y on Mac, star+nine on the telephone if you're dialling in or if you're in the iPhone app or the Android app, you can find the More button and Raise Hands is there. I'm delighted that we have a hand up. It's from Terry-Ann Saurmann.

Terry-Ann: Carla could not be here today so she asked me to ask the question in her stead and kind of for me too. We're wondering, regardless of what braille display you connect up to your tablet, when you go to write in braille, if you've had any disconnection issues.

Ben Mustill-Rose: There were a couple of times, I think two times over the space of about three days or so while I was putting that recording together, where I had to re-pair the braille display, but then equally one of those I believe was because my Orbit had gone fairly low on its battery and I needed to charge it up.

 So, yes, a couple of connectivity issues generally around navigating the device but what I would say, if you're writing and you're struggling, depending on exactly what it's doing, definitely try that space and G shortcut to change your input table if you're not quite getting exactly what you're expecting.

Terry-Ann: Okay, thank you for that.

Dave Williams: I see we have a hand from James Bowden. Matthew, shall we bring in James in case he had something to add to the answer to Terry's question?

Matthew Horspool: We could do that, and I should just say, that although I think that it's Jan that's got her hand up, it's actually somebody on the telephone who I think is Jan.

 Let's go to James first and then we'll go to the telephone user and then David Weston.

Ben Mustill-Rose: I think James has left.

Matthew Horspool: In that case, we'll go to the person on the telephone.

Mary Beth: Hi, my name is Mary Beth. I've got a quick question and then a quick comment. My question is some of the braille displays have problems when it comes time to turn a page in a Kindle book. Is that pretty seamless with the Orbit?

Ben Mustill-Rose: My experience is that it depends on the book. There is a setting, and we're going to put this in the handout, so don't quote me exactly on it but I believe it's called Fast Page Turning, or words to that effect. It's actually more of a capability. So certain books will support it, some won't.

 When I was playing around with the book that we read just then, the book that I chose didn't actually support the fast page turning capability. You didn't hear it but I was navigating using the table of contents.

 One thing that I would add just quickly on that is that some of the capabilities of the various books that you can buy are a little bit hard to discover if you're browsing on the Fire but what I really like about Amazon is that they are very good at syncing up all of your devices. So, it is possible, if you're more comfortable using a more traditional screen reader initially, to just visit the Kindle store on your PC or Mac using your web browser and screen reader of choice where a lot of those things are easier to find.

 So, yes, it seems to depend largely on the book.

Mary Beth: Thank you. Just a quick comment, as you can probably tell, I'm calling from the United States and I don't know if you guys are aware but there's a Fire tablet tutorial coming out from mysticaccess.com which is a website and they also have an Orbit tutorial.

Ben Mustill-Rose: That's probably quite useful because it wouldn't surprise me if their tutorial is maybe a slightly more detailed one than ours.

Matthew Horspool: And Mystic Access know about braille as well.

 I notice the return of James Bowden and then after James, we'll go to David Weston.

James Bowden: I wanted to ask, I noticed in the Settings for the braille table, you had computer braille, English braille, Grade 1 and Grade 2, undefined which English, and Unified English braille, undefined whether it's Grade 1 or Grade 2. Are you able to elucidate a bit which is what?

Ben Mustill-Rose: I was using UEB for most of it and I was getting Grade 2 but I am unsure as to the other grades unfortunately.

James Bowden: I imagine it will be EBAE which is the English Braille American Edition. You can test that by typing a word like "edition" and there won't be an ED sign if it's American and there will be an ED sign if it's British. Might be useful to know that.

 My second question, is there a good support email address or website to report things like this to Amazon?

Ben Mustill-Rose: Yes, there is. Device hyphen accessibility at amazon.co.uk, I believe. If anyone has one of these, they've actually done quite a good job in trying to solicit feedback. If you go into your VoiceView settings, it's the last item within the Settings, there's a section on how to give feedback. We'll put that in the handout as well.

Matthew Horspool: We're next going to come to David Weston and then Kawal.

David: I've got two things. One is, I have a Fire tablet and this is just a piece of information. Mine is a Fire tablet 8 Plus. It has two speakers so if you've got hearing problems, go for that one, as it's very clear with two speakers.

Ben Mustill-Rose: That's a good point. We should say that there are actually a range of options and also some with larger screens. The one that I was using was the 7" model but you can get ones that have up to 10" screen, if you do have some useful vision.

 How do you find it?

David: I have no vision so I'm reliant upon sound and I also have a hearing loss so it's brilliant.

 My question, I've just read my first book on Kindle using my Orbit reader. When I went out of the book and then came back into the book, it didn't come back in where I'd left off. It's usually several pages back so I have to keep winding through to find where I was again.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Firstly, clearly it should remember where you were and clearly it's not. One way that you could attempt to resolve that, not that you should have to, but you could double tap the screen, do a single-finger double tap once you've finished reading. You get an Options menu and one of the options there is to create a bookmark, so a bit of a faff and I'd love to know why it wasn't going back to the correct place but as a stopgap measure, you could try that.

David: Thank you very much, that should be a great help, I think. Mine is brand new. I've only had it a few weeks.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Did you find the set-up process okay?

David Weston: Fortunately my wife did it because she's sighted.

Ben Mustill-Rose: It is quite tempting to do that sometimes when you have a pair of eyes handy.

Matthew Horspool: Thank you, David. We're coming to Kawal and then Rhonda.

Kawal: I have got an Echo Show 8 and I've had it nearly a year. When I went into all the settings to set things up, I had quite a job connecting to my WiFi because I couldn't get all the letters in right because I was so used to using the iPhone. In the settings, I had a look to see whether you could add a braille display and there was no such thing, so I was wondering is it just for the new devices or is coming into every single product?

Ben Mustill-Rose: I don't know. For anyone who doesn't know, the Echo Show is Alexa with a screen.

 I don't own one but what I would say is if it is going to be somewhere, it's going to be within VoiceView.

Kawal: I had a look and I couldn't find it there.

Dave Williams: I have one and there's no braille support currently on the Echo Show devices. That would be fantastic were Amazon to add it, and that's possibly an email to devices hyphen accessibility.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Do you know if it supports a Bluetooth keyboard?

Dave Williams: I haven't tried a Bluetooth keyboard.

Kawal: Do you know, do they have blind people testing all these braille displays for Amazon?

Dave Williams: Yes, they do. There are blind people working at Amazon who are involved in the development of VoiceView. The Amazon accessibility team is a thing and I've met them, they are real people and they are keen to develop their accessibility tools. Perhaps they've got a little bit of catching up to do in some ways but really exciting that on such an affordable tablet, we've got some braille support and hopefully that will spread to the other Amazon smart devices.

Kawal: I notice how everybody is using the same braille commands and things so that's good if it's all consistent.

Dave Williams: Yes.

Matthew Horspool: Thanks, Kawal. Next we have Rhonda and after Rhonda we have another question from Terry-Ann.

Rhonda: First of all, thank you for putting this class together because during the class I was able to pair my Amazon Fire tablet with my Orbit Reader.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Oh, excellent. That's pretty quick going, that you were managing to do it live as well.

Rhonda: Yes. I was able to download the sample book and kind of read a little, so this is very helpful.

 The other thing, I was going to respond to the lady who mentioned about the Amazon tutorial at Mystic Access, it is now available. The current price in the US is $49.

Ben Mustill-Rose: So probably about £35 to £40. None of us have read it but I would imagine a fairly good investment if you do want something a bit more thorough.

Matthew Horspool: I would certainly think so. Mystic Access have been commissioned by a lot of the big assistive tech companies to produce tutorials.

 We will come back to Terry-Ann for her follow-up point.

Terry-Ann: Going back to the person who was talking about turning pages, not just for Kindle books but for other books with the tablet, it seems sometimes when you flip the page to the next page, it goes down to the very bottom of the page and then you have to use the command to get it back up to the top of the page. Has anybody found any other workaround for that?

Ben Mustill-Rose: I didn't encounter that myself. Without meaning to detract from the issue, it is good that we have these things and I suppose it's just going to be a case of slowly but surely ironing out these type of glitches.

Terry-Ann: Hopefully they will continue to do the updates.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Yes, definitely check for updates. They do update automatically but you can force an update if you go to Device Settings then System Updates.

Terry-Ann: Exactly. And Carla and I have a Whatsapp chapter we call the Tableteers and we talk about the Fire tablet and we've been talking a lot about the braille displays and we work with a gentleman from Amazon called Ryan French. So, he's a resource that we've been using and we're currently putting together some additional questions and comments for him and to let him know how much the braille has come a long way in the last year and a half, two years. They've done a lot of work with it and it's really good now, so we really appreciate that.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Thanks for that, Terry-Ann.

Matthew Horspool: We'll stop taking new hands now but we have a question from Carrie.

Carrie: First of all, I'm new to all this, I'm learning about it, I have no useful vision and I'm hearing impaired as well, and I'd like to know if there's a particular Fire tablet you would suggest for somebody like me or would any of them do the same things?

Ben Mustill-Rose: We had a comment from David Weston earlier, so the base model is a 7" display, but the thing there is that it only has one speaker whereas if you get one of the 8" or above models, you get two speakers. However, they do all have headphone jacks so if you aren't going to be able to use the speakers, plug a pair of headphones in and I won't go through all of the hearing-related accessibility settings but they do have things around mono audio as well.

Carrie: I do have the Orbit Reader so I would want to read in braille as well.

 My second question, what else do they do as well as the books? Do they do emails and things like that?

Ben Mustill-Rose: Yes, so really quickly, you've got emails, you can browse the web, you can buy things on Amazon of course, you can download apps, you can listen to music, you can watch movies, you can play games, you can do video conferencing and they've actually got Alexa built into them so you can do hands-free things like asking her what the weather is and stuff like that.

 So, really good value for what it is.

Carrie: Thank you very much for doing this. It's been very helpful.

Ben Mustill-Rose: No problem. Thank you for coming.

Dave Williams: Thanks very much, Carrie. On behalf of everybody, Ben, I just want to extend our thanks to you for putting this evening's session together. We really appreciate all your time and effort. We know you'll be compiling that handout, including some of the comments raised in the session.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Definitely.

Dave Williams: Tonight's session will be available from our Media page, braillists.org/media, just give us a few days.

 Thank you, Matthew Horspool, for your help with the moderation and taking care of the traffic. We really appreciate you. And thank you, everyone else, for all your questions and comments, as always, very much appreciated.

 Don't forget, the Braillists Foundation is back on Thursday with the braille book club, your chance to read braille with other braille readers. Next Tuesday at 7:30, we've got our Braille Bar which is an open braille Q&A for any questions braille-related, whatever you fancy, and then in two weeks' time, it'll be our braille education panel.

 You can find out more about the Braillists Foundation and our work at braillists.org where you can join our forum, contact our help address and much more besides.

 From me, Dave Williams, chair of the Braillists Foundation, and the rest of the team, have a great week, take care and bye for now.