The common term “blind” may refer to anything from total lack of visual response to legal blindness using a legal definition, and even, “functional blindness”, an educational term denoting reliance on a tactual reading medium, and frequently cane assisted travel.

There are several misunderstandings about the development and education of blind children. The development of blind children generally differs from that of children with normal vision; in fact, blindness can impact all areas of early development, in particular feeding, language, motor, and social skills. Unlike the popular notion that blind children have better hearing and tactual skills, many blind children have some degree of central auditory dysfunction and are tactual aversive.

Children who have a serious visual loss but some useful vision, may also require educational intervention through similar systems as blind children. Visual impairment has a dual definition—medical and functional. For children with a “serious visual loss after correction”, the loss may impact functioning with varying degrees of severity.

**Move, Touch, Read!**

Reading is the core of all education and a variety of options are available for the visually impaired child. including large print and Braille, optical devices ranging from magnifiers and monoculars through a broad range of electronic magnification devices, auditory materials, as well as various combinations. So a child might use Braille for some reading, for which tactual reading is more efficient, and large print or enlarged print, for other applications.

The preparation for literacy begins at birth with language and building a base for meaning, reading with the baby from an early age with many different kinds of literacy experiences, good visual and tactual play and training, and exposure to a print and Braille rich environment. The young VI child acquires literacy by moving, touching and doing!

http://www.tsbvi.edu/early-childhood/1926-move-touch-read
**Story bags**

Story bags are a great way to make a story more meaningful. Take, for instance, *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*. You could collect a crayon, paper, pencil, tape, comb, mouse puppet or stuffed toy, etc., for each of the pages of the book so that as you read the story, the children could see and feel the real objects. Some stories might be packaged in a special container—a Halloween story objects in a large plastic jack-o-lantern, a Christmas story in a gift box tied with a ribbon, a Valentine's story in a heart shaped candy box, an Easter story in an Easter basket, to reinforce the content.

You can also substitute parts of objects or the material of the object as a support to meaning. So a shoe lace might represent a shoe, or a piece of flannel a blanket.

The idea is to make the meaning of the story more real and concrete for the children.

**Activities**

Another way to make a book more meaningful is to do the actual activities in the story before or after reading the story. Draw the handprint turkey in *My First Thanksgiving* by Tomie DePaola. Bake cookies for *Christmas Cookies* by Amy Krouse Rosenthal. Paint for Peter H. Reynolds's *The Dot*.

**Puppets**

Puppets, stuffed animals and dolls are another way to make books meaningful. The children can act out the story with tiny props. So three different sized bear puppets, a girl doll, and dollhouse beds, chairs and bowls, make “Goldilocks” come alive for children. Similarly, you can use hats, or costumes or props, and let the children act out the story or activity in the book. A collection of hats is perfect for *Barney's Hats*.

You can make simple puppets from everyday things. A knee sock becomes a caterpillar for *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. Popsicle sticks and cutouts can be used for *The Tub People*. 
Raised Outlines and Textures

Books can also be made more meaningful for VI children by providing raised outlines around key elements of the illustrations, with puff pen, Wikki Stix or yarn glued on the page. Textures can be added to key elements of an illustration as an alternative.

Another way to make page content more accessible is to glue to the page the actual object (small shoe), model or toy object (toy shoe), partial object (shoe lace) or piece of an object (patch of canvas from a sneaker).

Braille Books and Large Print

Braille and large print books are available from the Texas State Library, the American Printing House for the Blind, the National Braille Press, and Seedlings Braille Books for Children.

Move, Touch, Read is a description of ways to adapt books and can be downloaded from the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired website — http://www.tsbvi.edu/early-childhood/1926-move-touch-read.


Literacy

Literacy is about more than books and print and surfaces. It’s about learning that print and Braille, and illustrations and format, all carry meaning. It’s about all the many kinds of book content from fantasy to non-fiction, to reference information. It’s about forms of literature from poetry to drama, fairytales to biography. It’s about narrative and dialogue.

But most of all it’s the love affair between a child and the wonderful, infinite world of books!
Vision is 90% of one’s information about the world and 100% of the relational meaning. Hearing and touch are both temporary and sequential, and can only partially compensate for the absent information. Unless children receive systematic meaningful exposure and teaching of the content of the world, the semantic base for meaning is impoverished. Children with visual impairment, like all children, learn to love reading by experiencing all the richness of the many journeys offered through reading. As a librarian, you can contribute by assisting our young children with visual impairment into that great adventure of the world of books!

For more information:
http://www.aph.org/ Materials and equipment
http://wwwafb.org/ Materials and information
http://www.nbp.org/ Braille materials
http://www.seedlings.org/Braille books
http://www.tsbvi.edu/ Texas state services and materials
http://www.hadley.edu/ Free courses for students, courses for families and professionals
http://www.nationaldb.org/ Deaf-blind information
http://ohiodeafblind.org/resources/products.cfm Materials and information
http://www.blindchildrenscenter.org/ Materials for parents
http://www.perkins.org/ Materials and information

Other ideas: highlight with a flashlight, place a lightbox under the book, create contrast with broad black areas and paint criterial features day glow paint!