**Name:** Ángeles LAFUENTE DE FRUTOS

**Gender:** Female

**Age:** 59

**Country:** SPAIN

**Name of the EBU national member processing the entry:**

ONCE – Spanish National Organization of the Blind

**Number of words in the national language:** 887

**First year braille class**

My name is Lucía and I’m five years old. My teacher says I have a visual impairment and that’s why I’m learning braille. The other girls and boys in my class read with their eyes, but I don’t - I read with my fingertips. I’m very lucky because my ONCE teacher gave me a nice game to learn braille called Braitico. All my schoolmates want to play with my butterfly Maripoints, even the ones in the class for 6-year olds. My teacher had to make a list to take turns so that they wouldn’t fight over it. We learn the letters in braille with Maripoints. For example, if the others are learning the letter ‘i’, which is easy because it’s a little stick with a dot on top, I learn Spanish braille using my Maripoints and put two markers in dots 2 and 4. One day I lost one of the markers to make braille letters, and I was so upset. I had to use a button from my smock to go on learning my letters, but it wasn’t the same because it didn’t have a magnet and it kept falling off - the ‘p’ was like an ‘m’ and the ‘h’ was like an ‘e’. Then one day it turned up…Pedro had it in his pencil case. What a cheek! But I forgave him straight away because he gave me a piece of strawberry chewing gum. When we have all learnt a letter, we read its story, because all the letters have a story, and they’re really fun. My ONCE teacher told us the stories were written by other teachers like her and they are specially designed and written so that we can develop ‘morphological awareness’. I don’t know what that is, but it sounds amazing! There are stories about unicorns, dragons, dromedaries, aeroplanes, trains, … The story I liked most was the one about elephants, the one for the letter ‘e’, and it’s written in verse. It’s a lot of fun. When it’s time to read a story, my classmates gather around the teacher and I sit beside her to read it in braille. Well, I can’t read yet, but I move my fingers over the dots (they’re tickly) to develop my sense of touch, according to my teacher. She reads out the story at the same time (because the story is in print and braille) and I feel excited because I imagine I can read. I also touch the pictures, but because everyone wants to touch them we always have a fuss…”Rafa, you’ve been touching them for long enough”, or “Miss, Olga has pulled the unicorn’s tail off”, or “Chris is eating the wheels from the train”. After reading the story and touching the pictures we listen to the story again, but this time on the computer. It’s great - it’s like watching a film in the cinema, and it’s good fun because there are interesting noises…rain, the sea, a village, the sound of bells or a goldfinch…there are even songs! We’ve learnt two - a rap using the vowels and a romance poem with the alphabet. My class teacher and my ONCE teacher have organised a music festival and we sing them together. I have a special locker in the classroom where I keep my Perkins brailler, my tablet and my braille stories, and my ONCE teacher has given my class teacher permission so that when somebody behaves really well, they can take one of the braille stories home, but with some conditions - they need to keep it upright so that the dots don’t get squashed, they’re not allowed to draw on it, they can’t give it to their younger brothers and sisters, and they need to bring it back the next day. So, everyone behaves, and especially at the end of the class when the teacher is tired and starts looking at the clock. My ONCE teacher also brought a huge poster with the letters in ink and braille. Each letter has a toy that sticks on top with a magnet. For example, there’s an ant for the letter ‘a’, a train for ‘t’, a yoyo for ‘y’ and a xylophone for ‘x’. That’s why I like my school so much. Last year wasn’t as good, but this year is special because we’re not as illiterate and we’re learning to read and write…the others use their books and pencil and we all use my braille and Perkins. We can send secret messages to one another that only the pupils in 1B can decipher. Do you know what I like most? The animals in the stories, with their soft, velvety textures. I’m not scared of those animals, not like last year when we went to the zoo. At the beginning I didn’t want to go because all the children said it was very nice and you could touch the lions. In the end, the teacher told me to relax and I wouldn’t have to touch anything because it wasn’t allowed. Thank goodness! So, braille is the star attraction in my school because it's everywhere…on the doors, in the bathrooms, on the coat rack, in the canteen, in the gym, in the break… We even have stories in braille in our library! So I braille. Do you braille too?