

“ Bookshare has had a huge impact on my life. Without Bookshare my grades would suffer. I can complete assignments on my own, keep up with my classmates, and really excel in school. Technology helps level the playing field for students with disabilities like me. I now attend Cornell University and help others unlock the power of Bookshare. It’s my hope that all people with reading disabilities such as dyslexia are able to use Bookshare to succeed in the classroom and become lifelong learners. ” —**BRIAN MEERSMA**



## CHALLENGE

Brian Meersma was diagnosed with dyslexia at a young age. It was difficult for him to read, write, and spell. He struggled to put letters and words into sentences and lost the broader meaning of what he was reading. He could not read what he wanted on his own and relied on his parents to read aloud for him. His inability to understand what the rest of the class was reading made him feel different and excluded.

## SOLUTION

In middle school he researched various sources of digital books and assistive technologies and discovered Bookshare, the world’s largest online library of accessible ebooks that is free for students with qualifying print disabilities such as dyslexia. With Bookshare he can use his computer or iPad to see the words and hear them read aloud, so instead of putting all his energy into decoding the words, he can focus on comprehension.

## IMPACT

Brian is a student at Cornell University where he is studying industrial and labor relations and is on the dean’s list. Bookshare helped him succeed in high school and college by enabling him to do schoolwork and research independently. It’s empowering to have so many books that he needs right at his fingertips. Without Bookshare, he wouldn’t be able to take classes appropriate for his abilities and his grades would suffer. Before Brian started reading books with assistive technology, he never read for fun or really enjoyed a book. With help from Bookshare, he has discovered the joy of reading and is now able to explore new things. Bookshare has made such an impact on Brian’s life that he has been an advocate on Capitol Hill for students with disabilities, joined the Bookshare Advisory Board, and writes an assistive technology blog. Technology has truly leveled the playing field for Brian and other students with disabilities.

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*Benetech is a nonprofit that empowers communities through software for social good. Our work transforms how people with disabilities read and learn, makes it safer for human rights defenders to pursue truth and justice, and connects people to the services they need to live and prosper. We’re constantly pursuing the next big social impact.*