READING COMPREHENSION

The Gutenberg Printing Press: the invention that changed the world.



In the 15th century, Johannes Gutenberg launched a Technical Revolution that changed the world forever. He invented a printing press that used metal movable type and could print texts faster and cheaper than copying them by hand.

Until then, books and knowledge were controlled by the elites: the Church and the Aristocracy. Books were produced by scribes in monasteries. It took months or years to finish a book copy, and they were all different, because scribes sometimes made mistakes or modifications.







In Europe, students in schools and universities had access to very few books. Gutenberg saw this as a business opportunity and found partners to create a printing press based on the ancient Roman wine press. He devoted a lot of time and money to create metal movable components that imitated handwriting by scribes (Blackletter script style, also known as Gothic script).

The first book printed by Johannes Gutenberg was the Holy Bible. With more than 1,200 pages, it required a full set of 290 different glyphs (characters). Gutenberg printed a total of 180 bibles in two years, most of them on paper. He rarely used vellum because it required about 150 calfskins to print one bible copy. Some of the books were illuminated (decorated by hand) using bright pigments and gold.



There are only 49 Gutenberg Bible copies left (most of them incomplete). Experts estimate that, nowadays, a complete Gutenberg Bible could fetch more than 35 million Dollars in an auction.



Gutenberg's invention democratized knowledge, as it allowed accurate reproduction and dissemination of texts on a massive scale. More people could buy books and learn to read. In less than a century, the printing press arrived almost everywhere in Europe and to some of the New World colonies. More than 20,000,000 books were printed about thousands of subjects. Before Gutenberg's invention, it is estimated that there were less than 30,000 books in all of Europe.

The Gutenberg Printing Press is one of the greatest inventions of humankind, a powerful agent of change. It fuelled the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, the Age of Enlightenment, the Scientific Revolution and the development of new technologies. Texts printed in vernacular languages contributed to create a shared national identity, facilitated the rise of nation-states and became a vector of propaganda during Wars and Revolutions.

Gutenberg's invention started a Printing Revolution that changed Western Civilization dramatically. It is an example of effective mass communication, and it continues to shape our world today.

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LIVEWORKSHEETS

QUIZ

Read the text and do the quiz. Choose the best option.

1) Johannes Gutenberg invented a printing press that used movable type.

- True (T).
- False (F).
- We don't know/ It doesn't say (DS).

2) Gutenberg based his printing press on a machine used in winemaking.

- True (T).
- False (F).
- We don't know/ It doesn't say (DS).

3) Before Gutenberg's invention, there were less than 5,000 books in all of Europe.

- True (T).
- False (F).
- We don't know/ It doesn't say (DS).

4) Before the 15th century, books in Europe were only written in Latin and Greek.

- True (T).
- False (F).
- We don't know/ It doesn't say (DS).

5) Before Gutenberg's invention, book production and knowledge were controlled by the elites (the Aristocracy and the Church).

- True (T).
- False (F).
- We don't know/ It doesn't say (DS).

6) Before Gutenberg's invention, books were very expensive and few people could buy them.

- True (T).
- False (F).
- We don't know/ It doesn't say (DS).

LIVEWORKSHEETS

7) It can take months or years to make a copy of the Holy Bible by hand.

- True (T).
- False (F).
- We don't know/ It doesn't say (DS).

8) To create the movable type, Gutenberg developed a new metal alloy; he had to convince the Church that he had not used Black Arts (Magic) to create it.

- True (T).
- False (F).
- We don't know/ It doesn't say (DS).

9) After Gutenberg's invention, more than 10,000,000 books were printed in less than a century.

- True (T).
- False (F).
- We don't know/ It doesn't say (DS).

10) Gutenberg's invention is so important, it is believed to have changed the world.

- True (T).
- False (F).
- We don't know/ It doesn't say (DS).

11) Thanks to the printing press, more people could learn how to read.

- True (T).
- False (F).
- We don't know/ It doesn't say (DS).

12) The first book printed by Johannes Gutenberg was the Holy Bible.

- True (T).
- False (F).
- We don't know/ It doesn't say (DS).

13) The Gutenberg Bible hasn't got any decorations in colour. It is all black and white.

- True (T).
- False (F).
- We don't know/ It doesn't say (DS).

LIVEWORKSHEETS

14) The Gutenberg Bible was only printed on vellum.

- True (T).
- False (F).
- We don't know/ It doesn't say (DS).

15) The text in the Gutenberg Bible imitates handwriting by scribes.

- True (T).
- False (F).
- We don't know/ It doesn't say (DS).

16) There are less than 50 Gutenberg Bibles surviving today.

- True (T).
- False (F).
- We don't know/ It doesn't say (DS).

17) The Gutenberg Bible is written using Gothic script.

- True (T).
- False (F).
- We don't know/ It doesn't say (DS).

18) Gutenberg invented the printing press to earn money.

- True (T).
- False (F).
- We don't know/ It doesn't say (DS).

19) Gutenberg's invention was so successful that he became rich.

- True (T).
- False (F).
- We don't know/ It doesn't say (DS).

20) The printing press did not arrive to the New World until the 18th century.

- True (T).
- False (F).
- We don't know/ It doesn't say (DS).

LIVEWORKSHEETS