

Inspiration: The invention of printing



Hypnerotomachia Poliphili

In this activity sheet you will learn about early printed books. You'll also explore some examples of early books that are featured in the Mirror of the World website.

In the spotlight

Hypnerotomachia Poliphili

Francesco Colonna

1499

Schatzbehalter

Stephan Fridolin

1491



Schatzbehalter

Words to know

Manuscripts, moveable type, printing press

People and places

Gutenberg, Johannes Gutenberg

Pages to visit

<http://www.mirroroftheworld.com.au/inspiration/printed/index.php>

The invention of the modern printing press

For many years, books were **manuscripts** – which means they were written by hand. This was a slow and very expensive process, so for a long time only the wealthiest people could afford books.

Around 1450, a German named Johannes Gutenberg invented the modern **printing press** and it had a massive impact in Europe and around the world. For the first time, books could be made quickly and inexpensively, which meant that more people could afford books. Before the 'Gutenberg Press', only a very small number of people in Europe could read and write.

Hundreds of years before, people in China, Japan and Korea began printing with carved wooden blocks. Around 1000AD, the Chinese began using moveable clay printing blocks of Chinese characters, to print on scrolls and paper. Some historians think that printing came to Europe from China via the Arabs, who lived in the Middle East, between Asia and Europe.

Gutenberg's press was a very modern machine for its day. It had a 'press' that the printer pulled down to print onto the paper. Pages were designed by fitting metal blocks of the alphabet into the press. These **moveable type** blocks could be arranged and then rearranged into words on a page. The printer could make many copies of a page very rapidly. Gutenberg's printing press was so effective that it remained almost unchanged for 400 years.

Printed books were an instant success and became very popular because they were so much cheaper. Soon, many more people in Europe could read and write. Many new and exciting books about the world became available to people for the first time.

Printers used this method for a long time, until the 19th century when steam power was invented. In the mid-20th century computers were invented and in the 1980's people had computers and printers at home for the first time. Now in the 21st century almost all books, newspapers and magazines are designed and printed using computers.

Activity 1 – Get interactive!

Have a look at two very good examples of early printed books on the Mirror of the World website: *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* and *Schatzbehalter*.

<http://www.mirroroftheworld.com.au/inspiration/printed/hypnerotomachia.php>
<http://www.mirroroftheworld.com.au/inspiration/printed/schatzbehalter.php>

Use the Zoom & Pan, Audio, and Turn the Page interactive features to really get a sense of the quality of books being printed, and the kinds of things people in 15th century Europe were keen to know.

Question time 1

1. Who invented modern printing?

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2. In what part of the world did modern printing start?

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3. Why did printed books replace manuscripts? What impact did this have on people's ability to read and write?

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Activity 2 - Imagine

Imagine that you live in the 15th century. You are not very wealthy, but you have just made enough money to buy a book for the first time. It's a new technology (like buying the latest computer). Describe how you feel about getting this new technology and the new possibilities for your future.

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Activity 3 – Printing in the future

1. What do you think is the future of printing – will we still print books?

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2. Many people read on computer screens now, so is there any need to print? Do you think it would be a good idea if there were no more books or magazines and everything was read on computer screens? What if future screens looked and felt more like a print book?

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3. What are some of the problems now with printing? Think about some of the environmental concerns that we face today.

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