



Treasures of the Library

THE WIDENING WORLD OF BOOKS & READERS

Examining how printing revolutionized society by the rapid dissemination of ideas thereby opening the way for wider public participation in political, social, and economic life.



Grade 7

World History and Geography: Medieval and Early Modern Times

The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens

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I. Introduction

Printing began a technological revolution that facilitated the communication of ideas and the preservation of knowledge. It would be hard to imagine society, as we know it today, without unlimited access to ideas. Without the communication and preservation of ideas made possible by the invention of printing and the technological advances that have improved the process over the past five centuries, public knowledge would largely depend on what institutions dictated scribes to record.

II. Objectives

- ◆ To explain the impact of printing on the communication of ideas.
- ◆ To give examples of religious themes in literature and explain how the literature of Medieval Europe reflected religious teachings.
- ◆ To explain how printing broadened readership and promoted literacy.
- ◆ To explain how the spread of ideas advanced Renaissance humanism, the Reformation, and the Scientific Revolution.

III. History-Social Science Standards Addressed

- 7.6 Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the civilizations of Medieval Europe.
- 8 Understand the importance of the Catholic Church as a political, intellectual, and aesthetic institution. . . .
- 7.8 Students analyze the origins, accomplishments, and geographic diffusion of the Renaissance.
- 1 Describe the ways in which the revival of classical learning and the arts fostered a new interest in humanism. . . .
 - 4 Describe the growth and effects of new ways of disseminating information. . . .
 - 5 Detail advances made in literature, the arts, science. . . .
- 7.9 Students analyze the historical developments of the Reformation
- 2 Describe the theological, political, and economic ideas of the major figures during the Reformation (e.g., Desiderius Erasmus, Martin Luther, John Calvin, William Tyndale).
- 7.10 Students analyze the historical developments of the Scientific Revolution and its lasting effect on religious, political, and cultural institutions.
- 2 Understand the significance of the new scientific theories (e.g., those of Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Newton) and the significance of new inventions.

IV. Background

In western Europe, printing is associated with the mid-fifteenth-century invention of movable type; however, printing was discovered in Asia. Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese used block printing to print scrolls and paper currency centuries before Europeans began printing. The “Diamond Sutra,” a ninth-century Chinese block-printed scroll, is among the treasures of the British Museum. In the eleventh century Chinese printers experimented with movable-type printing made of earthenware. In the thirteenth century, Korean artisans were printing with movable metal type, a process used nearly two centuries later in western Europe.

For centuries historians have argued over who should be credited with the invention of printing with movable type. Although most agree that Johann Gutenberg was not the first to print, his innovations and popularization of printing are worthy of praise. Regardless of who may be credited with the introduction of printing with movable type, it had a tremendous impact on Western Europe and the world. Gutenberg's Bible, printed in Mainz, Germany, between 1452 and 1455, is believed

to be the first substantial printed book using some sort of movable type. The two-volume Gutenberg Bible, intended for churches and monasteries, was the official Roman Catholic Vulgate Bible and was printed in Latin and read aloud to groups of people. However, within a short period of time, printers began to publish classical literature revived during the Renaissance and other secular works in Latin and vernacular languages for a wider audience. [Printed books were considerably cheaper to produce and less susceptible to errors than those inscribed by hand.] It is hard to imagine how Renaissance humanists such as Erasmus of Rotterdam or religious reformers like Martin Luther could have won such wide following without the development of printing.

As the character of printing changed and presses circulated religious and political tracts that questioned authority, institutions that originally championed printing began to question its consequences. In the sixteenth century, the Sorbonne, a university that controlled the intellectual life of France, began to view printers as subversives expounding religious heresy. By 1556, the English Star Chamber established the number of presses permitted in the nation and strictly regulated what could be published. Governments throughout Europe began to place restrictions on the press. The existence of these very restrictions testifies to the success of the printing press. Within its first hundred years, the printing press had shaken to the very core institutions that had hoped to control ideas and thus manipulate what individuals believed. Printing not only preserved the great works of the past but opened minds to new ideas. In an eloquent dissent in U.S. Supreme Court case, *Abrams v. United States* (1919), Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. asserted, “the ultimate good . . . is better reached by free trade in ideas—that the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market. . . .”

V. Materials needed

Document 1: Illustration from *Book of Hours*

Document 2: Illustration from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*

VI. Lesson Activities

1. Begin by having students review textbook readings on the Middle Ages. Using a brainstorming activity, ask students to list ways in which religious institutions, particularly monasteries, promoted learning.
2. Inform students that when they visit exhibitions at the Huntington Library they will see several examples of early hand-copied and richly illustrated religious manuscripts. Some of the most famous of these, called “books of hours,” were used by lay men and women in the later Middle Ages. They were collections of prayers, spiritual readings, and other devotional texts honoring the Virgin Mary, arranged around the seven periods of the day

assigned to prayer by the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages. Make a transparency of **Document 1**, Book of Hours, and project it for the class to examine. Tell students that each page was decorated with miniature paintings of the Virgin Mary, surrounded by elaborate floral borders and illuminated with gold leaf. Pose questions such as:

- ◆ Why was the text written in Latin?
 - ◆ Why was it so richly decorated?
 - ◆ How long might it take to hand copy this page in calligraphy?
 - ◆ Who would be able to afford a personal copy of the Book of Hours?
3. Although many of the manuscripts of Medieval England were written in Latin or French, the language of the educated classes, in the century before printing some texts were in the vernacular. Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is among the most famous of the manuscripts written in "Old English." Chaucer has thirty pilgrims on their way from London to the shrine of Thomas à Becket at Canterbury pass time by telling stories. The unique aspect of the work is that Chaucer has the pilgrims reflect every social group in England except the high nobility. The tales include courtly romances, animal fables, saints' legends, bawdy stories, and pious morality tales. Make a transparency of **Document 2**, "The Ellesmere Chaucer," and examine the intricate details of the illuminated manuscript. Have students research the *Canterbury Tales* and explain how the pilgrims, like their tales, represent all walks and classes of life in fourteenth-century England.
- ◆ Does the work reflect typical Medieval literature or is it a new style of literature?
 - ◆ Why did Chaucer write the *Canterbury Tales* in the vernacular rather than Latin?
4. Ask students how the invention of printing changed society. Guide student discussion and ensure that they understand that not only would printing make books more readily available but would also promote literacy. Remind students that the invention of printing by movable type in Europe coincided with the spread of Renaissance humanism and the Protestant Reformation. Considering the emphasis the Renaissance placed on classical learning, ask students what books they would imagine to be among those in great demand of printers. In the Medieval period in Europe, many of the books monks copied in monasteries were religious—the Bible, books of prayers such as the Book of Hours, lives of the saints as models for righteous living.
- ◆ As the Renaissance spread throughout Europe, how would the new spirit of humanism change the nature of what would be printed?
 - ◆ How would the printing press be used to circulate information regarding new religious teachings that were previously repressed?

5. Examine textbook accounts of Martin Luther and his Ninety-five Theses. Ensure that students understand that Luther, a monk who also held a professorship at Wittenberg University in Saxony in what is now Germany, was following a medieval custom of posting a position on an issue that he was prepared to defend.
 - ◆ Without printing, how effective would Luther's protest have been beyond Saxony?
 - ◆ How might it have been stopped or isolated to one part of the Holy Roman Empire?

You may wish to extend the lesson by having students investigate previous challenges to Roman Catholic authority such as the efforts of John Wycliffe (1320–1384) or John Hus (ca. 1369–1415). Have students speculate on how these movements may have spread throughout Europe if the printing press had been available.

6. Have students read accounts of the life and work of Polish astronomer Nicolas Copernicus (1473–1543), Belgian anatomist Andreas Vesalius (1514–1564), English scientist and philosopher Francis Bacon (1561–1626), and Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei (1564–1642). You may wish to have students work independently using their textbook and an encyclopedia or assign students to groups for research and select one or more students to report to the class on the importance of each scientist. How did these four scientists communicate their discoveries to the wider world outside their communities? How important was the printing press to the advancement of scientific knowledge?
7. Have students select one of the following activities:
 - ◆ Create an advertisement to encourage people to read Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.
 - ◆ Prepare a short skit or reader's theater to dramatize the impact of the printing press on the spread of ideas.
 - ◆ Construct a "broadside" (a handbill usually with an illustration and short narrative) to support or challenge the scientific discoveries of Copernicus, Vesalius, Bacon, or Galileo.

Conclude the lesson with a general class discussion on the ways in which European society changed because of the communication of ideas. You may wish to have students write an essay on how current technology has made an effect on contemporary society.

V. Extension Activities

1. Research one of the following and prepare a class presentation.
 - ◆ William Langland's *Piers Plowman* (ca. 1400)
 - ◆ "Mystery" plays that were popular in Medieval Europe—explain the purpose of these plays.
 - ◆ Gutenberg Bible (ca. 1452)
 - ◆ Sebastian Brant's *Ship of Fools* (1497)
2. Prepare an audiovisual presentation for the class on how printing promoted learning.
3. Research the life of Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam. Read and discuss the following excerpt from his famous satire, *Praise of Folly*.

No society, no intimacy can be pleasant or enduring without folly; so much so that a people could not stand its prince, nor the master his man, nor the maid her mistress, nor the tutor his pupil, nor the friend his friend, nor the wife her husband for a single moment more, if they did not from time to time . . . cover themselves with some honey of folly. . . . Every profession, every calling, every art is tinged or permeated with folly. What more stupid than a scholar who glories in the discovery of a worthless writing, or a new manuscript of something old and useless? What more stupid than the monk who devotes his life to doing nothing with unction and ceremony, and makes ignorance a virtue? The scientists too, who think they have done something wonderful when they see another star or think they have solved the riddle of the ages, are, in the face of the real wonders of Nature, ridiculous. The statesman, the merchant, the theologian, the poet, all chase unattainable goals or take pride in acts and writings that are vain and pointless. . . .

- ◆ Rewrite the excerpt from *Praise of Folly* in your own words.
- ◆ Why do you think *Praise of Folly* was so popular when it was written? Why has its popularity continued to the present day?
- ◆ Who is being ridiculed? Why?
- ◆ Why do you think Erasmus chose to write *Praise of Folly* as a satire? How effective is satirical writing?

Further extend the activity by having students read Jonathan Swift's famous satire, *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World* [better known as *Gulliver's Travels*] and discuss the effectiveness of satire as a literary style.

VI. Vocabulary

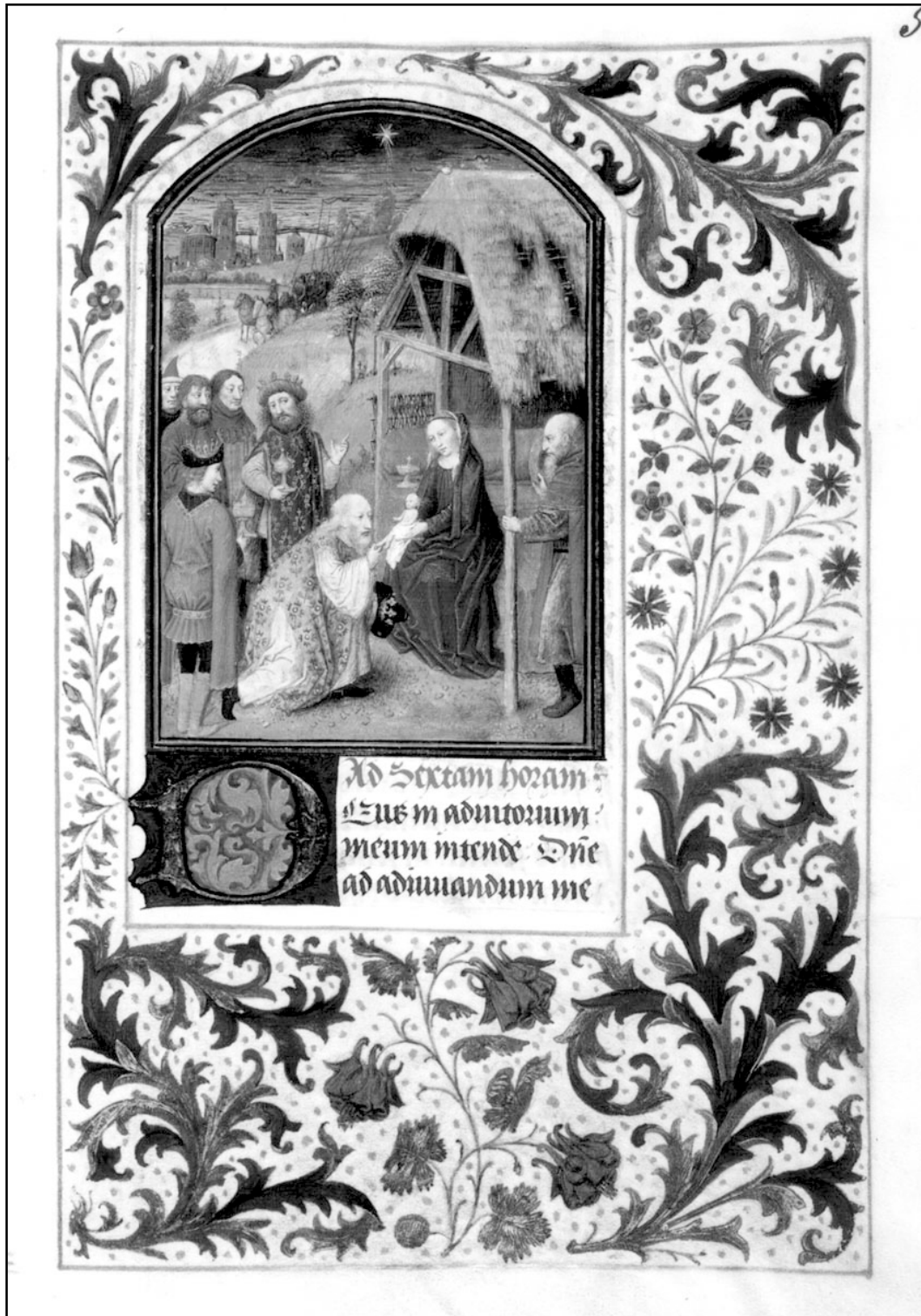
<i>folly</i>	foolishness; stupidity; silliness
<i>humanism</i>	a system of thought based on nature, dignity, interests, or ideals or human beings; a belief that human beings are capable of self-fulfillment
<i>lay</i>	not belonging to a given profession
<i>Ninety-five Theses</i>	Martin Luther's objections to Roman Catholic beliefs that he nailed to the church door at Wittenberg, October 31, 1517, as a means of promoting discussion; usually considered the beginning of the Protestant Reformation
<i>permeated</i>	filled; infused
<i>pilgrimage</i>	journey to a holy place or shrine
<i>Reformation</i>	a period in history between 1517 and 1648 that marked an open protest against the Roman Catholic Church and the establishment of religious sects that sought "reform," thus the term Protestant Reformation
<i>Renaissance</i>	a rebirth or revival; the European Renaissance began in Italy and spread throughout Europe—it is usually thought to have begun with the Italian poet Petrarch (1304-1374) and continued through the careers of the English dramatist William Shakespeare (1565-1616) and Spanish author Lope de Vega (1562-1635)
<i>satire</i>	to make fun of; ridicule; lampoon
<i>shrine</i>	a holy place; place that attracts pilgrims

Document 1

Book of Hours

Simon Marmion (c. 1450–75)

“Adoration of the Magi”



Document 2

Canterbury Tales
Geoffrey Chaucer
"The Knight's Tale"

