

# The Printing Press

Read the following passage about the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg, then answer the following questions.

## Invention of the Printing Press

When Gutenberg invented the printing press in 1445, he forever changed the lives of people in Europe and, eventually, all over the world. Previously, bookmaking entailed copying all the words and illustrations by hand. Often the copying had been done onto parchment, animal skin that had been scraped until it was clean, smooth, and thin. The labor that went into creating them made each book very expensive. Because Gutenberg's press could produce books quickly and with relatively little effort, bookmaking became much less expensive, allowing more people to buy reading material.

## The Demand for Books Grows

In the Middle Ages, books had been costly and education rare; only the clergy had been regular readers and owners of books. Most books had been written in Latin, considered the language of scholarship. In the Renaissance, the educated middle classes, who could now afford books, demanded works in their own languages. Furthermore, readers wanted a greater variety of books. Almanacs, travel books, chivalry romances, and poetry were all published at this time. Simultaneously, a means of printing music was also invented, making music available at a reasonable cost. As the demand for books grew, the book trade began to flourish throughout Europe, and industries related to it, such as papermaking, thrived as well. The result of all of this was a more literate populace and a stronger economy.

## Humanism Emerges

Books also helped to spread awareness of a new philosophy that emerged when Renaissance scholars known as humanists returned to the works of ancient writers. Previously, during the Middle Ages, scholars had been guided by the teachings of the church, and people had concerned themselves with actions leading to heavenly rewards. The writings of ancient, pagan Greece and Rome, called the "classics," had been greatly ignored. To study the classics, humanists learned to read Greek and ancient Latin, and they sought out manuscripts that had lain undisturbed for nearly 2,000 years.

The humanists rediscovered writings on scientific matters, government, rhetoric, philosophy, and art. They were influenced by the knowledge of these ancient civilizations and by the emphasis placed on man, his intellect, and his life on Earth.

Answer the following questions about the reading.

- 1) When did Gutenberg invent the printing press?
- 2) Before the printing press was invented, what did the process of bookmaking look like?