

Books: From the Beginning

by Susan Bartlett



- 1 Long ago there were no books. Parents told stories to their children. The children grew up. These children told the same stories to their children. Over the years, the number of stories grew and grew. Soon a person could not remember them all. They needed something to help them. So some people made marks on wooden sticks. Others tied knots in pieces of colored string. Each knot meant something. However, after people learned to write, it was easier to keep records.
- 2 The oldest kind of writing was done with a sharp stick called a stylus. Marks were made in soft clay. Then the clay was baked until it was hard. Clay tablets were not books, but they were a start.
- 3 Other people wrote on palm leaves and tree bark with a stylus. However bark and palm leaves crumble or decomposed over time.
- 4 However, the tough papyrus plant did last. From it, the people of Egypt made papyrus rolls at least 5000 years ago. On these rolls they drew picture words.
- 5 In time, though, people grew tired of unwinding the long rolls. So they folded sheets of papyrus in half and tied them together. At last books began to look more as they do now.
- 6 By about the year 1300, parchment had taken the place of papyrus. Parchment was made from animal skins. The Christian monks made these books, called manuscripts, which means that they were *written by hand*. The monks copied early writings onto parchment. Sometimes they added pictures. The books were lovely. However it still took a long, long time to copy just one book.
- 7 Block books came next. They told stories in pictures. People who couldn't read liked them. The pictures were cut on blocks of wood. They were called woodcuts. Each block was then covered with ink and pressed onto paper. Block books were cheap and fast to make. Written books were still very scarce. Only the rich could have them.
- 8 Then came an important development. In Germany about the year 1445, Johann Gutenberg introduced movable type. Type, or letters cut from metal, could be used over and over. Books could be made faster and cheaper. Printing took the place of writing each book slowly by hand. However printing was a new idea only to the Western world. The Chinese had been printing this way for hundreds of years.
- 9 Printing quickly spread from Germany to other countries. Because of the speed and ease of this kind of printing, there were more books. People began to read plays, poetry, and travel books, as well as religious books.
- 10 If Gutenberg could see a printing plant now, it would seem like magic to him. Thousands of books are printed at once. A machine printed the words of the very story you're reading now. The words were printed on one big sheet of paper. Then the sheet was folded. The edges were cut. A machine did it all.
- 11 Millions of people can now own and read books. In books the things humankind knows can be kept and shared. Knowledge and ideas are not forgotten. Perhaps this story will be read by your grandchildren. Then they, too, can share the story of books.

From BOOKS: A BOOK TO BEGIN ON by Susan Bartlett, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968, used with permission of the author.

COMPREHENSION

A Choose the best ending for each sentence. Write *a*, *b*, or *c*.

- 1 This story is mostly about how
 - a the Egyptians made papyrus books.
 - b books have changed over the years.
 - c Christian monks made their books by hand.
- 2 Books you have today are *not* like books made by Christian monks because
 - a of the way they are made.
 - b of the amount they cost.
 - c Both **a** and **b**

- 3 This story shows that if a book can be made quickly it will probably
 - a cost less to buy.
 - b have more ideas in it.
 - c only be owned by rich people.
- 4 The writer of this story thinks that books are important because
 - a now rich people can have them.
 - b the pictures they have are lovely.
 - c they let people pass on knowledge to others.
- 5 Without books, knowledge would have to be
 - a told from person to person.
 - b learned by discovery.
 - c Both **a** and **b**

LEARN ABOUT WORDS

B Often you can find out the meaning of a word by seeing how it is used in a story. The other words in the story give you clues.

Find the word in the story that best fits each meaning. (A paragraph number tells you where to look.) Write the word.

- 1 recall; keep in mind (1)
- 2 beginning (2)
- 3 beautiful (6)
- 4 hard to find; rare (7)
- 5 extended; became known (9)
- 6 lack of trouble; simplicity (9)
- 7 passed on to other people; used and enjoyed by others (11)

C **too** = also

two = the number after *one*

Words that sound alike but have different spellings and meanings are called homophones. *Too* and *two* are homophones.

Look at each word in **bold type** below. Note the paragraph number. Look at the paragraph and find the homophone. Which of the two words fits in the blank in the sentence? Write the word.

8 **knot** (1)

Block books did _____ have words.

9 **maid** (6)

Parchment was _____ from animal skins.

10 **would** (7)

_____ you want to unwind long rolls of papyrus again and again?

THINK ABOUT IT

D A word was left out of each sentence. Look at the two words in **bold type** below each sentence. Which word best completes the sentence? Write the word.

- 1 You can tie knots with rope, thread, or _____.
rocks string
- 2 Early writing was done on clay, _____, and parchment.
papyrus machines
- 3 Printing spread to the countries of _____, France, and Italy.
London England
- 4 People can read stories, plays, and _____ in books.
television poetry
- 5 Printing is used for books, magazines, and _____.
newspapers parchment

E Gutenberg had to *direct* the printers. They followed his *direction*.

Adding the letters *-ion* to a verb like *direct* changes it to a noun—*direction*. If the verb ends in *e*, the *e* is dropped before *-ion* is added.

dictat~~e~~ + **ion** = dictation

Add *-ion* to the word in **bold type** to complete the second sentence. (Remember to drop the final *e*.) Write the new word.

- 6 The monks used gold to **decorate**.
The gold was a _____.
- 7 People **collect** old books. Each _____ is valuable.
- 8 Gutenberg didn't **invent** the press. It was a Chinese _____.
- 9 Her job is to **protect** books. They won't last without _____.
- 10 The printer had to **correct** a word. He made the _____.

F Some contractions are made by putting a verb and *not* together.

wasn't is made from *was not*

Other contractions are made by putting a pronoun and a verb together.

that's is made from *that is*

we've is made from *we have*

Read each sentence. Which two words make up each underlined contraction? Write the two words.

- 11 People couldn't buy books.
- 12 Clay tablets weren't real books.
- 13 Block books didn't have writing.
- 14 Look at the books you've read!
- 15 Today it's easier to own books.