

Gutenberg | Nonfiction Reading Test 4

If you are reading this right now, you are taking part in the wonder of literacy. Because of printed words, people can relay information across both time and space. Ideas are encoded in writing and transmitted to readers across thousands of miles and years. Because of this development, the words of people distant to us can influence events, impart knowledge, and change the world. Much of the credit for the development of this phenomenon can be attributed to one man.

Johannes Gensfleisch zur Laden zum Gutenberg, better known as Johannes Gutenberg, was born in the German city of Mainz. Though most of Gutenberg's early life is a mystery, historians believe that he studied at the University of Erfurt in 1418 and spent much of his young adult life practicing the profession of his father: goldsmithing. Having a penchant for fortune and success, Gutenberg borrowed money from investors in 1439 and found himself in financial trouble.

In the year 1439 the city in which Gutenberg lived was planning to exhibit its large collection of relics from Emperor Charlemagne (a famous ruler who had united much of Western Europe around 800 AD). The exhibit was expected to bring many visitors to the town, so Gutenberg took investments and created many polished metal mirrors which were to be sold to the visitors (it was a common belief at that time that mirrors were able to capture holy light from religious relics). The mirrors which Gutenberg produced probably would have sold well, but due to severe flooding the event was delayed by one year. The impatient investors demanded that Gutenberg return their investments, but he had already spent the money on producing the unsaleable mirrors. He was trapped in a difficult situation. In order to satisfy the investors, Gutenberg decided to share his greatest secret with them.

This secret would forever change the world, all of history, and even the process of keeping history. It's been argued that Gutenberg's idea was one of the greatest of all mankind. This one idea would lead to the spread of countless others. It would play a key role in the development of the Renaissance, Reformation, the Age of Enlightenment, and the Scientific Revolution. This idea would bring learning to the masses and form the backbone of the modern knowledge-based economy. Gutenberg had created the mechanical printing press with movable type.



Johannes Gutenberg

Before the spread of Gutenberg's idea, literature was primarily handwritten. That means that each copy of the Catholic bible and all of its 73 books were tediously and painstakingly hand scribed, and this was done before the invention of the ballpoint pen. Given the amount of detail that went into scribing each text, creating a single copy of a bible could take years. Because of the effort that went into producing them, books were extremely rare and valuable. Because of the value and scarcity of books, there was little reason for common people to learn to read or write since it was unlikely that they would ever handle a book in their lifetimes. Gutenberg's invention would change all of that. His printing press allowed literature to be produced on a mass scale. His movable metal type could be arranged once to form a page, and his press could print the page again and again.

The first major text that Gutenberg produced was a 42 line copy of the bible. Written in Latin and containing 1272 pages, the Gutenberg Bible has had an immeasurable effect on the history of the printed word. Scholars estimate that Gutenberg produced between 165 and 185 of these bibles, which sold out almost immediately. Most copies went to monasteries and universities, though one bible was sold to a wealthy private individual. Copies are known to have sold for 30 florins (about three years of wages for a clerk at the time), which may seem expensive but was nonetheless much cheaper than a hand produced copy. Purchasing a Gutenberg Bible in the 1450s would have been a good investment if you and your descendants were able to maintain it. Only twenty-one complete Gutenberg Bibles exist today and the last one traded hands in 1987 for 4.9 million dollars, the highest price ever paid for a book at the time.

Gutenberg's brilliant idea would soon change the world, but in the short term he bungled what proved to be a large and risky investment. He found himself in financial trouble once again and was sued by one of his investors, who accused Gutenberg of mismanaging money meant for the production of books. The courts ruled against Gutenberg and Gutenberg lost control of the shop that he had created. He was effectively bankrupt.

Though he had failed as a businessman, the technologies that he had created spread across Europe rapidly. As these printing technologies and techniques spread, news and books began to travel across Europe much faster than previously possible. The world has not been the same since. Though Gutenberg was financially unsuccessful in his own lifetime, he made the world a much richer place.

Directions: Read each question carefully and choose the best answer. Refer to the text if necessary. Write your answer on the provided space.

1. Which *best* describes the structure of the text in paragraph 2?

- a) Compare and contrast
- b) Problem and solution
- c) Chronological order
- d) Spatial order

2. Which of the following expresses the correct order of events?

- a) Gutenberg was born in Mainz, invested in mirrors, and then became a goldsmith.
- b) Gutenberg created the printing press, printed the bible, and then invented the metal mirror.
- c) Gutenberg went to college, revealed his press, and then invested in shiny mirrors.
- d) Gutenberg studied goldsmithing, invented the printing press, and then lost his shop.

3. Which *best* explains why Gutenberg's plan to sell mirrors failed?

- a) The mirrors were less popular than he had expected.
- b) Flooding delayed the event for an entire year.
- c) Too many other people had the same idea.
- d) Newly invented glass mirrors rendered his metal mirrors obsolete.

4. Which of the following did Gutenberg invent?

- a) Reflective mirrors
- b) The printing press with movable type
- c) Written language
- d) Scientific inquiry

5. Which is not listed in the text as a movement to which Gutenberg's idea contributed?

- a) The Great Schism
- b) The Scientific Revolution
- c) The Renaissance
- d) The Age of Enlightenment

6. Which of the following is *best* supported by evidence from the text?

- a) Gutenberg's idea was a tremendous success that made him incredibly wealthy.
- b) Gutenberg's idea didn't catch on in his lifetime, but grew very popular after his death.
- c) Gutenberg's idea did not make him rich but spread very quickly.
- d) Gutenberg's idea did not catch on right away but made him incredibly rich over time.

7. Which *best* explains why most people were illiterate during Gutenberg's time?

- a) Books were rare and very expensive.
- b) The public school system had not yet been created.
- c) Writing had not yet been invented.
- d) Emperor Charlemagne made reading and writing illegal for common people.

8. Which *best* expresses the author's purpose in writing this text? _____

- a) To describe what life was like during the Middle Ages
- b) To persuade people to read and write more
- c) To chart the spread of printing technologies across Europe
- d) To provide biographical information about Johannes Gutenberg

9. Which *best* explains why so few of Gutenberg's bibles were sold to private individuals? _____

- a) Gutenberg wanted to use his talents to help churches and universities.
- b) Gutenberg's Bible was pretty expensive and most people couldn't read.
- c) Most Europeans were not religious and did not care about the bible.
- d) Gutenberg's investors forbade him from selling the bibles to private individuals.

10. Which of the following titles best expresses the main idea of this text? _____

- a) *Investing Wisely: Turning Your Good Ideas into Money*
- b) *How to Make Books Using the Gutenberg Method*
- c) *The City of Mainz: Life in Medieval Germany*
- d) *Gutenberg: A Man Who Changed the World*

Jackson POLLOCK

<https://www.moma.org/>



Jackson Pollock (1912-1956) was the American painter who led the Abstract Expressionism movement which was characterized by free-associative gestures in paint sometimes referred to as “action painting”. Pollock’s technique of dripping paint on to a canvas earned him the nickname of “Jack the Dripper”. Although recognized during his lifetime, he was often hard-pressed for cash. His paintings now sell for millions.

For more information on Jackson Pollock’s life, you can watch Ed Harris’s biopic released in 2003 and starring Ed Harris as Pollock, with a beautiful soundtrack including songs by Tom Waits. Here is the link to the trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z0xiobvDML0>

Analysis of the painting “White light”, 1954

https://www.moma.org/audio_file/audio_file/1682/559e.mp3

Listen to the audio. Answer the following questions in writing:

1. What are some of the explanations given to explain Pollock’s art?
2. Why was his art revolutionary at that time?
3. Pick out the biographical elements you hear.
4. His technique: what is it exactly?
5. To what other form of art did he compare his own?
6. Where did he draw his inspiration from?
7. Focus on the different visitors’ words; how do they react to Pollock’s art?
8. What about the critics of his time?
9. Where did he usually paint?
10. What size is the “White Light”?
11. What do most Pollock’s canvasses have in common?
12. Why did MoMa choose to talk about “White Light” rather than some other Pollock’s paintings?