Words on the Move

How Gutenberg's press changed the reach of ideas

9-12.WC.34 "Analyze Johannes Gutenberg's printing press and its effect on society (e.g. growth of literacy and the dissemination of ideas)."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details that show how printing worked, circle two effects on readers or debates, and write 1 and 2 beside two limits to those effects.

A Press That Changed the Audience

1 In mid-fifteenth-century Mainz, in what is now Germany, Johannes Gutenberg developed a practical way to print with movable metal type. A worker arranged individual letter pieces into words, inked them, and pressed paper against the raised letters. The pieces could be rearranged for another page. Scribes had copied books by hand, a slow process that made books costly. Gutenberg's workshop still required skilled workers and money, but a prepared page could produce many nearly identical copies. His printed Bible, completed around 1455, showed that a large, complex book could be made this way.

2 More copies changed how ideas traveled. Printers in European cities made books, notices, and short pamphlets that merchants and travelers could carry across borders. Scholars could compare the same printed text in different places instead of relying on scarce handwritten copies. In the early 1500s, reformers used print to circulate arguments about church practices. Their opponents printed replies, so disagreements reached readers far from the original debate. Printing did not create those arguments, but it allowed words to move faster and reach larger audiences than hand copying usually could.

3 Printing also affected who could learn to read, though the change was gradual. As books became more available and, over time, less expensive, some families and schools gained more material for reading practice. Demand for books in local languages gave people who did not know Latin more chances to encounter written ideas. Yet many people remained unable to read, and books still cost money. Authorities sometimes tried to ban printed works, while printers could spread rumors as well as careful arguments. The press expanded access to information, but access and reliable knowledge were not guaranteed.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did movable type help a workshop produce books differently from a scribe?

2. How did making more copies change what scholars in different cities could do?

3. How did printing affect debates about church practices without causing the debates themselves?

4. Why did wider access to printed works not guarantee that everyone could learn from them? Use two details from the passage.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a town council in 1520 wants merchants in three towns to follow a new rule for weighing grain. In four to five sentences, explain how a printer could change the rule's reach compared with handwritten notices, predict one effect on the towns, and identify one reason printing alone might not make the rule effective.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · 9-12.WC.34

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details that show how printing worked, circle two effects on readers or debates, and write 1 and 2 beside two limits to those effects. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did movable type help a workshop produce books differently from a scribe?	**Workers could print many nearly identical copies from a prepared page, while a scribe had to copy a book by hand.**
2	How did making more copies change what scholars in different cities could do?	**Scholars in different places could compare the same printed text rather than depend on scarce handwritten copies.**
3	How did printing affect debates about church practices without causing the debates themselves?	**Reformers printed arguments and opponents printed replies. Copies carried their disagreement to readers far from where it began.**
4	Why did wider access to printed works not guarantee that everyone could learn from them? Use two details from the passage.	**Many people could not read and books still cost money. Printed works could also carry rumors or be banned.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A council could pay a printer to make many identical notices explaining the new grain weights. Messengers could take copies to markets in all three towns instead of waiting for each notice to be copied by hand. Merchants who read the notices could check whether sellers used the required weights. However, some merchants might not read the notices. The council would still need people to explain and enforce the rule.

Accept other passage-supported cause-and-effect explanations. For Part 3, look for a plausible effect in the grain markets and a specific limit on what printed notices could accomplish.