

A Balanced Visual Arts and Literacy Lesson on the History of Books

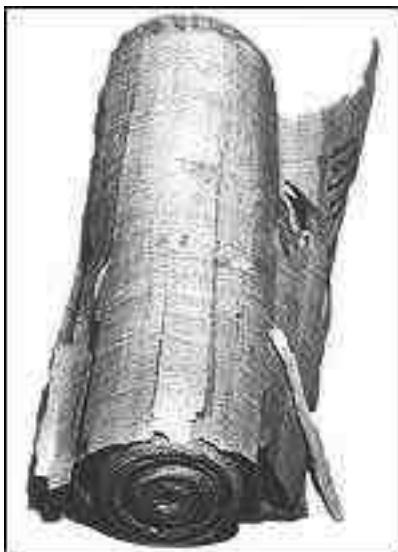
Objectives:

- 1. Art History:** Students will learn about the origin of books and how other cultures have used them by listening to a lecture and seeing visuals.
- 2. Aesthetics:** By reviewing several different types of books from a suggested list, students will be able to list five main literacy skills and explain why each is important to their education.
- 3. Art Production:** Keeping their five main literacy skills in mind, students will plan, layout, and execute a handmade book of their own design using all necessary art materials.
- 4. Art Criticism:** Students will be able to identify the literacy skills used in their book production as well as critique their own work using a four-step process.

Art History

History of Books:

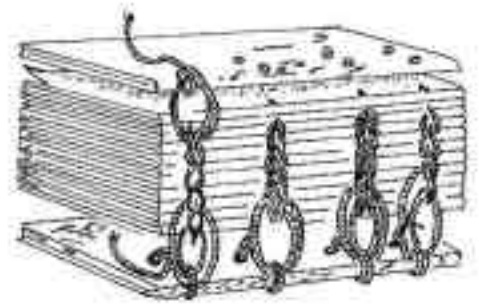
Since the beginning of human kind, humans have wanted to leave a mark somewhere, saying “we were here.”



Humans have used leather, bark, clay, soft metals, and papyrus to record everything from laws to cultural stories. The word “book” is Old English in origin and means “written sheet.” Some of the earliest writings come from Mesopotamia and Egypt. Mesopotamians wrote in cuneiform on clay tablets. The Egyptians had official scribes that were trained in writing hieroglyphs on papyrus scrolls.

In ancient times, ca. 300 B.C., there was a great library in Alexandria, Egypt, that was said to contain over 500,000 papyrus scrolls.

In the 4th century B.C., the Greeks and Romans wrote on papyrus scrolls as well as on wax-covered wooden tablets. Some of the wooden tablets were hinged together with leather thongs or pieces of metal; a “book” like this was called a codex. This style of construction was the earliest form of what we would define as a book.



Codex

The people of Asia used several different materials to write on and preserve their thoughts: silk, palm leaves, birch bark and stems of bamboo were all made into scrolls. The Chinese are given credit for inventing

www.ceu.hu/medstud/manual/MMM/frame11.html



www.asianart.com/splendors/

By the 5th century, most Chinese writing used only paper. But, the paper was not yet made into what we would call books.



In Thailand, pieces of bark were put together in an “accordion style” of book. These opened vertically and were then read horizontally. Bamboo pieces, which were plentiful in the orient, were polished and then woven together with silk cords or leather strips. Scribes would then write with ink and brushes on the slats.



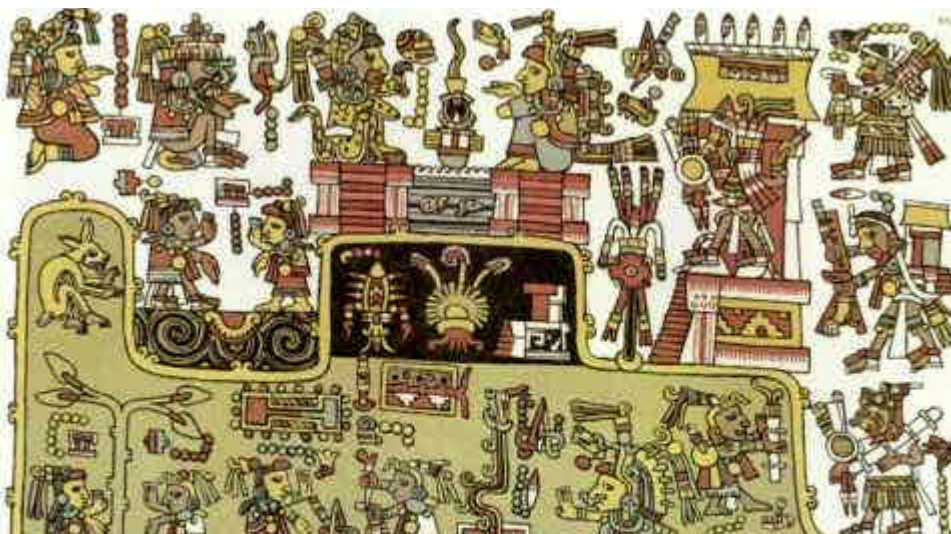
From the 7th to the 12th century, the Islamic Arab Empire flourished. Because the Arab conquered the Chinese, Islamic scribes learned how to make paper and became great book writers. Cities like Damascus and Baghdad were centers for book production.

The Muslim bible, the Koran, was compiled by copyists by 651 A.D. Copies of the Koran were beautifully decorated with elaborate borders, backgrounds, and patterns called Arabesques. The same copyists also worked to translate the works of the Greek philosopher Aristotle.



For over 2,000 years, the peoples of Europe, Africa and Asia used the skins of animals to preserve their thoughts. Sheep and goat skins were the first to be made into writing sheets called parchment. It takes the skins of 12 sheep to make a 150- page book. Then it was discovered that calf's skin made an even finer type of parchment called vellum.

Native Americans, on the other hand, used bison or buffalo skins to keep their tribe's stories. And further South, the Aztecs used deerskins, banded together to become several yards long.



Their sacred records are called amoxtlis.

When the Roman Empire collapsed about the 5th century A.D., Europe went through many changes. There were wars and invasions. The Christian religion became a main focus of most Europeans. Many Christian monasteries were established throughout Europe, and it was in these that most of the books of this period of time were written, from approximately 476 to 1453. The monks worked in scriptoriums using only natural light, no fires or candle light, for fear of fire. The parchment or vellum pages were large and expensive, so great care was taken when writing on them. Creating a single page took up to 4 or 5 monks: one to lay out the guide lines, one to do the calligraphy, one painted the illumination, and another did the gilding. Covers



for these precious pages were very ornate-- usually of carved, inlaid wood and leather.



Because most people didn't read at this time (such books only belonged to the very wealthy, to kings, and the church etc.), the illuminator had the responsibility of illustrating what was happening in the text on each page so the reader could see the story unfolding. All the materials used were made from natural sources, but because these books



were so precious, well taken care of, and respected, a number of them still exist today.

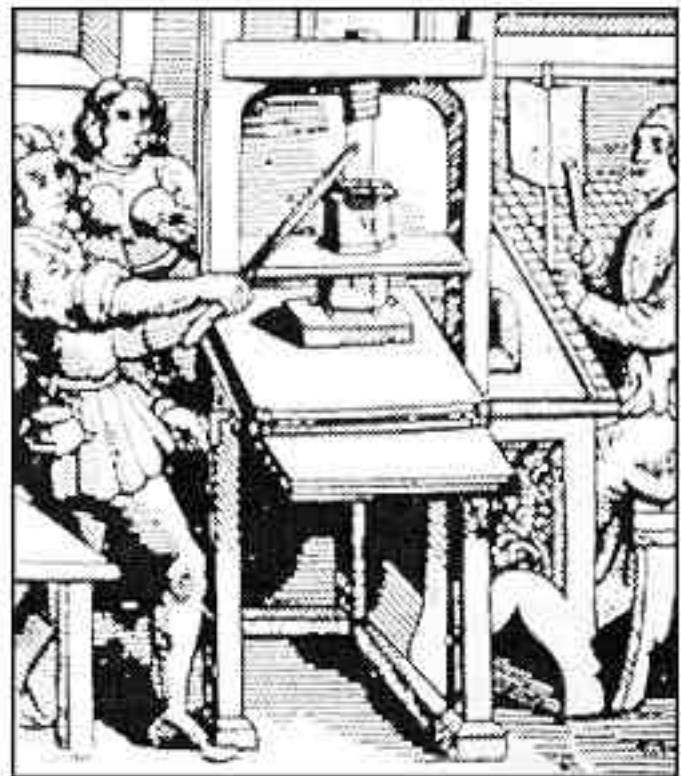
The Chinese are given credit for first making paper. They soaked different materials such as plants, straw, tree bark, and even old fish nets in water, then beat them into a pulp. The pulp was then poured onto screens and pressed lightly, and then left out to drain and

dry. When peeled off the screen, the dry fiber made a sheet of paper to write on. The use of paper was slow to spread because most people of the 2nd century didn't read or write. When it was introduced into Europe in the Middle Ages, people didn't trust paper.. In fact, paper had no legal standing or value, hence the old saying "not worth the paper it's written on." Not until the 12th century in Europe did paper mills become common. (There is a good film in the Nebo Instruction Media Collection, filed under History, called "Did You Ever Wonder. . . How they Make Paper" #48896.)

Printing, as we know it today, had its start (again) in China and Japan. During the 6th century, words and images were being carved into wooden blocks that could be inked and then printed onto paper or even onto silk. In the 11th



century, the Chinese invented the first moveable type that we know of. The Europeans were a little slower; it wasn't until the 1300's that they began printing from wood blocks.



Johannes Gutenberg, in 1438, was the man that revolutionized printing in Europe with his special jeweler's tools and an old wine press. Gutenberg is given credit for the Gutenberg Bible, dubbed Europe's first printed book even though it was never signed or dated.



From this time on, the printing of books became very complicated and was a strong business. Europeans of the late 14th century into the Renaissance had a thirst for knowledge. Their demand for the printed word sparked a new world of business. There were type makers, type setters, printing press makers, paper makers, publishers, writers, bookbinders, guilders, fore-edge painters and booksellers, just to name a few of the new professions.

Not surprisingly, with all of this new availability of knowledge and exchange of ideas, some censorship occurred. Italy, France, and Germany became major publishing centers and the state and church kept close tabs on the content of what was being published. Throughout the 14th to 16th centuries, state and church in Europe were intertwined. If someone questioned the state or church's authority or doctrine, that individual could be thrown into prison or even put to death.



Of course there were always ways to get around such censorship. By the 17th century, people had written books on science, medicine, law, and even questionable little books of poetry, short stories, and novels. These were often printed small enough to fit inside larger, more respectable volumes. Governments, starting

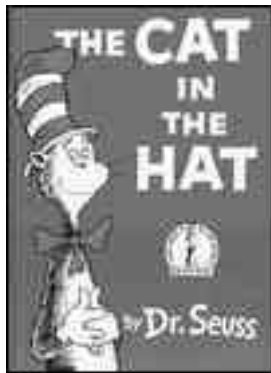
as early as 213 B.C., burned written material they deemed "not useful," decadent, or dangerous. Censors wanted to suppress any ideas they didn't agree with. This censorship still goes on today, but usually, without book burning.

(For further information on printing, there is an old, but good film called: "Printing

Transforms Knowledge” from the series: The Day the Universe Changed. #42194. This can be found in the Nebo School District Media Collection and, probably, in some other school district media centers.)

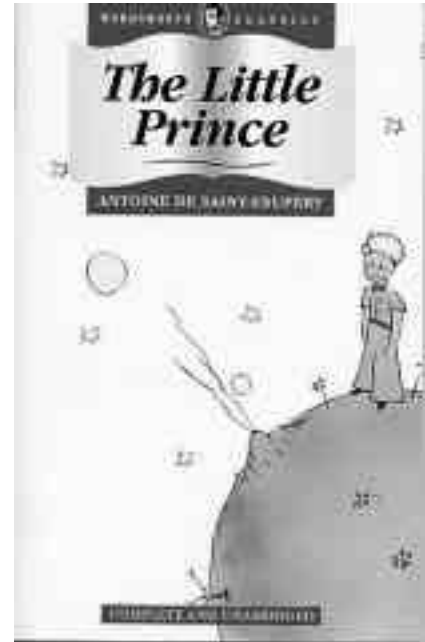
Libraries

Thank heavens people through the centuries had the forethought to preserve so much of what was written and said. Libraries were a part of many ancient cultures. The



Egyptians, Hebrews, Greeks, and Romans all had great libraries. Many European cities have libraries that have been in existence since the Middle Ages. There is something special about the feel and smell of a library with all of its wonderful bits and pieces of knowledge handed down through centuries of time. Of course, now that we have the computer, CD-roms, video tapes, and the like, libraries are not just for books on

the written page, but, continue to evolve and change as technology changes.



Children's Books



Children and story books seem to go hand in hand, but it wasn't until the early 19th century that there were books published especially for children. The first store in the U.S. dubbed a "children's" bookstore was in Boston, Massachusetts. It opened in 1916.

Many books were and still are written by one person, and then given to an illustrator to add the artwork. Now and then some writers have done their own little drawings, such as in the book, "The Little Prince," written and illustrated by its author, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry in 1943. Today there are many author/illustrators such as Maurice Sendak, Mary Englebreit, Dr. Seuss and Shel Silverstein. Can you imagine the world without the wide variety of wonderful children's literature that we now enjoy? We enjoy children's books not only for their great stories but also for their wonderful art that makes the mind wander to other places and times.

To close with a bit of wit and wisdom from Benjamin Franklin, "If you would not be forgotten as soon as you are dead and rotten, either write things worth reading or do things worth

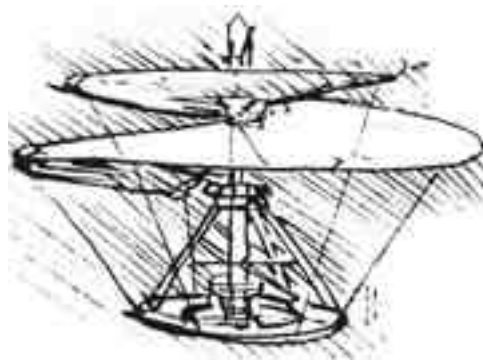
the writing.” Why not do both? The source for this history of books is The History of Making Books, by Scholastic. It is a book well worth purchasing.

Why literacy through the making of Books?

Having your students make books is an excellent way to nourish interest in literacy. Paul Johnson, senior lecturer in Art Education at the Manchester Metropolitan University and director of The Book Art Project has created two wonderful books-- A Book of One's Own: Developing Literacy Through Making Books, 1992, and Literacy Through the Book Arts, 1993. If you're serious about getting into book arts with your

students, you couldn't buy two better books to give you all the ideas you need.

In the words of Paul Johnson, “It is so practical to make a book of words, graphics, and pictures, whether the aim is to explore one's creative potential (an illustrated poem) or make a scientific investigation (inventing a machine). Even in this electronic age the notebook has a valuable function; the jotting down of words or graphics is as essential to the programming of a thought as it was to Leonardo da Vinci. And ‘practical’ is the operative word.”



da Vinci's "Copter"

Lesson Plan Ideas for Bookmaking

Art History:

1. Go over the history of books with the class.
2. Ask questions, such as: How long have books been around? Have books always looked the way they look today? What kinds of materials did ancient people write on?
3. Show some older books if you can get a hold of them, even old magazines, etc.
4. If you can watch the video suggested in the lesson-- about how paper changed the world-- it has a lot of helpful information.

Aesthetics:

1. Show different types of books such as: table top (or display) books, storybooks with and without pictures, textbooks, pop-up books, even a fun book on tape or cd. Discuss the purpose of each of these, what attracts us to the book, why do we pick up one book and not another? Is it the smell, the pictures, the story, or the cover that attract us?
2. Record answers and responses from this part of your lesson to use later for art criticism and assessment.

Art Production:

Make your own books. Begin with an easy one, then advance as time allows to some of the more challenging ones. The two books in the bibliography on book making are excellent resources. Look at how the example books are laid out.

Art Criticism:

Using some of the answers that were given in the aesthetic discussion, talk about how their work compares and contrasts with the published books. Were the illustrations important to their work? If so, how? Does your layout move the viewer's eye around the title and illustrations? Does your type face fit the story and illustrations?

Assessment: Using the information gathered in your art critic and aesthetics discussion, have students look critically at their own books. Have them possibly make up the rubric to be graded by. Of course you need to look at craftsmanship, layout, straight lines, illustration, application of color if any, etc.

Bibliography

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