

The Renaissance

Renaissance - The Spread of Ideas

Goods weren't the only things that came to Italy during the Renaissance. Ideas came, too. They arrived thanks to two main events, the fall of the Byzantine Empire and the invention of the printing press. These events influenced the spread of ideas and helped Europe come out of the darkness of the Middle Ages.

The Fall of the Byzantine Empire

During the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church in Europe only allowed the study of religion. In contrast, the **Byzantine Empire**¹ was a center of study and thought. The Empire, which included what is now southern and eastern Europe, northern Africa, and the Middle East, had strong ties to Christianity. But, unlike Europe, religion did not keep people from learning the thoughts of Greek and Roman philosophers. **Scholars**² examined the great accomplishments of these ancient cultures in poetry, rhetoric (debating), and moral philosophy.

Then, in 1453, the Turks conquered the Byzantine Empire. The invaders captured **Constantinople**,³ the center of learning in the empire. The city was no longer safe for many of the scholars and thinkers who lived there. They fled across the Mediterranean Sea to Italy. They brought books and ideas with them. The Byzantines were educated in the classic scholarship of ancient Greece and Rome. When they arrived in Italy, many Italians became interested in studying the classics, too. They began to ask questions, and view the world differently. The fall of the Byzantine Empire helped begin the Renaissance and the rebirth of interest in classical ideas in Italy.

¹ **Byzantine Empire** – Originally part of the Roman Empire, but remained independent when the Roman Empire fell. The Byzantine Empire ended in 1453 with the fall of the city of Constantinople.

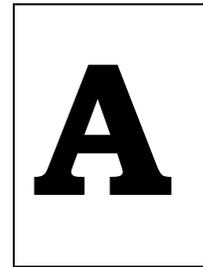
² **scholars** – students; people who study

³ **Constantinople** – The capital city of the Byzantine Empire. When the Turks took over Constantinople in 1453, the entire empire fell.

The Printing Press

A long time ago, books had to be copied over by hand. Each page had to be carefully scrawled out onto parchment. Parchment was made of animal skin that had been scraped until it was very thin, smooth, and clean like paper. Making a book was very difficult and took a lot of time. Because the Catholic Church controlled everything, the few books that were made were about religion. Books were so rare and expensive only rich people could afford to buy them. Most people never learned to read at all.

In 1440, all that changed. **Johannes Gutenberg**⁴ invented the **printing press**.⁵ The press used tiny blocks of letters called moveable type. The letters were arranged into words and sentences and rows of type were lined up in a frame the size of a page. Then the letters were covered in ink and pressed onto a blank piece of paper, much like a stamp. It took a long time to arrange the letters. But once they were set, hundreds of copies could be made at once. Unlike parchment, the printing press used regular paper, which was much cheaper. With the printing press, books could be printed quickly, inexpensively, and in large quantities.



Printing quickly replaced hand copying and became a vital new way to communicate. At one time, most books were written in Latin, which few people could read or understand. In the Middle Ages, people had been content to listen to their local priests interpret passages of the Bible for them. Now, they wanted to read for themselves about all the things the world had to offer. They could afford their own books. The middle classes began to demand books written in their own languages. They wanted books about everything—not just religion. As people read about politics and social issues, they formed opinions and exchanged ideas. These ideas fueled the Renaissance of Europe.

⁴ **Johann Gutenberg** – the man who invented the printing press

⁵ **Printing Press** – a machine that used moveable type, or letters, to print books.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What caused people from Constantinople to come to Italy?
 - a. They wanted to spread new ideas.
 - b. They wanted to study Greek and Roman philosophers.
 - c. They wanted to have an adventure.
 - d. They wanted to flee from the invading Turks.

2. Compared to copying everything by hand on parchment, the printing press was
 - a. much slower.
 - b. much faster.
 - c. too difficult to operate.
 - d. only able to print in one language.

3. Which of the following *best* helps you understand the passage?
 - a. Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press.
 - b. The fall of the Byzantine Empire and the printing press influenced the spread of ideas and helped Europe come out of the Middle Ages.
 - c. The middle classes began to demand books written in their own languages.
 - d. People wanted books about everything—not just religion.

4. Which of the following was *not* a result of books becoming less expensive and easier to make?
 - a. More people could afford books.
 - b. Books were written in more languages.
 - c. The church began copying books by hand.
 - d. Books were written about more than just religion.

5. Which event happened first?
 - a. The people of Constantinople fled to Italy.
 - b. The Turks conquered the Byzantine empire.
 - c. Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press.
 - d. The Renaissance began.

6. What reasons might the Catholic Church have had for not wanting people to study philosophy and art during the Middle Ages in Europe?

7. Why might the printing press have been especially important to people fleeing Constantinople?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

The printing press worked by covering letters with ink and pushing them _____ pieces of paper.

- a. onto
- b. between
- c. in
- d. behind

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

During the Byzantine Empire, scholars learned about ancient cultures by examining poetry, rhetoric, and moral philosophy.

Who? scholars

(did) What? _____

How? _____

When? _____

10. **Vocabulary Word:** philosophy: the study of knowledge and beliefs.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: _____
