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Johann Gutenberg and the Amazing Printing Press

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Koscielniak, Bruce. *Johann Gutenberg and the Amazing Printing Press*. Illustrated by Bruce Koscielniak. Houghton Mifflin, 2003. ISBN 0618263519. \$16.00.

Reviewer: AnnMarie Hamar;

Reading Level: Primary;

Rating: Excellent;

Genre: Non-fiction;

Subject: Books--History; Gutenberg, Johann, 1397?-1468--Juvenile literature; Printing--History of; Book--Reviews;

Bruce Koscielniak's narrative explores the history of printing, from the development of paper in China to the printing of the Gutenberg Bible. Though Johann Gutenberg is the main subject of the book, Koscielniak explains how the Chinese invented the woodblock method of printing and how they developed ink. As well, Koscielniak describes how the Koreans improved on the Chinese system by casting movable metal characters. While these developments were underway in Asia, in Europe books were copied by hand, a costly labor-intensive job. This meant only monasteries with scribes in-residence, libraries, and very wealthy people could afford to buy books. In addition, many people were illiterate. In 1435, Johann Gutenberg began working on the "secret tools" that eventually led to a new way of casting moveable metal type pieces. Gutenberg also developed a new linseed oil-based ink and a press that would push paper or vellum onto the inked type. His innovations made printing books less expensive and accessible to more people. His most famous publication was the Gutenberg Bible, a 1,282 page Latin Bible with two columns of forty-two lines of text per page. Only forty-seven of the original two hundred copies printed still exist. Koscielniak's writing style is fluid and easy to read. His cartoon-like watercolor illustrations often add humorous touches to the text.