

The Story of Writing

LESSORI ARY

The Great Lesson 4



Addla Montessori

Great Lesson 4

The Story of Writing

A Simpler Version for Lower Elementary

Remember how we talked about the creation of the Earth, how the plants came, the frog, and the insects, the animals and at last, when the Earth was ready for them the Humans came?

Then we had another story about the coming of the Humans, the story of the men women and children just like you and me. We talked about the gifts they brought with them and what they did.

(Allow the children to remind you of what they did)

Today's story is about something they did a very long time ago, after they had been living on Earth for a very, very long time.

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From the beginning we think that Human's must have spoken to one another, using grunts and laughter, they would give different objects names so they knew what each other wanted and they could warn people if there were dangerous animals, let people know where foods were growing and tell them about good places to shelter, if they were travelling. They would want to tell others about exciting things they had seen during the day and comfort the children who were scared. But they could only tell the people they met these things and as we know people have hearts to love those they hadn't met. You can hear me now because we are close and if I wanted to speak to someone outside I could open a window and shout loudly, but what if someone comes after we have gone home, then they can't talk to me.

In the past people had the same problems, they wanted to leave messages to warn others and tell each other good news. At first they probably used pebbles, arranging them in certain patterns to tell people thing, or they drew pictures with paint. They might have looked a bit like this.



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A long time ago in Sumatra people began to make signs using a wedge shaped tool called a stylus. They pushed the tool into soft clay and it made an impression, when it baked in the sun it went hard. People used the signs they made to make books and they had whole libraries filled with this special writing called 'cuneiform' writing. (it means wedge shaped from the Latin 'cuneus'). Can you imagine how excited the people who found these libraries were?



Another group of people who lived in Egypt painted beautiful signs on walls and carved them onto stone. They discovered a plant called papyrus, a reed which grows along the River Nile, that they could use to make paper and made brushes out of plants and ink from soot.



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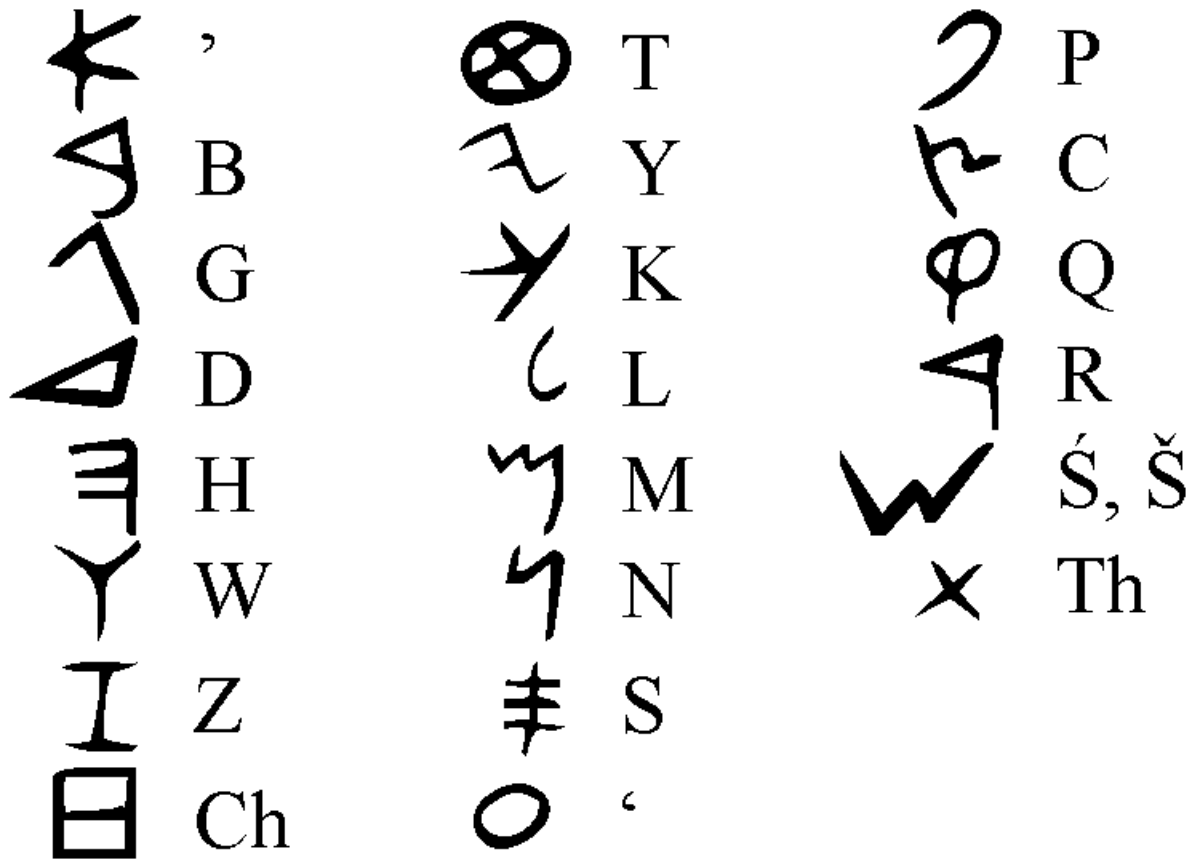
To read it you need to know what all the signs mean, the signs are called hieroglyphs (which means, holy carved writing). Because you had to know what all the signs meant not everyone who saw it could read it.

During the time of the ancient Egyptians there was a group of people called the Phoenicians. The Phoenicians could travel all over the seas on boats to sell silver, jewellery, spices, silk and Tyrian Purple, a very special dye from a special shell used for making beautiful indigo clothes. They liked to trade things quickly to make lots of money and so they travelled all over the area meeting new people who spoke different languages.

They were very impressed by the writing of the Egyptians and thought it would be a useful way to write down all the things they bought and sold so that they could find out how much money they had made, but the writing of the Egyptians took a long time to make and not everyone could understand it, so they decided to make it simpler.

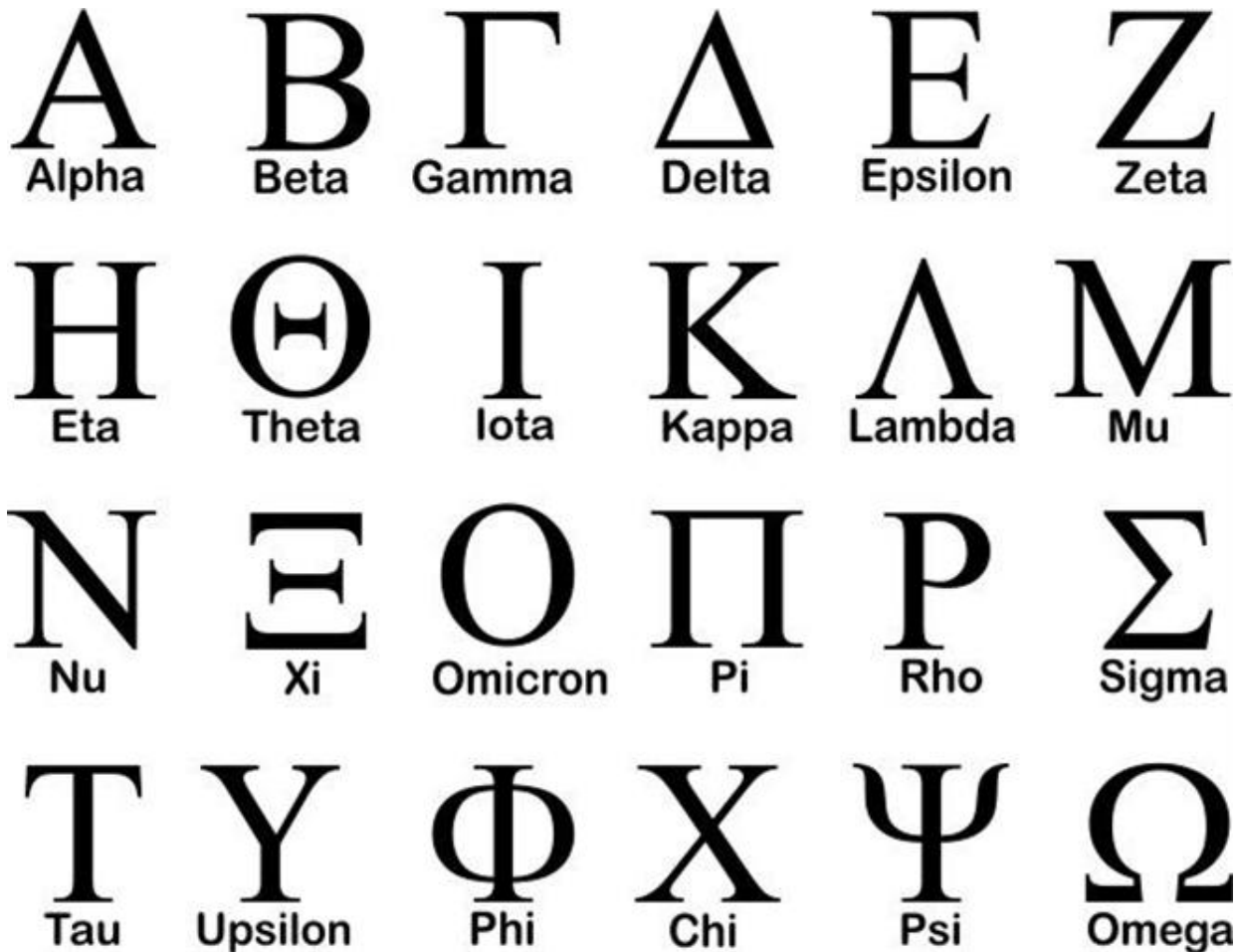
They could see that the Egyptians made messages using some pictures and some signs which told you how the word sounded. The Phoenicians decided that they would draw shapes and show the sounds made when you said the word. We think they had between twenty or twenty two signs which could make the sounds to describe all of the things they bought and sold. The signs looked like everyday objects.

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The Ancient Greeks also liked this idea, they wanted to use it to write down things that they thought were important, they soon forgot that the symbols were supposed to look like oxen and houses, they just knew what sound they made so the letters began to look different.

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These are the first two letters they used, the 'Alpha' and the 'Beta', they are the first two letters of the Alphabet, the Greek word for the Alphabet. The Greeks used the letters to write plays and record their ideas about life.

The Romans came later and thought having an Alphabet was going to be really useful, they could write down their plans for building roads and send messages throughout Europe, to make sure that the soldiers and governors were working together.

Because the Romans liked to carve words on their favourite buildings they decided to make the letters simpler.

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𐤀	𐤁	𐤂	𐤃	𐤄	𐤅	𐤆	𐤇	𐤈
A	B	G	D	E	V	Z	H	O
[a]	[b]	[k]	[r/d]	[e]	[v]	[ts]	[h]	[tʰ]
𐤉	𐤊	𐤋	𐤌	𐤍	𐤎	𐤏	𐤐	𐤑
I	K	L	M	N	Ξ	Ο	P	Σ
[i]	[k]	[l]	[m]	[n]		[o]	[p]	[ʃ]
𐤒	𐤓	𐤔	𐤕	𐤖	𐤗	𐤘	𐤙	
Q	R	S	T	Y	X	Φ	Ψ	
[q]	[r]	[s]	[t]	[u/w]	[z]	[pʰ]	[kʰ]	

So you see the signs used by the Phoenicians were used by many people and spread throughout the world. Eventually they got passed down to us. We have them now in the Sandpaper Letters. When you know the Sandpaper Letters you can write your own ideas to tell people what you are thinking. You can read messages from people you have never met who live on the other side of the world, or people from the past. We can send messages to our friends when we are on holiday or send them cards to wish them a Happy Birthday.

Even though making the alphabet happened a very long time ago, I can use it today to tell the story to you.

The Story of Writing (from Moteaco)

Lately I have been telling you stories about the earth and about how it came to be. We've talked about how plants and animals came to live on the earth, and about the coming of human beings. The story I want to tell you today takes place after human beings had already come to live on the earth. There's no way to tell exactly how long ago the story happened, but it was a long time ago, indeed! No matter, though; this is a true story.

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When men and women first lived on the earth they had need of many things: food, shelter, and clothing, to name some. This was a long time ago, though, and there were no food markets or clothing stores. There were no homes to live in. Even so, the earth was ready for humans. The gift of a larger brain and imagination served them well as they searched for what they needed. They told each other about what they found and where they found it. Maybe they used gestures, or a combination of gestures and sounds.

(model some gestures and sounds portraying food and direction)

This system worked fine most of the time. Eventually, though, a challenge presented itself. If a person found something good to eat -- say, some fish in a pond -- and no one else was there, what could they do? Maybe they thought: "How can I tell about what I have found?" Maybe the first person didn't solve this problem, but somebody did! Someone, we don't know who or when, decided to make a picture. The picture told the story, rather than the sounds, or gestures that might have been expressed.

(show a pictograph)

People probably drew these kinds of pictures for a very long time. Pictures were made of what was important, and of what they wanted others to know. For example: a hunter might need to record that 10 animals were spotted near a certain rock. He may have drawn a picture of an animal, with 10 strokes underneath, on the rock to record that message.

(show the hunter's pictograph)

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Time passed and ancient people continued to draw pictures. Some of their pictures were very beautiful. We know this because some of them, drawn a very long time ago, have been found on the walls of caves around the world.

(show the cave painting)

Even more time passed. At a certain point in history, about 5,000 years ago, a group of people called the Egyptians lived in northern Africa along the banks of the Nile River. They made lots of pictures: some were carved in stone, some were painted on stone, and some were painted on paper. The stones came from the land around them, and the paper was made from the papyrus plant, a reed that grew near the river. They first painted pictures on this paper with a brush and then later used a pen to write their picture messages.

(show a picture of hieroglyphics)

As you might imagine, people were sometimes confused by picture messages. This was especially true when people started using the same pictures for different meanings, as the Egyptians did. For example, a picture of a leg could mean:

1. The object, meaning an actual leg
2. An idea, meaning 'to run', because the leg was used for running.
3. The tone of the words, as in 'quickly'

(show pictures of different types of hieroglyphics)

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At about the same time in history, a people called the Phoenicians lived around the Mediterranean Sea, north of Africa. They sailed to lands around the Mediterranean and sold many things - ivory, spices, incense, silver, ornaments, glass - and one very, very special thing. Only the Phoenicians sold this one special thing. What was it? It was a rare purple dye, like we use to color cloth. Somehow they discovered that a particular shellfish contained in its shell a tiny particle of bright red coloring that they could use as a dye. These shellfish were gathered by the millions and crushed together to make the dye. Because it was hard to get -- only the Phoenicians had it -- the dye was very expensive. Only royalty and the very wealthy were able to dye their clothes with this beautiful color. The Phoenicians were the discoverers of this dye: how it was made was a closely guarded secret.

But as important as this Tyrian Purple Dye was to the Phoenicians, it is not why they are part of this story. Here is the reason why:

The Phoenicians traded with the Egyptians, who by now used pictures that represented sounds as well as objects. Being merchants, the Phoenicians needed a quick and accurate way of recording their business, so they 'borrowed' (quite cleverly) just the sound pictures of the Egyptians. This sort of picture could express many different things, like ideas and amounts of money. Best of all, these symbols made it easier to tell what was meant, since people who spoke to each other by this time agreed that certain sounds meant certain things. The Phoenicians found out what you found out when you learned to use the sandpaper letters -- this mark makes this sound.

(show pictures of the Phoenician alphabet)

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Even though it was the Phoenicians who were the first to use what we know as the alphabet, you might not recognize their letters. So, this is not quite the end of the story. You see, it was the Romans who first called these letters 'the alphabet'. The Roman letters are ones you might recognize. The sandpaper letters you learned are almost the same as the letters used by the Romans.

(show pictures of the Greek, Roman, and modern alphabet)

Remember when I was reading *name of book here* to you the other day? It is the Phoenicians who first invented the idea of writing only sounds on paper. They did not need to draw pictures of objects, only the marks for sounds.

People today still use this idea. When you write down a story, you write down the letters that make the sound of the word that you want to write. And when you read, you recognize the sounds that the alphabet letters make. Because the Phoenicians recognized the sound alphabet, the author of *name of book here* could write the book we just read.

This is the Story of Writing.

The Story of Writing (from Miss Barbara)



Pictographs circa 15000 B.C. (Chad)

People had lived on Earth for about 4 million years. They had learned to control fire, make complex tools, and survive variable weather. Humans wanted to share what they had seen so they drew on the walls of caves. We can learn much about the animals that were important to these humans by studying these pictures. Maybe someday you will travel and visit some of these caves.

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7,500 years old Danube Valley Civilization script to 5,500 years ago

	FIRST WRITINGS			ORNAMENTS FROM ROMANIA
	Jerdet Nasr 3000 BC	Knessos 2000 BC	Törfäria 4000 BC	

The Danube Valley civilization is one of the oldest civilizations known in Europe. It existed from between 5,500 and 3,500 BC in the Balkans and covered a vast area, in what is now Northern Greece to Slovakia (South to North), and Croatia to Romania (West to East). <https://www.ancient-origins.net/ancient-places-europe/danube-valley-civilisation-script-oldest-writing-world-001343>

Ideograms circa 7,500 B.C.

Humans later used a combination of pictures to tell a story. They used pictures as symbols - pictures that represented a word. A picture of a mouth and a bowl meant eating. They used natural materials for 'paint' - like dried blood, berries, charcoal or rocks.



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Sumer circa 3500 B.C

The people of Sumer had a great civilization. They did not have many trees in Sumer so they learned how to use clay as a tablet. They baked the tablet in the sun to dry. They used a wedge shaped tool called a stylus. We call their wedge shaped writing cuneiform. Cuneiform means wedge shaped.

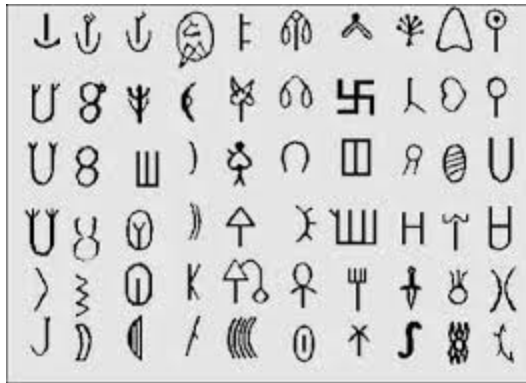


Egypt circa 3200 B.C.

The Egyptians developed a style of writing called hieroglyphics, or writing of the gods. They carved their symbols into rock. It was very difficult to learn as it had so many symbols so they had scribes who went to school to learn how to write. Only boys were allowed to go to scribe school. The Egyptians developed a type of paper from a plant called papyrus. They used a reed sharpened into a point to write on their paper. They then rolled the paper into scrolls. These were their books. Sometimes the Egyptians wrote symbols that stood for concepts and sometimes they mixed in symbols that stood for sounds. We use symbols for sounds today. They wrote left to right, right to left and up and down.

(Have a scroll rolled so students understand. Show maps of where Egypt was.)

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3,500 B.C. Indus River

There was another great civilization on the Indus River near the Arabian Sea. They developed a system of writing with around 250 symbols. They carved their writings on soft soapstone. No one has yet deciphered their language. This civilization died out, whereas the other two continued to grow.

I tell them that someday, maybe one of them will decode the symbols of the Indus. Recently there was another civilization discovered in Asia that also had writing. Watch for current articles so you can share them with your students to let them know this research is living and ongoing.



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2,000 B.C. Shang Dynasty

The Shang on the Yellow River is the earliest known civilization that used Chinese writing. They used about 3,000 symbols for words and actions. The Chinese language of today differs very little from this early writing. This is because the Chinese civilization was isolated from the rest of the world for many years.



Phoenician Writing

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	'
	B
	G
	D
	H
	W
	Z
	Ch

	T
	Y
	K
	L
	M
	N
	S
	'

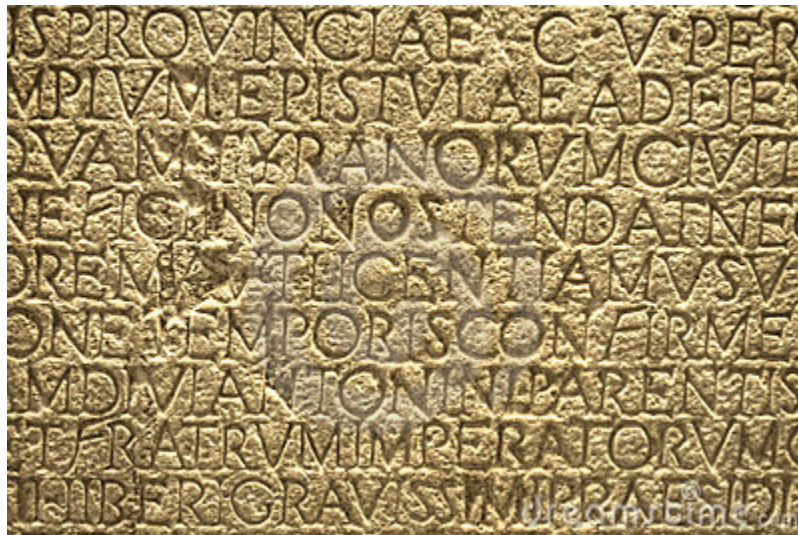
	P
	C
	Q
	R
	Š, Š
	X
	Th

Phoenician Alphabet

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Phoenicians 1,600 BC

The Phoenicians lived on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. They were merchants who sailed around the Mediterranean Sea selling ivory, spices, incense, ornaments, glass. Their name comes from a purple dye they used to make clothes. It came from shellfish called the Murex Snail. They were famous for their purple dye. They needed an easy system of writing to keep track of all the goods they traded. They saw the Egyptian and Sumerian alphabets and borrowed their ideas. Their first alphabet had 80 symbols, but eventually they simplified it to only 22 letters with sounds. The Phoenicians did not have any vowels.



The Greek Wall Writing 800 B. C

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Α

Alpha

Β

Beta

Γ

Gamma

Δ

Delta

Ε

Epsilon

Ζ

Zeta

Η

Eta

Θ

Theta

Ι

Iota

Κ

Kappa

Λ

Lambda

Μ

Mu

Ν

Nu

Ξ

Xi

Ο

Omicron

Π

Pi

Ρ

Rho

Σ

Sigma

Τ

Tau

Υ

Upsilon

Φ

Phi

Χ

Chi

Ψ

Psi

Ω

Omega

The Greek Alphabet

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The Greek Alphabet (You can laminate this)

The Greeks learned the alphabet from the Phoenicians. They did not speak the same language as the Phoenicians so they had to add some new letters. They changed to an alphabet with 24 letters. The word alphabet comes from the first two letters of their alphabet - alpha and beta. The Greeks used vowels, left spaces between words, used some punctuation and were the first to only write left to right.



Romans 100 B. C.

The Romans were a great civilization. They conquered a lot of the world. They simplified the Greek alphabet by changing the shape of many of their letters. They named their language Latin. The shape of our letters today is a lot like the Roman letters of 2,000 years ago. The Romans kept their writing in books, instead of on scrolls. Monks copied the books by hand using beautiful script and pictures called illumination. They wrote with quill pens on paper made from animal skins called parchment. They wrote beside open windows using the sun for light.

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The Chinese Paper

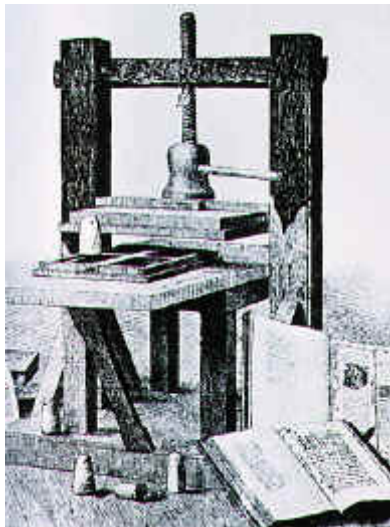
The Chinese 900 B.C The Chinese invented many things before the Europeans. The Europeans did not know as the two cultures rarely mixed with each other. The Chinese invented the first printing press. They first had individual letters carved in wood. Pages were written by putting individual letters together. Later they carved a whole page of words onto a wooden block. Many pages could then be printed, but the wood wore down rapidly and had to be replaced. The Chinese also invented true paper from wood pulp around 105 A.D.

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Alcuin 780 A.D.

Charlemagne was a king of another great civilization that conquered much of the world. He had a library full of all the books written at that time in the great city of Alexandria. Unfortunately most of the books were lost in a great fire. A monk named Alcuin developed many of the rules we use today for capital letters and punctuation.



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Printing Press, Europe 1400 A.D.

Johann Gutenberg, a German, is thought to have invented the first paper in Europe. The Chinese had developed a process to make paper long ago, but refused to share their secrets. Gutenberg also invented a faster printing press. More books could now be made in a day than a monk could produce in several months. The Koreans were the first to use a type set made out of bronze. It lasted much longer than wood.

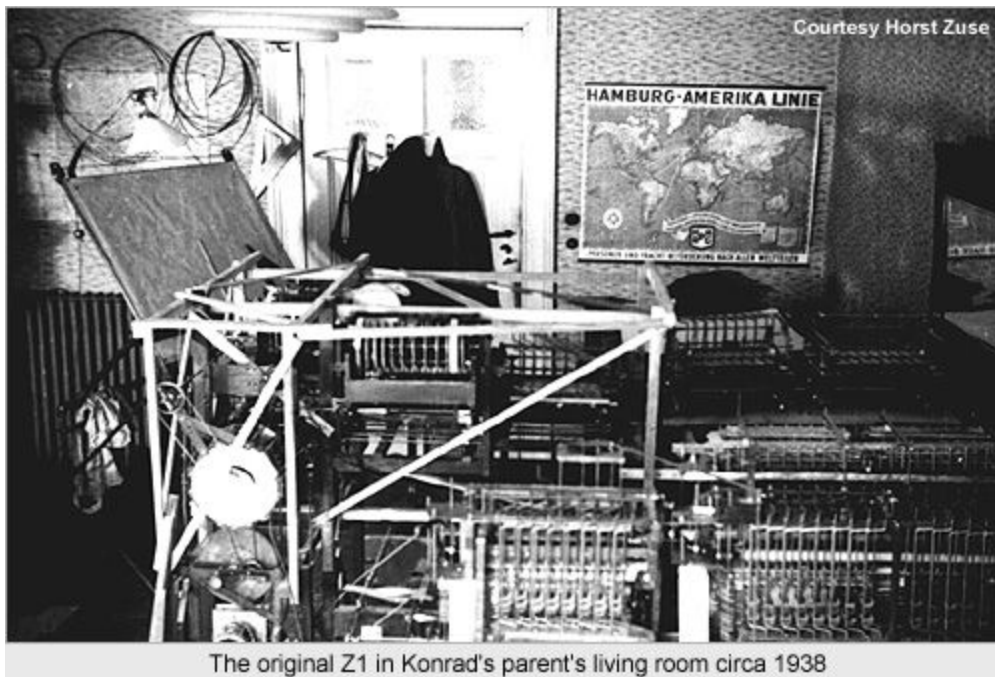


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Rosetta Stone 1799 A.D.

The Rosetta Stone is discovered by some of Napoleon's soldiers while they were fighting in Egypt. Napoleon was a famous French General. The Rosetta Stone had a passage written in two languages: Egyptian hieroglyphics and Greek. As many educated people could read the early Greek, they slowly figured out the meaning of the hieroglyphics. It took forty years, but the secrets of the ancient language were finally unlocked. Reading a civilization's writing lets us know a lot about how they lived and what they thought.

You can purchase a replica of the Rosetta Stone that is much smaller, of course, than the original, but students love to look at it and try to find hieroglyphics they know.



The original Z1 in Konrad's parent's living room circa 1938

Computers 1900' s

Today the written word can travel from one part of the world to another in seconds. Computers and satellites have made it possible to exchange news as it happens. Languages are translated from one to another by machines. Great quantities of information can be held by one magnetic disk. Whole encyclopedias are stored in about a six inch space. Someday communication with paper may be looked upon as we now look upon cave drawings.

Talk about how language will probably change when they are your age. This can inspire talk about wrist watches and telephones that allow you to see the speaker, talking computers, etc. This is also a good time to talk about how some languages are disappearing and how some languages are influencing others.

Some Follow up work

Tell a story using Pictograms or ideograms.

Write some words in hieroglyphics, cuneiform or other writing systems.

Like the Phoenicians who wrote without vowels or punctuation, write a story without vowels and see if we can read it.

The children can also try their hands on writing in code: Morse code for example.

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