Name: _____ Date: _____

How Paper Traveled West from China

Circle group

Long ago, people wrote on things that cost a lot. Egyptians used papyrus, made from a tall river plant. Scribes in other lands used parchment, which was thin animal skin. They worked well. But they were not cheap.

Paper changed that. Chinese workers made it about two thousand years ago. Tradition says an official named Cai Lun improved how it was made. Workers soaked plant fibers like bark, hemp, and old rags. The fibers turned into soft pulp. They spread the pulp on a screen and pressed out the water. Then the sheet dried. Paper was light, smooth, and cheap.

For a long time, the craft stayed in East Asia. Then merchants and travelers took it along trade routes. By the 700s, people made paper in the Islamic world. Mills opened in cities like Baghdad. Cheap paper filled libraries, schools, and offices with records.

The craft came to Europe much later. Some of the first mills were in Spain and Italy. They used rags from towns. When printing came to Europe, paper was ready. A material from China had crossed a continent. It helped bring millions of books.

Questions

1. What are papyrus and parchment?

_____

_____

2. What did Chinese workers use to make pulp?

_____

_____

3. How did papermaking travel out of East Asia?

_____

_____

4. Which city is named as a place with paper mills?

_____

_____

5. Why did cheap paper help schools and libraries?

_____

_____

6. Why was paper ready when printing came to Europe?

_____

_____

Words to know

scribes: people whose job was to copy or write documents by hand
pulp: a soft, wet mass of broken-down fibers
merchants: people who buy and sell goods
mills: buildings where a product is made by machinery or workers

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

How Paper Traveled West from China

Triangle group

Long before paper, people wrote on materials that were costly or awkward. Egyptians used papyrus, made from a tall river plant. Scribes in other lands used parchment, a thin sheet prepared from animal skin. Both worked well, but neither was cheap enough for everyday use.

Paper changed that. Chinese artisans developed it around two thousand years ago, and tradition credits an official named Cai Lun with improving the method in the early second century. Workers soaked plant fibers, such as bark, hemp, and old rags, until they broke down into a soft pulp. They spread the pulp thinly on a screen, pressed out the water, and let the sheet dry. The result was light, smooth, and inexpensive.

For centuries, the craft stayed mostly in East Asia. Then, as merchants and travelers moved along the trade routes of Central Asia, the skill moved with them. By the 700s, papermakers were working in the Islamic world, and in the centuries that followed, paper mills opened in cities such as Baghdad. Cheap paper helped fill libraries, schools, and government offices with written records.

The craft reached Europe much later. Some of its first mills appeared in Spain and Italy, where the same basic steps were followed with rags collected from towns. When printing arrived in Europe afterward, paper was already available to supply it. A material invented in China had crossed a continent, and it prepared the way for millions of books.

Questions

1. What are papyrus and parchment?

_____

_____

2. What did Chinese paper makers use to make pulp?

_____

_____

3. How did the skill of papermaking travel beyond East Asia?

_____

_____

4. Which city is named as a place where paper mills opened in the Islamic world?

_____

_____

5. Why did cheap paper help libraries and schools grow?

_____

_____

6. Why was paper ready for printing when printing arrived in Europe?

_____

_____

Words to know

scribes: people whose job was to copy or write documents by hand
artisans: skilled workers who make things by hand
pulp: a soft, wet mass of broken-down fibers
merchants: people who buy and sell goods
mills: buildings where a product is made by machinery or workers

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

How Paper Traveled West from China

Square group

Long before the invention of paper, people recorded their words on materials that were either costly or inconvenient. Egyptians relied on papyrus, which was prepared from a tall river plant, while scribes in other lands turned to parchment, a thin sheet processed from animal skin. Both served admirably, yet neither was inexpensive enough for ordinary daily use.

Paper transformed that situation. Chinese artisans developed it roughly two thousand years ago, and tradition credits an official named Cai Lun with refining the method in the early second century. Workers soaked plant fibers, including bark, hemp, and discarded rags, until they dissolved into a soft pulp. They then spread the pulp thinly across a screen, pressed out the water, and allowed the sheet to dry. The finished product was light, smooth, and remarkably affordable.

For many centuries, the craft remained largely confined to East Asia. Eventually, as merchants and travelers journeyed along the great trade routes of Central Asia, the knowledge traveled with them. By the 700s, papermakers were at work in the Islamic world, and during the centuries that followed, paper mills opened in cities such as Baghdad. Inexpensive paper helped to stock libraries, schools, and government offices with written records.

The craft reached Europe considerably later. Some of its earliest mills appeared in Spain and Italy, where the same basic steps were carried out with rags collected from towns. When printing arrived in Europe afterward, paper was already available in quantity. A material invented in China had crossed an entire continent, and it paved the way for millions of books.

Questions

1. What were papyrus and parchment, and where did they come from?

_____

_____

2. What materials did Chinese artisans soak to make pulp?

_____

_____

3. How did the knowledge of papermaking spread beyond East Asia?

_____

_____

4. Which city is named as a place where mills opened in the Islamic world?

_____

_____

5. Why did inexpensive paper help libraries and schools flourish?

_____

_____

6. Why was paper already available when printing arrived in Europe?

_____

_____

Words to know

scribes: people whose job was to copy or write documents by hand
artisans: skilled workers who make things by hand
pulp: a soft, wet mass of broken-down fibers
merchants: people who buy and sell goods
mills: buildings where a product is made by machinery or workers

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

For the teacher: How Paper Traveled West from China

Each student sheet carries a shape, not a level. The same topic and facts, written three ways.

Circle: How Paper Traveled West from China

Easier · 188 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 3.3

1. Old writing materials made from a plant and from animal skin.
2. Plant fibers like bark, hemp, and old rags.
3. Merchants and travelers took it along trade routes.
4. Baghdad.
5. More people could afford enough paper for records and books.
6. Mills in Europe were already making it.

Triangle: How Paper Traveled West from China

This passage · 239 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 7.7

1. Older writing materials, made from a river plant and from animal skin.
2. Plant fibers such as bark, hemp, and old rags.
3. It moved along trade routes with merchants and travelers.
4. Baghdad.
5. Many more people could afford enough writing material for records and books.
6. Paper mills already existed in Europe and were making plenty of it.

Square: How Paper Traveled West from China

Harder · 260 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 10.5

1. They were older writing materials made from a river plant and from animal skin.
2. Plant fibers such as bark, hemp, and discarded rags.
3. Merchants and travelers carried it along the trade routes of Central Asia.
4. Baghdad.
5. Far more people could afford enough writing material for records and books.
6. Paper mills had already opened in Europe and were producing it in quantity.