



A Downside to the Printing Press?

History nugget

Prior to the invention of the printing press in 1440, originals and copies of books about drugs (and every other topic) were laboriously written down by hand. This was no easy task given the length of some of the world's classic medical and science texts such as the five-volume encyclopedia of herbal medicine, *De Materia Medica*, penned by Pedanius Dioscorides between 40-80 CE.

After the printing press became more mainstream, information about alcohol (and other drugs) flowed more freely and easily, as did the alcohol itself. For example, in 1512 CE, Hieronymus Braunschweig published *The Big Book on Distillation*. Soon afterward, distilling alcohol moved from the realm of monasteries and apothecaries to include artisans and merchants. An alcohol industry was being born. This was followed by a rise in alcohol consumption.

In reading Shakespeare's plays, one can see a possible consequence. In the late 1500s, the characters in his plays echo the Renaissance view of wine as pleasant and inviting. In the plays written after 1600, the negative effects of alcohol consumption are portrayed.

[\[pdf student handout\]](#)

Instructional strategies

1. Brainstorm with students a list of ways in which the printing press contributed to positive human activity and ways it may have contributed to negative outcomes. You might ask students if technological inventions such as the printing press are a blessing or a curse and have them explain their responses.
2. Have students prepare a presentation comparing and contrasting the contributions of the printing press and the internet to human cultural development (or drug use in particular).
3. Have students write a paper answering the question: Does technology shape people or do people shape technology?

Curricular competencies

- Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to: ask questions; gather, interpret and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions
- Assess the significance of people, places, events and developments at particular times and places
- Characterize different time periods in history, including periods of progress and decline, and identify key turning points that mark periods of change
- Determine what factors led to particular decisions, actions and events, and assess their short- and long-term consequences
- Make ethical judgments about past events, decisions and actions, and assess the limitations of drawing direct lessons from the past

Drug literacy objectives

- Assess the complex ways in which drugs impact the health and well-being of individuals, communities and societies
- Recognize binary constructs (e.g., good vs bad) and assess their limitation in addressing complex social issues like drug use
- Develop social and communication skills in addressing discourse and behaviour related to drugs

This resource was developed by the Centre for Addictions Research of BC with funding provided by the Government of Canada. Any views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Government of Canada or the Centre for Addictions Research of BC.