Renaissance Book Production
Station 1: Deluxe Gutenberg Bible (Two Volumes)
(Z241. B58 1961 v.1 and v.2)

Johannes Gutenberg (c. 1398-1468) developed a printing press with moveable type (individual letters) around 1439. From his invention, printing technology spread across Europe, arriving in England around 1476. In the early 1450’s Gutenberg undertook the production of his first major project: the Bible.

The books in front of you are modern (1961) recreations of Gutenberg’s Bible, made with authentic fifteenth century methods and materials. You MAY touch these books. (Do NOT touch the books at the other stations.)

Experience
1. Pick up one of these books. This is one of the very first times that all the books of the bible were put into a single (double) volume.
2. Figure out how to undo the clasps.
3. Examine the spine to see where the pages are sewn in.
4. Find the first page of Genesis. Can you read any of the text?

Questions
1. What do you think the metal bumps on the cover are for?

2. Can you tell how many sheets of paper are sewn into the gatherings?

3. How would you describe the typeface (font) of the text? Is it similar to any kinds of writing we have seen in old books so far?

4. How would you describe the illustrations in this book?
Renaissance Book Production
Station 2: Incunables

Incunable means “from the cradle” or “in swaddling clothes” in Latin. Incunables (or Incunabula), therefore, are the earliest printed books. Any book, pamphlet, or single sheet that was printed before the year 1500 is called an incunable. At this station, you will note the similarities and differences between the manuscripts (hand-written) that we saw on our last visit to the library, and the very earliest printed books.

Incunable 1: Sermons on Job (1471, Nuremberg) (BR65.C45 S45x 1471)
Note that this book is a little more plain than some of the other books you’ve seen today. The font is less ornate, there are no pictures, and there is only some rubrication (red lettering). It is also a book of sermons in Latin. Who do you think would own this book, and what would they do with it?

Incunable 2: Encyclopedia by Vincent de Beauvais (1473, place unknown, likely Strausbourg) (D17.V56x 1473)
What artistic features do you see on this page that are similar to medieval book-making art forms that we saw last time? Does it look like the book itself (binding, pages, covers) is more advanced than the manuscripts we saw last time? Or is printing the only major advance?

Incunable 3: Latin Bible (1484, Venice) (BS75.1484)
Notice that in a few places on this page, there are blank spaces with small letters in the middle. What do you think these blanks are for?

Incunable 4: Summa Pisana: Cannon Law (1481, Pisa) (BX1757. B37x 1481)
After you have practiced setting some type, come back to look at this book and just appreciate for a moment how difficult setting the tiny type for this book would have been.

Two General Questions
These books are representative of early printing. How are they similar to/different from the handwritten manuscripts we saw in the previous unit? What features are still missing from modern books as you know them?
Renaissance Book Production
Station 3: Mature Printing Practices

After several years of experiments and experience with the printing press, printing became a viable commercial venture. Printers and editors came up with useful tools like tables of contents, glossaries, chapter headings, and meaningful spacing. Use this station to familiarize yourself with some seventeenth century (1600’s) printing practices.

Book 1: Chaucer’s Works, edited by Thomas Speght (1602) (X BL 821.17 C496w)
This is the first edition of Chaucer that has punctuation. Does it help you read the text? In addition to punctuation, what are some other organizational features that help the reader navigate the page?

Book 2: John Dryden Fables (1700, this edition from 1745) (X BL 821.4 D799f 1745)
Note the illustration next to the title page. How do you think this illustration was put into the book? Also, who are the other poets that Chaucer is grouped with? What does this suggest about Dryden’s feelings about Chaucer?

Book 3: John Milton Defensio (1652) (X BL-C 941.062 M662i 1652)
This book is written in Latin, but note that the font is much different from the earlier manuscripts and incunables. Why do you think a printer would develop a font like this? Also, this book would have been a dangerous book to own when it first came out (it defends the English people’s decision to kill their king, Charles I). What role does mechanical printing have in being able to spread dangerous ideas secretly and quickly?

Book 4: John Donne Anatomy of the World (1611) (X 821.3 D685a)
Note that at the bottom of every page in this book, there is a single word on the bottom right corner. This is called a “catchword.” What do you think its purpose is?
Renaissance Book Production
Station 4: Be the Printer

Instructions for this station:

1. Using the moveable type in the tray, construct your full name (first and last) on one of the small cardboard trays provided.

2. Hold your type tray up to a mirror. You’ve done it correctly when you can read it in the reflection.

3. How did you do?

4. Now put the type back in the tray—be careful to get them back in the right compartments.

After you have tried your hand at type setting, answer these questions:

What was easy about setting type? Why?

What was difficult about setting type? Why?

How long do you think it would take to create a full sheet of text this way? How long would it take to make a full book? 50 books? 100 books? 1000 books?