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The Book: A Cover-to-Cover Exploration Of The Most Powerful Object Of Our Time



Synopsis

“Everybody who has ever read a book will benefit from the way Keith Houston explores the most powerful object of our time. And everybody who has read it will agree that reports of the book’s death have been greatly exaggerated.” —Erik Spiekermann, typographer

We may love books, but do we know what lies behind them? In *The Book*, Keith Houston reveals that the paper, ink, thread, glue, and board from which a book is made tell as rich a story as the words on its pages — of civilizations, empires, human ingenuity, and madness. In an invitingly tactile history of this 2,000-year-old medium, Houston follows the development of writing, printing, the art of illustrations, and binding to show how we have moved from cuneiform tablets and papyrus scrolls to the hardcovers and paperbacks of today. Sure to delight book lovers of all stripes with its lush, full-color illustrations, *The Book* gives us the momentous and surprising history behind humanity’s most important — and universal — information technology. 71 color illustrations

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Keith Houston’s book about books — their purpose, their history, their construction — is an in-depth look at how these precious artifacts came to be, and an illustrative artwork in its own right. Created with a hard cardboard cover and classic red spine band, *THE BOOK*’s various parts are noted from front to back; such designations as “binding” and “formatter head” remind us that this is a lesson. But *THE BOOK* is as much entertainment as elucidation. It starts with the basic, first real (because portable as well as readable) example — hieroglyphs on papyrus.

Papyrus is a curious plant that, cut in thin segments, lined up and soaked (preferably in Nile water), produces a flat pliable surface that can be written on. Though the Chinese are sure that they also invented both paper and writing, they were far away from the European and Mediterranean peoples, who created what we in the West recognize as language and letters papyrus, on animal skins (parchment) and eventually on linen rags (paper). Houston humorously notes that one major barrier to the production of paper was the chronic shortage of rags due to such annoyances as the American Revolution; offers an engaging depiction of medieval monks toiling over scriptural composition with perhaps a bit of less-than-spiritual grumbling; informs us that the Gutenberg Bible was preceded by the Gutenberg schoolbook, *Ars Grammatica*; includes a brief bio of one of our best recognized illustrators, John James Audubon, who turned to bird sketching for a living after a stint in debtor's prison; and throws in a macabre account of corpse snatcher William Burke, whose skin was posthumously turned into a certain anonymous little book.

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