

## The Renaissance

### The Italian Renaissance

The word *renaissance* means rebirth. In Italy between 1350 and 1550 a rebirth of ancient Greek and Roman knowledge occurred. Italy was the first center of the Renaissance because of its strategic location and its Roman heritage. The cultural and political ideas of this rebirth eventually spread throughout Europe and produced the expansion of trade, exploration, and forms of technology.

During this time, Italy and the rest of Europe were recovering from the disasters of the fourteenth century, such as the plague, political instability, and a decline of Church power. Powerful city-states were centers of cultural and political life in northern and central Italy. With this new rise of urban society came more secular views of the world, and increased wealth led to more leisure time for education, art, and the investigation of ideas. A new outlook on life began to emphasize individual ability and achievements. **Humanism**, as the movement became known, put importance on people improving their lives through gaining knowledge in a wide variety of subjects.

### The Italian States

The lack of a central ruler in Italy allowed several city-states to remain independent and flourish. Expanded trade with the Byzantine and Islamic civilizations brought prosperity. Trading centers set up during the Crusades allowed merchants to bring silks, sugars, and spices back to Italy and the west. Italian trading ships also moved into the western Mediterranean and north along the Atlantic to trade.

One of the richest city-states was Milan. Francesco Sforza and his band of mercenaries conquered the city in 1447. The rulers of Milan created a strong centralized government that was able to generate large amount of tax revenue for the city. Florence was governed by a small group of wealthy merchants, most notably the **Medici family**. The Medici's, who grew wealthy through their trading activities, dominated the politics of the city. The Medici's were great patrons of the arts.

### Renaissance Artists

Renaissance thinkers believed a well-rounded person could achieve success in many areas of life. **Leonardo da Vinci** was a true Renaissance man: a scientist, mathematician, engineer, inventor, anatomist, painter, sculptor, architect, musician, and writer. Among his most notable works are the *Mona Lisa* and *The Last Supper*. Combining his interest in art and science, he also created sketches of flying machines and submarines centuries before these machines were actually built.

Another renowned figure was **Michelangelo**, who was an accomplished sculptor, painter, and architect. Over the course of four years from 1508-1512 he painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. His sculptures of the biblical *David* and *The Pieta* showed a revival of Greek style and the introduction of realism. His works are considered some of the greatest masterpieces of western art.

### Italian Renaissance & Humanism

A major intellectual movement of the Renaissance was **humanism**. It was based on the study of the literary classics of Ancient Greece and Rome and incorporated secularism (indifference to, rejection or exclusion of religion) and an emphasis on human characteristics. An Italian scholar named Petrarch has been called the father of the Humanist movement. He led the movement to locate and use works by Greek and Roman writers. The subject's studies included grammar, rhetoric (art of speaking or writing effectively), poetry, moral philosophy, and humanities.

### Vernacular Literature

The emphasis on classical Roman works led to the use of Latin in many texts. However, some writers chose instead to write in the **vernacular**, the language spoken in their own regions, such as Italian, French or German. Writers such as Dante, who wrote *The Divine Comedy*, did so in his native

language Italian. Chaucer (*The Canterbury Tales*) and Shakespeare (*Romeo & Juliet*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*), wrote also in their native languages.

### Education in the Renaissance

Renaissance humanists believed that education could change human beings. They opened schools to share their ideas and taught various classes in liberal studies. Typical subjects included history, moral philosophy, eloquence or rhetoric, grammar or logic, poetry, mathematics, astronomy and music. Students also participated in physical activities such as archery and javelin throwing.

Females attended schools in small numbers but were excluded from mathematics and rhetoric. Religion and morals education was considered most important for “Christian ladies” so that they would become good mothers and good wives.

### Machiavelli and the New Statecraft

One of the most influential books on political power was written during the Renaissance by a man named **Niccolo Machiavelli**. *The Prince* was mainly concerned with how to get and keep political power. A major theme in the book is that “the end justifies the means.” In the book Machiavelli wrote that leaders must be strong and ruthless to protect their states.

### The Artistic Renaissance

Human beings took center stage in the artistic works of the Renaissance. Renaissance art was characterized by the use of perspective, shading, and blending religious themes with natural settings. Artists were interested in re-creating nature in their pieces with a sense of reality—a break with the flat, old stylized art of the Middle Ages. Although the subject matter remained largely devoted to religious subjects, Italian Renaissance artists introduced natural elements and also turned to classical mythology.

### New Techniques in Painting

Masaccio developed a new, realistic style of painting called perspective. This mastery of perspective was the key to the development of Renaissance art. Another important technical aspect was the use of geometry to achieve correct organization and outdoor light and space. Finally, painters were interested in anatomy and the movement of the human body. The aim was to create as realistic a portrayal as possible, especially of the human nude.

Sculptures and architecture also improved. Inspiration for Renaissance sculptors and architects came largely from classical Greek and Roman works. The period between 1490 and 1520 contained some masters of the High Renaissance. Da Vinci, Raphael, and Michelangelo are artists associated with this period. These men had mastered the realistic portrayal of the human form and were interested in creating idealized forms. Da Vinci sought to express the perfection of nature and the individual, while Michelangelo was interested in portraying divine beauty in perfectly proportioned human form.

### The Northern Renaissance

The artists of Northern Europe focused on scenes from everyday life and worked on illustrating books and small panels that required a mastery of precise detail and creating objects on a very small scale. **Rembrandt** was a Dutch painter that was concerned with the contrast of light and shadow in his paintings.

The most important northern school of art in the fifteenth century was found in Flanders. **Jan van Eyck**, a Flemish (Netherlands) painter, was one of the first to use oil paint, which allowed him a wide range of colors and the ability to create fine detail, as in his work, *Giovanni Arnolfini and His Bride*. **Albrecht Dürer** was a German artist who incorporated the laws of perspective and used them along with minute details of northern artists, in his work *Adoration of the Magi*. Another of his works, *Melancholia* showed a Renaissance flair for investigating the life of the mind.

The Impact of the Printing Press

In 1455, **Johannes Gutenberg** of Germany invented a printing press with movable metal type that allowed for the mass production of texts. Before this invention, books had to be copied by hand, and were expensive and time-consuming to produce. Gutenberg’s Bible was the first European book produced from movable type. The mass-production of texts encouraged scholarly research and increased people’s desire for knowledge. Literacy increased and new ideas about philosophy, literature, and religion spread more rapidly. Of the almost forty thousand books printed by 1500, more than half were religious texts. These religious publications created an interest in reform both from within the Catholic Church and among its opponents.

Directions: In the graphic organizer below, list the facts for each of the following terms.

Important People and Terms	Identify and define the terms
Renaissance	
Humanism	
The Medici Family	
Leonardo da Vinci	
Michelangelo	
Vernacular	
Renaissance Education	
Niccolo Machiavelli	
Renaissance Art	
New Painting Techniques	
Rembrandt	
Johannes Gutenberg	

Niccolo Machiavelli, a diplomat in the pay of the Republic of Florence, wrote *The Prince* in 1513 after the overthrow of the Republic forced him into exile. It is widely regarded as one of the basic texts of Western political science, and represents a basic change in the attitude and image of government.

### **That Which Concerns a Prince on the Subject of the Art of War**

The Prince ought to have no other aim or thought, nor select anything else for his study, than war and its rules and discipline; for this is the sole art that belongs to him who rules, and it is of such force that it not only upholds those who are born princes, but it often enables men to rise from a private station to that rank. And, on the contrary, it is seen that when princes have thought more of ease than of arms they have lost their states. And the first cause of your losing it is to neglect this art; and what enables you to acquire a state is to be master of the art. Francesco Sforza, though being martial, from a private person became Duke of Milan; and the sons, through avoiding the hardships and troubles of arms, from dukes became private persons. For among other evils which being unarmed brings you, it causes you to be despised, and this is one of those ignominies against which a prince ought to guard himself, as is shown later on.

### **Concerning Cruelty and Clemency, and whether it is better to be Loved than Feared**

Upon this a question arises: whether it is better to be loved than feared or feared than loved? It may be answered that one should wish to be both, but, because it is difficult to unite them in one person, it is much safer to be feared than loved, when, of the two, either must be dispensed with. Because this is to be asserted in general of men, that they are ungrateful, fickle, false, cowardly, covetous, and as long as you succeeded they are yours entirely; they will offer you their blood, property, life, and children, as is said above, when the need is far distant; but when it approaches they turn against you. And that prince who, relying entirely on their promises, has neglected other precautions, is ruined; because friendships that are obtained by payments, and not by nobility or greatness of mind, may indeed be earned, but they are not secured, and in time of need cannot be relied upon; and men have less scruple in offending one who is beloved than one who is feared, for love is preserved by the link of obligation which, owing to the baseness of men, is broken at every opportunity for their advantage; but fear preserved you by a dread of punishment which never fails.

Nevertheless a prince ought to inspire fear in such a way that, if he does not win love, he avoids hatred; because he can endure very well being feared whilst he is not hated, which will always be as long as he abstains from the property of his citizens and subjects and from their women.

From: Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ed. W. K. Marriott. London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1908, pp. 117-118, 129-131.

1. What is a Prince's primary aim? Why?
2. According to Machiavelli, is it better to be loved than feared or feared than loved? Which does he choose and why?
3. How can this document be used by leaders?