

The Italian Renaissance

What You Will Learn...

Main Ideas

1. Increased trade with Asia brought wealth to Italian trade cities, leading to the Renaissance.
2. Italian writers and artists contributed great works during the Renaissance.

The Big Idea

The growth of wealthy trading cities in Italy led to a rebirth of the arts and learning called the Renaissance.

Key Terms and People

Marco Polo, p. 559

Renaissance, p. 561

humanism, p. 561

Dante Alighieri, p. 562

Niccolo Machiavelli, p. 562

Michelangelo, p. 563

Leonardo da Vinci, p. 563



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TAKING NOTES

Use the graphic organizer online to record information about the growth of trade and cities. Note how this growth influenced writers and artists.

If YOU were there...

You are a historian living in Florence, Italy, in the late 1300s. In your writing you describe the wonders of your city today. But the place was very different only about 50 years ago. At that time, the Black Death was sweeping through the city. In fact, your own grandfather was killed by the terrible disease. Some 50,000 of the city's other citizens also died from the plague. Now, though, Florence is known for its beauty, art, and learning.

How did your city change so quickly?

BUILDING BACKGROUND By the late 1300s the Black Death's horrors had passed. Europeans could worry less about dying and concentrate more on living. They wanted to enjoy some of life's pleasures—art, literature, and learning. Increased trade with faraway lands would help spark new interest in these activities.

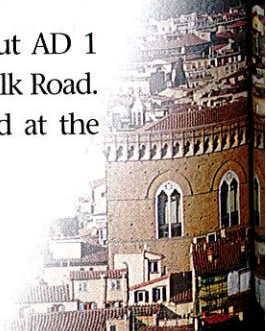
Trade with Asia

It seems strange that the Black Death had any positive results, but that is what happened. Though the death toll was terrible, the disease didn't damage farmland, buildings, ships, machines, or gold. People who survived used these things to raise more food and make new products. Wages rose as workers, now in short supply, demanded higher pay. Europe's economy began to grow again.

As more goods became available, prices went down. Trade increased, and new products appeared in the markets. Some of these goods came from thousands of miles away. To learn how these items ended up in Europe, we need to go back in time.

The Silk Road Reopens

The Chinese and Romans did business together from about AD 1 to 200. Products moved between East and West along the Silk Road. This was a caravan route that started in China and ended at the



Mediterranean Sea. When the Roman Empire and the Han dynasty fell, soldiers no longer protected travelers. As a result, use of the Silk Road declined. Then in the 1200s the Mongols took over China. They once again made the roads safer for travelers and traders. Among these traders were a remarkable man from Venice named **Marco Polo** and his family.

The Polos traveled from Europe to China, where they saw many amazing things, such as paper money, and coal used for fuel. In China they also met with the Mongol emperor Kublai Khan. He invited them to stay in his court and made Marco Polo a government official. The Polos spent 20 years in Asia before returning to Venice. There, a writer helped Polo record his journey. Polo's descriptions made many Europeans curious about Asia. People began to desire Asian goods, and trade between Asia and Europe grew. Italian merchants organized much of this trade.

Trade Cities in Italy

By the 1300s four northern Italian cities had become trading centers—Florence, Genoa (JEN-uh-wuh), Milan (muh-LAHN), and Venice. These cities bustled with activ-

Florence was a banking and trade center. The city's wealthy leaders used their money to beautify the city with impressive buildings and art.

ity. Shoppers there could buy beautiful things from Asia. Residents could meet strangers from faraway places and hear many languages on the streets.

Italian cities played two important roles in trade. One role was as ports on the Mediterranean Sea. Venice and Genoa were the main port cities. Merchant ships brought spices and other luxuries from Asia into the cities' harbors. Merchants then shipped the goods all across Europe.



GEOGRAPHY SKILLS INTERPRETING MAPS

- 1. Location** In what part of Italy are all four major trading cities located?
- 2. Place** Geographically, how do Genoa and Venice differ from the other two major trading cities?



History Close-up

Florence

A market in Florence buzzes with activity in this scene showing what Florence may have looked like in the 1400s.

Merchants traded goods from Europe and Asia in the city's markets.

Cloth was a major trade good in Florence.

Bankers kept detailed records of their investments.

The other role was as manufacturing centers. Each city specialized in certain crafts. Venice produced glass. In Milan workers made weapons and silk. Florence was a center for weaving wool into cloth. All of this economic activity put more money in merchants' pockets. Some Italian merchant families became incredibly wealthy. Eventually, this wealth would help make Italy the focus of European culture. How did this happen?

Florence

One city—Florence—stands out as an example of the great trade and wealth coming into Italy during the 1300s. Florence's wealth began with the wool trade, but banking increased that wealth. Bankers in Florence kept money for merchants from all over Europe. The bankers also earned money by making loans and

charging interest. Interest is a fee that lenders charge people who borrow money from them. This fee is usually a certain percentage of the loan.

The greatest of the Florence bankers were the Medici (MED-i-chee) family. In the early 1400s they were the richest family in the city. Their fortune gave the Medicis political power too. You see, in most big Italian cities, a single rich family controlled the government. The head of the family ruled the city. By 1434 Cosimo de' Medici (KOH-zee-moh day MED-i-chee) ruled Florence.

Cosimo de' Medici wanted Florence to be the most beautiful city in the world. He hired artists to decorate his palace. He also paid architects to redesign many of Florence's buildings.

Cosimo de' Medici also valued education. After all, his banks needed workers who could read, write, and understand math.

THE IMPACT TODAY

Bankers in Florence during this time developed a bookkeeping system that is still used today.



City leaders hired architects and artists to create beautiful buildings like this famous church called the Duomo.

Visitors to Florence helped spread Renaissance ideas throughout Europe.

ANALYSIS SKILL ANALYZING VISUALS
What can you see in this illustration that shows the wealth of Florence?

To improve education, he built libraries and collected books. Under the Medicis, Florence became the center of Italian art, literature, and culture. In other Italian cities, rich families tried to outdo each other in their support of the arts and learning.

Beginning of the Renaissance

This love of art and education was a key feature of a time we call the Renaissance (re-nuh-SAHNS). The word **Renaissance** means “rebirth” and refers to the period that followed Europe’s Middle Ages.

What was being “reborn”? Interest in art and literature revived, especially in ancient Greek and Roman works. Appreciation also developed for the importance of people as individuals. These ideas were very different from those of the Middle Ages.

READING CHECK Summarizing How did trade lead to the Renaissance in Italy?

Italian Writers and Artists

New ways of thinking emerged during the Renaissance. At the same time, the period brought a renewed emphasis on the past. These trends inspired Italian writers and artists to produce many brilliant works.

Sources of Inspiration

During the Middle Ages, most thinkers in Europe had devoted themselves to religious study. By the 1300s, however, scholars had begun to broaden their interests. They studied poetry, history, art, and the Greek and Latin languages. Together, these subjects are known as the humanities because they explore human activities rather than the physical world or the nature of God. The study of the humanities led to a movement called **humanism**, a way of thinking and learning that stresses the importance of human abilities and actions.

FOCUS ON READING

What word in this paragraph, besides *Renaissance*, uses a Latin root that means “again”? How does the meaning of the word reflect the meaning of the Latin root?

Primary Source

BOOK

The Prince

In *The Prince*, Machiavelli offers advice for rulers on how to stay in power. In this famous passage, he explains why in his view it is better for rulers to be feared than to be loved.

“A controversy has arisen about this: whether it is better to be loved than feared, or vice versa. My view is that it is desirable to be both loved and feared; but it is difficult to achieve both and, if one of them has to be lacking, it is much safer to be feared than loved . . . For love is sustained by a bond of gratitude which, because men are excessively self-interested, is broken whenever they see a chance to benefit themselves. But fear is sustained by a dread of punishment that is always effective.”



ANALYSIS SKILL

ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES

Do you think that Machiavelli gave good advice in this passage? Why or why not?

This interest in the humanities was linked to the rediscovery of ancient writings. In the 1300s Turks conquered much of the Byzantine Empire. Scholars seeking to escape the Turks fled to Italy. With them they carried rare works of literature.

Many of the works they brought to Italy were ancient **classical** writings, such as works by Greek thinkers. Scholars were excited by the return of these writings and went looking for ancient Latin texts too. They found many in monasteries, where monks had preserved works by Roman writers. As scholars rediscovered the glories of Greece and Rome, they longed for a renewal of classical culture.

Renaissance artists and architects were also drawn to the past. Classical statues and ruins of Roman buildings still stood in Italy. These ancient ruins and statues inspired painters and sculptors.

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

classical
referring to the cultures of ancient Greece or Rome

Italian Writers

Many Italian writers contributed great works of literature to the Renaissance. The earliest was the politician and poet **Dante Alighieri** (DAH-n-tay ahl-eeg-YEH-ree). Before Dante, most medieval authors had written in Latin, the language of the church. Dante wrote in Italian, which was the common language of the people. This showed that he considered Italian, the people's language, to be as good as Latin.

A later Italian writer, **Niccolo Machiavelli** (neek-koh-LOH mahk-yah-VEL-lee), was also a politician. In 1513 he wrote a short book called *The Prince*. It gave leaders advice on how they should rule.

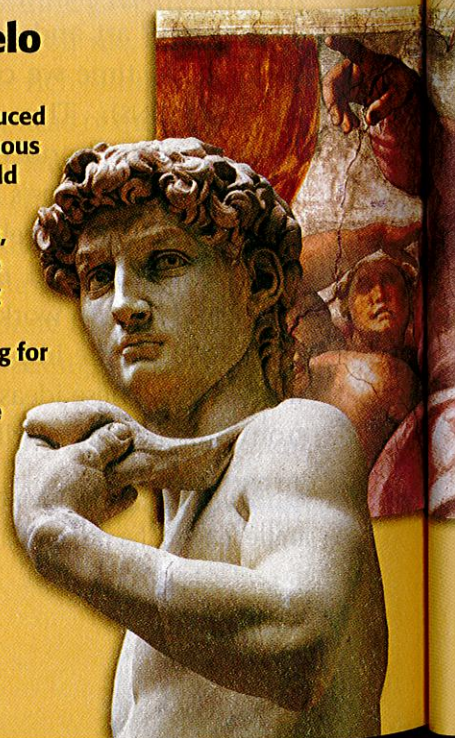
Machiavelli didn't care about theories or what *should* work. He was only interested in what really happened in war and peace. He argued that to be successful, rulers had to focus on the "here and now," not on theories. Machiavelli thought that rulers sometimes had to be ruthless to keep order. In this way, Machiavelli serves as a good example of Renaissance interest in human behavior and society.

Two Masters

Michelangelo

1475–1564

Michelangelo produced some of the most famous works of art in world history. Like many of his masterpieces, his powerful statue of the Israelite king David and his remarkable painting for the Sistine Chapel (both at right) were created for the Roman Catholic Church.



Italian Art and Artists

During the Renaissance, Italian artists created some of the most beautiful paintings and sculptures in the world. Ideas about the value of human life affected the art of the time. Artists showed people in a more realistic way than medieval artists had done. Renaissance artists studied the human body and drew what they saw. However, because artists often used classical statues as their guides, many of the human beings they drew were as perfect as Greek gods.

Artists also used a new technique called perspective—a way of showing depth and distance on a flat surface. Perspective is created by various means. For example, people in the background of a painting are shown smaller than people in the front. Sharper colors are used for objects seen up close, while distant images are made to look hazier. Also, parallel lines, such as on floor tiles, are drawn diagonally. This is another way to give the illusion of distance between the people or objects shown.

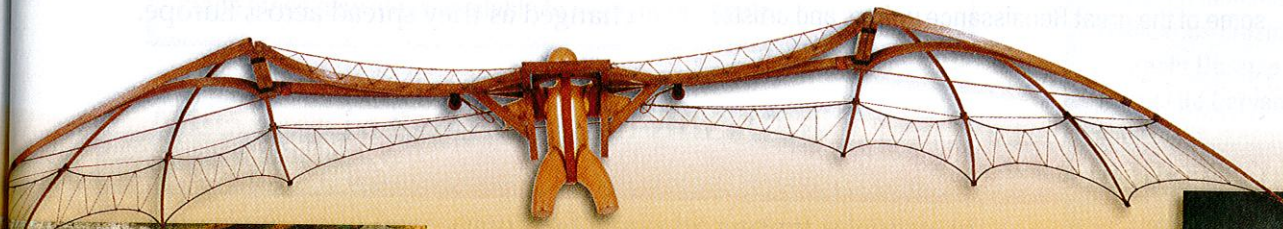
Two Masters

There were several great Italian Renaissance artists. But two stand out above the rest. Each is an example of what we call a Renaissance person—someone who can do practically anything well.

One of these great Italian masters was **Michelangelo** (mee-kay-LAHN-jay-loh). He had many talents. Michelangelo designed buildings, wrote poetry, carved sculptures, and painted magnificent pictures. Perhaps his most famous work is a painting that covers the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican. The muscular human figures in this immense painting remind the viewer of Greek or Roman statues.

The true genius of the Renaissance was **Leonardo da Vinci**. In addition to being an expert painter, Leonardo was a sculptor, architect, inventor, engineer, town planner, and mapmaker. Both nature and technology fascinated Leonardo. Detailed drawings of plants, animals, and machines fill the sketchbooks that he left behind.

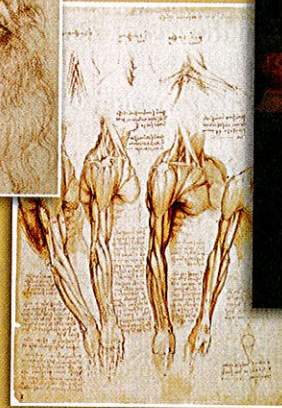
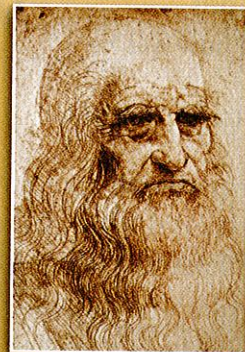
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ANIMATED HISTORY
Renaissance Artists



Leonardo da Vinci

1452–1519

Leonardo showed artistic talent at a young age, but no one could have known that he would become one of the great geniuses of history. His *Mona Lisa* (far right) is one of the most famous paintings in the world. Leonardo also left behind notebooks that were filled with examples of his other interests. His self-portrait (above right) and anatomical sketches (right) reveal his attention to detail and study of the human body. His ideas for a human-powered flying machine are reflected in the model above.

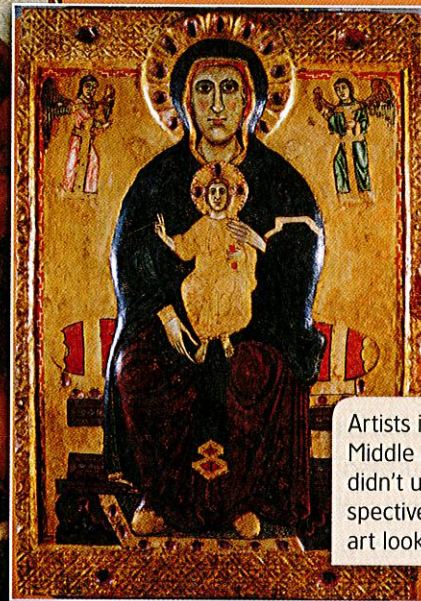


Renaissance Art

Renaissance art was very different from medieval art. Renaissance artists used new techniques to make their paintings more realistic.

How are these two paintings similar and different?

The people in this painting appear larger and have more detail than the mountains in the distance, creating a sense of depth.



Artists in the Middle Ages didn't use perspective, so their art looked flat.

To make his art more real, Leonardo studied anatomy, the structure of human bodies. He also showed human emotions in his work. His famous portrait of Mona Lisa, for example, shows the lady smiling.

READING CHECK Summarizing Who were some of the great Renaissance writers and artists?

SUMMARY AND PREVIEW Changes in Italy led to the beginning of an era called the Renaissance. During the late 1300s, a great rebirth of art, literature, and learning occurred in Italy. In the next section, you will learn how Renaissance ideas changed as they spread across Europe.

Section 1 Assessment

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ONLINE QUIZ

Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and People

- a. Identify** Who was **Marco Polo** and how was he influential?

b. Analyze Why were the four major trade cities of Italy important economically?

c. Elaborate How did the city of Florence rise to its position of fame?
- a. Describe** What sources inspired Renaissance artists and scholars?

b. Compare Which artist would you rather have met in real life—**Michelangelo** or **Leonardo da Vinci**? What is the reason for your choice?

c. Evaluate Why do you think **Dante Alighieri** chose to write in Italian, rather than Latin, the language used by most scholars?

Critical Thinking

- 3. Sequencing** Draw a diagram like the one below. Using your notes, put the events in the correct order.



FOCUS ON WRITING

- 4. Finding Key Details** The main idea of this section might be stated, "Due to contact with Asia and the wealth that resulted from trade, the Renaissance began in Italy." Write this main idea in your notebook. What key details in this section support this idea? Write them in your notebook as well.