

THE RENAISSANCE:

THE DAWN OF A NEW AGE IN EUROPE

- ❖ Learning and the Arts began to flourish during the Renaissance.
- ❖ Crusaders returned to Europe with a newfound understanding of the world.
- ❖ The invention of the printing press encouraged literacy and helped to spread new ideas.
- ❖ Wealthy families and the church had amassed enough wealth to become patrons.
- ❖ The development of financial techniques such as bookkeeping and credit allowed merchants to prosper.

Renaissance means "rebirth" or "reawakening." The Renaissance was a rebirth of the classical values of ancient Greece and Rome including an emphasis on humanism which is an interest in studying and improving the human experience on Earth. Beginning in Italy, the Renaissance spread through Europe from roughly 1350 to the early 1600s.

When people hear the word Renaissance, they often think of great art, but there were at least four major developments that occurred during the Renaissance period: 1) the flourishing of the arts and sciences based on rediscovery of the literature of classical Greece and Rome, 2) the Protestant Reformation that tore apart the Christian world and reduced the power of the Catholic Church, 3) the voyages of discovery that led to the European conquest of America and European supremacy in the world, and 4) the printing press which gave people a reason to learn how to read and write and made it possible for large numbers of people to learn of the new ideas of the Renaissance.

In some ways humans "grew up" during the Renaissance. They learned they were not the center of the universe, they discovered a New World on Earth, artists learned how to accurately portray the world, and true scientific inquiry began. So much changed during the Renaissance that it is considered the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of modern times. The term "renaissance" is now used to describe any revival or rediscovery.

The Renaissance patrons wanted art that showed joy in human beauty and life's pleasures. Renaissance art is more lifelike than in the art of the Middle Ages. Renaissance artists studied perspective, or the differences in the way things look when they are close to something or far away. The artists painted in a way that showed these differences. As a result, their paintings seem to have depth because they tried to make the human body appear anatomically correct, and they developed a technique for making spaces appear in a realistic 3-D form, which is perspective.

Renaissance Art

The Renaissance patrons wanted art that showed joy in human beauty and life's pleasures. Renaissance art is more lifelike than in the art of the Middle Ages. Renaissance artists studied perspective, or the differences in the way things look when they are close to something or far away. The artists painted in a way that showed these differences. As a result, their paintings seem to have depth.

Leonardo da Vinci was born in 1452 in the village of Vinci. His name means Leonardo of Vinci. Leonardo began his career working for a master painter in Florence. By 1478, Leonardo left his master and set up his own workshop. People have been trying to guess the secret behind the smile of his Mona Lisa ever since he painted it around 1505. His Last Supper shows clearly the different feelings of Jesus and his followers.

Leonardo's fame grew—but not just for his painting. Leonardo was truly a “Renaissance Man,” skilled in many fields. He was a scientist and an inventor as well as an artist. He made notes and drawings of everything he saw. Leonardo invented clever machines, and even designed imitation wings that he hoped would let a person fly like a bird.

Michelangelo Buonarroti of Florence was one of the greatest artists of all time. Like Leonardo, Michelangelo was a “Renaissance Man” of many talents. He was a sculptor, a painter, and an architect. When Michelangelo carved a statue of Moses, he included veins and muscles in the arms and legs.

Michelangelo was a devout Christian, and the church was his greatest patron. He designed the dome of St. Peter's church in Rome. Nearby, Michelangelo's paintings cover the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, the building where new popes have been selected for more than five hundred years. Michelangelo's painting illustrates the Book of Genesis, with scenes that span from the Creation to the Flood. The project was very difficult. Working alone, Michelangelo had to lie on his back atop high scaffolding while he painted the vast ceiling.

HUMANISM

Many Renaissance scholars looked to the past for inspiration. They studied the classics – the works of the ancient Greeks and Romans. In the works of the classics they found a spirit similar to theirs that valued innovation in this world rather than looking forward to the next world after death.

A person who studied the classics was called a humanist. Humanists recreated classical styles in art, literature, and architecture. Humanists believed that by studying the classics, they could understand people and the world better. One humanist wrote,

“To each species of creature has been allotted a peculiar and instinctive gift. To horses galloping, to birds flying, comes naturally. To man only is given the desire to learn.”

The Black Death played a significant role in the development of humanism. Survivors of the Black Death felt a sense of empowerment from surviving such a horrible ordeal. They began to stress the importance and capabilities of the individuals, rather than an institution, such as the Church, in shaping their future.

The humanists emphasized the importance of human values instead of religious beliefs. Renaissance humanists were often devout Christians, but their promotion of secular, or non-religious, values often put them at odds with the church. In the Northern Renaissance, Christian Humanists sought to improve society by improving Christianity. This idea led directly to the Protestant Reformation.

Today we refer to the study of literature, philosophy and art as the humanities. The civilizations of Greece and Rome ended long ago, but they continue to influence us today.

City-States in Italy

During the Middle Ages, much of Italy was controlled by the Holy Roman Empire. As the emperors and popes fought for control, both were weakened. Several Italian cities formed states that were independent of both the empire and the church. *Venice and Florence* were two centers of power and wealth that became the cradle of the Renaissance.

The city of **Venice** became rich by collecting taxes on all merchandise brought into its harbor. Venice built huge warships that protected the valuable cargo of its merchant ships from pirate raids. Following the Black Death, there were fewer merchants in Venice, meaning that each merchant made more money from trade. With this vast wealth from trade, many of the leading families of Venice competed with one another to build the finest palaces or support the work of the greatest artists.

The Renaissance was a burst of creative energy that began in the Italian city-state of **Florence** and reached its peak under the leadership of Lorenzo de Medici, known as "Lorenzo the Magnificent." The wealth of Florence was based on commerce and banking, and Lorenzo was a member of the most powerful banking family of Florence. He was a patron (supporter) of Renaissance artists, and he took a great interest in the recovery of classical literature often found neglected in European monasteries.

Similar to Athens in ancient Greece, Florence attracted the era's greatest artists and thinkers including Dante (author of *The Divine Comedy*), *Machiavelli* (*The Prince*), Leonardo DaVinci, Michelangelo and Raphael. If ancient Athens was the cradle of Western Civilization, then Florence was the cradle of the modern world. The Renaissance spread from Florence to Rome and eventually to much of Europe.

Like the Classical artists who inspired them, Renaissance artists emphasized humanism in art. Renaissance artists still painted the religious subjects of the Middle Ages, but they also portrayed living people from their own society. Inspired by classical sculpture and new developments in artistic technique such as perspective, Renaissance art became more realistic and three-dimensional than the stiff, flat art of the Middle Ages. Artists of the Renaissance sought a balance between rigid formality and wild emotion, a return to the Classical Greek ideal of the "Golden Mean."

Crusades & the Black Death

1. Islam spread far from its birthplace in the modern nation of Saudi Arabia. By AD1095, land where Jesus Christ lived was controlled by Muslims. Christians considered this land holy and believed they, not Muslims, should control it.
2. The Crusades were a series of wars initiated by Christians, and fought against Muslims, in an attempt to win back their holy lands.
3. The Crusaders were ultimately unable to reclaim their holy lands, but the wars had another effect: Western Europeans had left their homes to fight in a distant war. The stories of the returning Crusaders encouraged their countrymen to look beyond their own villages for the first time.

Still, the Crusades probably had greater impact on Europe than on the Holy Land. The Crusades opened a trade network between the Middle East and Europe, which led to exchange of spices, fabrics, and technologies from the Islamic Empire. In many cases, roads were rebuilt to facilitate trade, and Europeans, not just Crusaders, began making the journey to the Middle East to experience the thriving Islamic Civilization.

Europeans now had first-hand knowledge of just how backward Europe seemed in comparison to the more advanced Islamic culture. This realization probably pushed Europeans to develop more rapidly to catch up with the rival Muslims. Europeans acquired important technologies from the Muslim world including the "Arabic" numbering system (from India), the compass (from China), and the astrolabe, an Arabic instrument for measuring latitude. These inventions would make it possible for European ships to sail far out to sea.

The Crusades were not a success, and ultimately lessened the power of the Pope as a political authority. Many knights left to fight in the Crusades, and many did not return, giving more power to the Kings, who gained more direct control over the people.

Almost half of the people of Western Europe died in a great sickness known as the Bubonic Plague. The plague was also referred to as "the Black Death" because the skin of diseased people turned a

dark gray color. It apparently began in China's Gobi Desert, and it killed about 35 million Asian people.

The Black Death caused people to lose their faith in God. For many, the experience was so horrible it caused them to doubt the existence of a God, or to doubt the ability of the Catholic Church to help them. As a result, the Church became less popular.

Increasingly, people who survived the Black Death wanted to enjoy life. They questioned the Church, which taught Christians to endure suffering to get a heavenly reward. Survivors of the Black Death felt a sense of power that they had survived such a horrible ordeal. They developed the belief that humans were capable of great things, and began to challenge themselves to accomplish bigger and better things.

After the Black Death, people also started to question the structures of medieval society, like feudalism. As people became more educated following the Black Death, they began to look to their classical past - the civilizations of Greece and Rome - for ideas.

The Black Death also killed off so many people in Europe that those who survived were set to make more money from the newfound trade network established by the Crusades. As spices and goods from the Middle East made their way into Europe, specifically through Italy, merchants grew wealthy. This was a significant ingredient in the development of the Renaissance in Italy.

The Reformation & Counter-Reformation

The Reformation (also called the Protestant Reformation) was a religious movement of the 1500s that began as an attempt to reform the Roman Catholic Church, but resulted in the establishment of Protestant Churches which broke away from it. The Reformation was begun by Martin Luther, a Catholic monk who nailed his 95 Theses (arguments) to the door of a Catholic church in Germany in 1517. The 95 Theses attacked the Catholic Church for the sale of indulgences, a church practice that allowed people to pay money to be forgiven of sins.

The invention of the printing press helped to spread the ideas of Luther and the Reformation. Luther believed that every person could have a direct relationship with God, so there was little need for priests. With Bibles being printed in local languages, people could now read the Bible for themselves. The Reformation diminished the authority of the clergy (church officials) and gave many kings and princes the excuse they wanted to limit the power of the Catholic Church.

The Reformation brought huge and unexpected changes to European society, changes that were reflected in the European colonies of the New World. No longer did the Roman Catholic Church control all religious thinking as it had since the Roman Empire; Christians now had a choice of religion. And, since it was possible to question and criticize the teachings of mother church, it also became possible to question other long-held beliefs in areas such as science, politics, and society.

The Counter-Reformation

The Catholic Church responded to the Reformation by launching its own Counter-Reformation which adopted important reforms of the Catholic Church. The sale of indulgences was stopped, for example. But, the Counter-Reformation also had another important task, fighting the new ideas of Protestantism.

The Counter-Reformation identified books to be burned, and it stepped up the work of the Inquisition, a system of church courts which placed heretics and sinners on trial. Torture and imprisonment were often used to extract confessions from Protestants and wayward Catholics. The Inquisition was especially strong in Spain where Christians had only recently succeeded in pushing the Muslim Moors back to North Africa.

Today, the term inquisition is used to describe any harsh or persistent interrogation.

The Printing Press

The most immediate example of radical change wrought by the printing press is the Reformation. The Reformation was brought about by the ability of the press to produce thousands of copies of Martin Luther's ninety-five theses within only a few weeks after he posted them in Wittenberg. Luther's message of dissent thus was spread throughout Germany and Europe, too late for the Catholic Church to do anything but excommunicate Luther. Between 1518 and 1525 Luther fought a *propaganda* war against the Church, and printing presses published approximately 2,100,000 copies of his sermons and tracts, effectively making permanent a schism in Western Christianity.

Block printing existed long before Gutenberg. The Chinese had been carving wood blocks to print books as early as 868, but their process had one major drawback; a new set of woodcuts had to be made for each book. Producing one book was difficult; producing a variety of books was not practical.

The invention of the printing press helped to spread the ideas of Luther and the Reformation. Luther believed that every person could have a direct relationship with God, so there was little need for priests. He believed that the Bible was the most important book, and that each individual should be able to read the Bible and interpret it themselves. Martin Luther translated the Bible into German vernacular. Others followed and translated the Bible, and with the help of the printing press the Bible was the first full book printed. With Bibles being printed in local languages, people could now read the Bible for themselves. This meant that the Catholic Church no longer had a monopoly on how people read, or interpreted, the Bible.

Copies of Gutenberg's invention spread throughout Europe, but Gutenberg did not get rich from his invention. Patents did not yet exist, so anybody could build a printing press without compensating Gutenberg for his inspiration. Some religious and government officials denounced the invention of printing because they feared that it would spread bad ideas. But they were a minority. By 1500 there were 1,700 printing presses in Europe. The presses had already produced about 20 million volumes of 40,000 different books.

Dowling, Mike, "Johann Gutenberg," available from <http://www.mrdowling.com/704-gutenberg.html>; Internet; updated Wednesday, January 5, 2005 . ©2009, Mike Dowling. All rights reserved.

Europeans Explore the World

In the second half of the 15th century, European sailors began to plan voyages that would take them beyond the limits of the world they knew. The new interest in the world came in part from the Renaissance, but the main reason was to set up new trading links with spice-producing lands in Asia.

Spices were an essential part of everyday life for the Europeans. Refrigeration had not yet been invented, so the only way to preserve meat was to salt it. Adding spices helped to hide the salty taste. The spices also concealed the taste of meat that had gone bad.

The Turks defeated the Byzantine Empire in 1453, cutting the land link between Europe and Asia. If spices were to reach Europe, a sea route to Asia had to be found. Prince Henry the Navigator of Portugal set up a school for sailors and encouraged the exploration of the African coast. In 1486, Bartholomeu Dias and his crew became the first Portuguese sailors to reach the southern tip of Africa, but he turned back because his crew was unwilling to travel any further. Ten years later, Dias helped another Portuguese sailor, Vasco da Gama, plan a voyage around Africa to India.

Christopher Columbus hoped to reach India by sailing west. When the Portuguese king would not sponsor his voyage, he asked Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain. After six years, they agreed. When Columbus reached a group of islands across the Atlantic Ocean in 1492, he was certain he had reached his goal. Columbus called the native people Indians. This is why the Caribbean islands are known as the West Indies. Columbus made three more voyages to the Caribbean, but he never realized his mistake.