

>> The growth of urban areas helped spur and encourage a renewal of culture known as the Renaissance. This 19th century reconstruction of a 15th century painting shows Florence, Italy, in 1490.



Interactive Flipped Video

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From the 1300s to the 1500s, Western Europe enjoyed a golden age in the arts and literature, known as the Renaissance. The word literally means “rebirth.” The Renaissance was a time of great creativity and change in many areas—economic, political, social, and above all, cultural.

## >> Objectives

**Describe** the characteristics of the Renaissance and understand why it began in Italy.

**Identify** Renaissance artists and explain how new ideas affected the arts of the period.

**Understand** how writers of the time addressed Renaissance themes.

**Explain** the impact of the Renaissance.

## >> Key Terms

humanism  
humanities  
Petrarch  
Florence  
patron  
perspective  
Leonardo da Vinci  
Michelangelo  
Raphael  
Baldassare  
Castiglione  
Niccolò Machiavelli  
vernacular

# The Italian Renaissance

## The Italian Renaissance

The Renaissance marked the transition between medieval and early modern times. During the Renaissance, Western Europe witnessed the growth of cities and trade, which greatly extended people’s horizons.

**A New Worldview** Most important, the Renaissance changed the way people saw themselves and their world. Spurred by a reawakened interest in the learning of ancient Greece and Rome, creative Renaissance minds set out to transform their own age. Their era, they felt, was a time of rebirth after the disorder and disunity of the medieval world.

Renaissance Europe did not really break with its medieval past. Much of the classical heritage had survived, including the Latin language and knowledge of ancient thinkers such as Euclid and Aristotle. Yet the Renaissance did produce new attitudes toward culture and learning. Unlike medieval scholars, who debated the nature of life after death, Renaissance thinkers were eager to explore the richness and variety of human experience in the here and now.



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During the Renaissance, there was a new emphasis on individual achievement. Indeed, the Renaissance ideal was a person with talents and skills in many fields.

**ASpirit of Adventure and Curiosity** The Renaissance supported a spirit of adventure and curiosity that led people to explore new worlds or to reexamine old ones. Columbus, who sailed to the Americas in 1492, represented that spirit. So, too, did the scientists who looked at the universe in new ways.

An Italian thinker, Pico della Mirandola, captured this spirit of adventure and confidence in human abilities when he wrote: "To [man] it is granted to have whatever he chooses, to be whatever he wills."

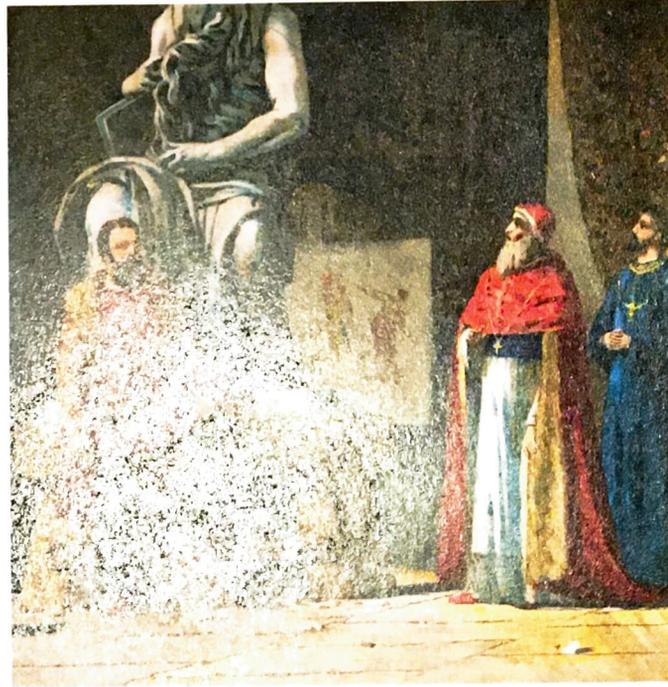
**Renaissance Humanism** At the heart of the Italian Renaissance was an intellectual movement known as **humanism**. Humanist scholars studied classical Greek and Roman cultures, hoping to use the wisdom of the ancients to increase their understanding of their own times. Though most humanists were pious Christians, they focused on worldly, or secular, subjects rather than on the religious issues that had occupied medieval thinkers.

Humanists believed that education should stimulate the individual's creative powers. They emphasized the **humanities**—subjects such as grammar, rhetoric (the study of using language effectively), poetry, and history—that had been taught in ancient Greek and Roman schools.

Francesco **Petrarch** (PEE trahrk), who lived in Florence, a city in north Italy in the 1300s, was an early Renaissance humanist. From monasteries and churches, he hunted down and assembled a library of Greek and Roman manuscripts. Through his efforts, and those who followed his example, the speeches of Cicero, the poems of Homer and Virgil, and Livy's *History of Rome* again became known to Western Europeans.

Petrarch also wrote poetry. His *Sonnets to Laura* are love poems, inspired by a woman he knew only at a distance, but their style greatly influenced writers of his time. Petrarch wrote in the **vernacular**, or everyday language of ordinary people, as well as in Latin.

**2 DESCRIBE** What were some important characteristics of the Renaissance?



>> The Church was an important patron of Renaissance art, commissioning paintings and sculptures. Here, the pope meets with artist Michelangelo.



>> Francesco Petrarch, an Italian Renaissance scholar, poet, and humanist.

# The Renaissance Begins in Italy

The Renaissance began in Italy in the mid-1300s and later spread north to the rest of Europe. It reached its height in the 1500s. The Renaissance emerged in Italy for several reasons.

**Italy's History and Geography** The Renaissance was marked by a reawakened interest in the culture of ancient Rome. Since Italy was the center of ancient Roman civilization, it was only natural for this reawakening to begin there. Architectural remains, antique statues, coins, and inscriptions were all daily reminders of the glory of ancient Rome.

Italy differed from the rest of Europe in another important way: Italy's cities had thrived during the Middle Ages. In the north, city-states like Florence, Milan, Venice, and Genoa grew into prosperous centers of trade and manufacturing. Rome and Naples also contributed to the Renaissance cultural revival.

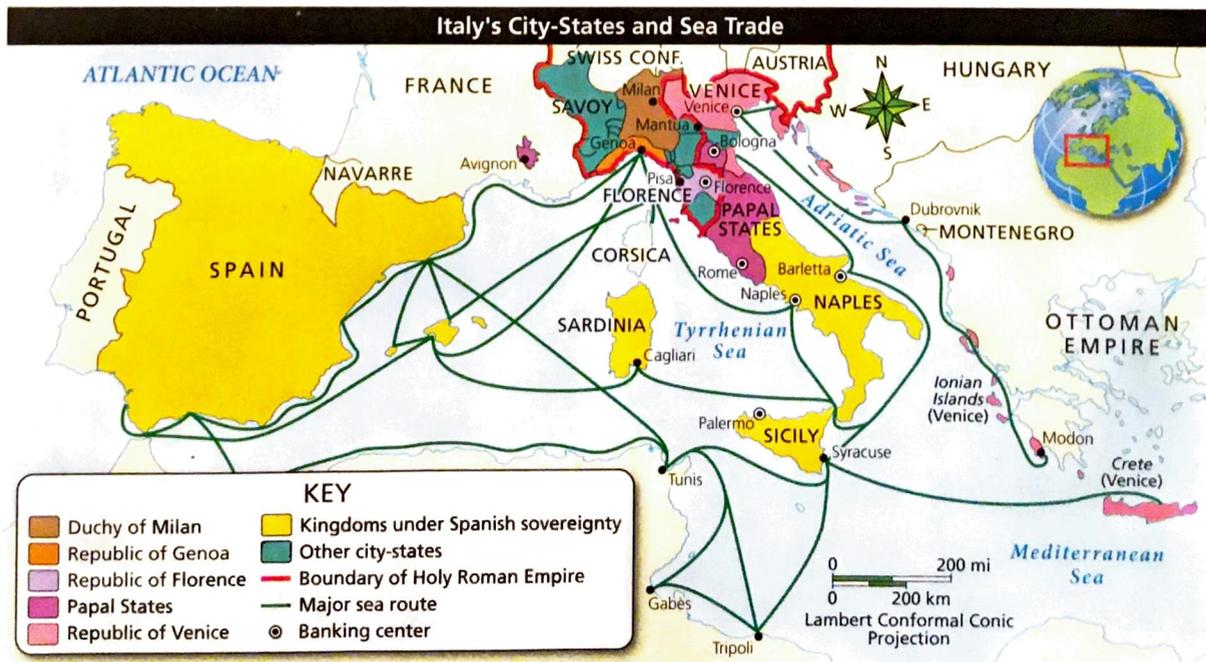
At trading ports along Italy's coastlines, ships brought goods, people, and ideas from the Muslim world, which had preserved much learning from ancient Greece and Rome. Many texts—and much knowledge—that had been lost in Europe were recovered through these trading contacts.

A class of wealthy and powerful merchants emerged in Italy's city-states, and they promoted the cultural rebirth. These merchants exerted both political and economic leadership, and their attitudes and interests helped to shape Renaissance Italy. They stressed individual achievement and spent lavishly to support the arts.

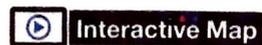
**Florence and the Medici** Florence, perhaps more than any other city, came to symbolize the Italian Renaissance. Like ancient Athens, it produced a dazzling number of gifted poets, artists, architects, scholars, and scientists in a short space of time.

In the 1400s, the Medici (MED dee chee) family of Florence organized a banking business. Their business prospered, and the family expanded into manufacturing, mining, and other ventures. Money translated into cultural and political power. Cosimo de' Medici gained control of the Florentine government in 1434, and the family continued as uncrowned rulers of the city for many years.

The best known Medici was Cosimo's grandson, Lorenzo, known as "the Magnificent." Lorenzo represented the Renaissance ideal. A clever politician, he held Florence together through difficult times. He was also a generous **patron**, or financial supporter, of the arts. At Lorenzo's invitation, poets and philosophers frequently visited the Medici palace. Artists learned



**>> Analyze Maps** The states and kingdoms of Italy lay at the center of Europe's sea trade. Why were so many banking centers located in Italy?



their craft by sketching ancient Roman statues displayed in the Medici gardens

**? IDENTIFY CAUSE AND EFFECT** Why did Italy's historic legacy make it an ideal place for the Renaissance to begin?

## Art Flourishes in the Renaissance

The Renaissance attained its most glorious expression in its paintings, sculpture, and architecture. Wealthy patrons played a major role in this artistic flowering. Popes and princes, along with successful merchants, supported the work of hundreds of artists.

**Art Reflects New Ideas and Attitudes** Renaissance art reflected humanist concerns. Like the artists of the Middle Ages, Renaissance artists portrayed religious figures, such as Mary and Jesus. However, they often set these figures against Greek or Roman backgrounds.

Painters also produced portraits of well-known figures of the day, reflecting the humanist interest in individual achievement. Renaissance artists also painted scenes from Greek and Roman mythology and depicted historical events.

Renaissance artists studied ancient Greek and Roman works and revived many classical forms. The sculptor Donatello, for example, created a life-size statue of a soldier on horseback. It was the first such figure done since ancient times.

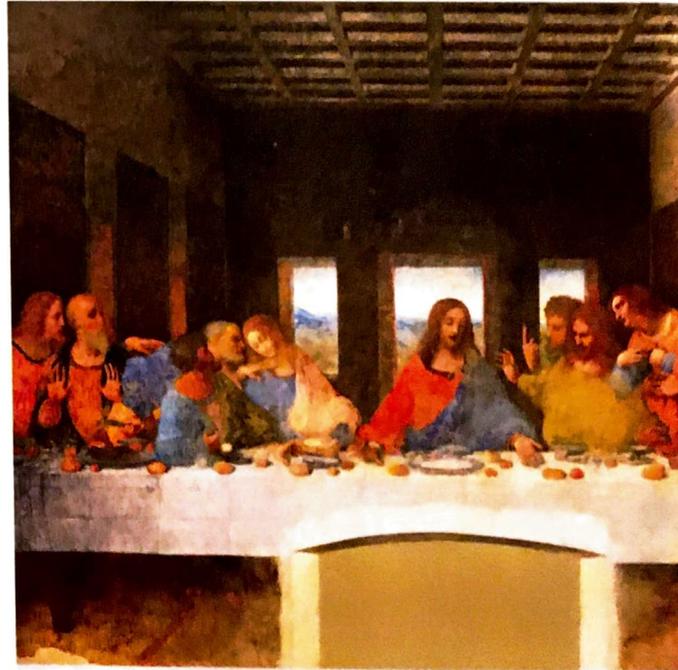
**New Techniques and Styles** Ancient Roman art was realistic, a style that was abandoned in the Middle Ages. Renaissance painters developed new techniques for representing humans and landscapes in a realistic way. They discovered the rules of **perspective**, which allowed them to represent a three-dimensional world—what people see—onto a two-dimensional surface, such as wood or canvas. By making distant objects smaller than those close to the viewer, artists gave the impression of space and depth on a flat surface.

Artists also used shadings of light and dark to make objects look round and real, making scenes more dramatic. Renaissance artists studied human anatomy and drew from live models. This made it possible to portray the human body more accurately than medieval artists had done.

**Renaissance Architecture** Renaissance architects rejected the Gothic style of the late Middle Ages. To them, it was disorderly. Instead, they adopted the



>> In this painting by Italian Renaissance artist Tintoretto, Mary Magdalene anoints the feet of Jesus. Classical columns in the background reflect the Renaissance style.



>> **Analyze Information** Leonardo da Vinci used perspective in his painting, *The Last Supper*, completed in 1498. What techniques bring the viewer's eye to the central figure of Jesus?

 **Interactive Illustration**



>> The Duomo, a dome atop a cathedral in Florence, was designed by Renaissance architect Filippo Brunelleschi. Completed in 1496, it was modeled on the dome of the Pantheon, built in ancient Rome.

 **Interactive 3-D Model**



>> **Analyze Information** Ceiling frescoes done by Michelangelo in the Vatican's Sistine Chapel in Rome. How do the paintings show aspects of Renaissance humanism?

columns, arches, and domes used by the ancient Greeks and Romans. To top the cathedral in Florence, Filippo Brunelleschi (broo nay LAYS kee) created a majestic dome, modeled on the dome of the ancient Pantheon in Rome.

Like so many other Renaissance artists, Brunelleschi had many talents. He had studied sculpture with Donatello and was an accomplished engineer, inventing many of the machines used to construct his dome.

**Leonardo da Vinci** Florence was home to many outstanding painters and sculptors. Among the most brilliant was **Leonardo da Vinci** (DAH VIHN chee), who was born in 1452. His endless curiosity fed a genius for invention. He sketched objects in nature and dissected corpses to learn how bones and muscles work. Today, people admire Leonardo's paintings for their freshness and realism. Most popular is the *Mona Lisa*, a portrait of a woman whose mysterious smile has baffled viewers for centuries.

Another masterpiece, *The Last Supper*, which shows Jesus and his disciples, is a deceptively simple painting and a brilliant example of the use of perspective. To create it, Leonardo used a new type of paint, which decayed over time. However, the painting has been restored.

Although Leonardo thought of himself as an artist, his interests extended to botany, anatomy, optics, music, architecture, and engineering. He sketched flying machines and undersea boats centuries before the first airplane or submarine was built. His many notebooks filled with sketches are a testament to his genius.

**Michelangelo** Like Leonardo, **Michelangelo** was a many-sided genius. He was a sculptor, engineer, painter, architect, and poet. Born in 1475, he came under the wing of the Medicis in Florence. As a young man, he shaped marble into masterpieces like the *Pieta*, which captures the sorrow of Mary as she cradles the dead Jesus on her knees. *David*, Michelangelo's statue of the biblical shepherd who killed the giant Goliath, recalls the harmony and grace of ancient Greek sculptures.

In 1508, Michelangelo started a new project, painting a series of murals on the vast curved ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. During the next four years, he worked to complete scenes from the biblical book of *Genesis* along with figures of prophets who had foretold the coming of Jesus.

Later, as an architect, Michelangelo drew a design for the enormous dome of St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome. Although he did not live to see it, the dome was completed based on his exact design. The dome

served as a model for many later structures, including the Capitol in Washington, D C

**Raphael** A few years younger than Leonardo and Michelangelo, **Raphael** (rah fah EL) studied the works of those great masters. His paintings blend Christian and classical styles. Among his best-known works is *School of Athens*, which pictures an imaginary gathering of great thinkers and scientists, including Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, and the Arab philosopher Averroes. In typical Renaissance fashion, Raphael included Michelangelo, Leonardo, and himself.

**? IDENTIFY** Which artistic technique was developed during the Renaissance and used in *The Last Supper*?

## New Books Reflect Renaissance Themes

Poets, artists, and scholars mingled with politicians at the courts of Renaissance rulers. A literature of “how to” books sprang up to help ambitious men and women who wanted to rise in the Renaissance world.

**Castiglione's Ideal Courtier** The most widely read of these handbooks was *The Book of the Courtier*, by **Baldassare Castiglione** (kahn teal YOH nay). In it, he describes the manners, skills, learning, and virtues that a member of the court should have.

The ideal differed for men and women. The ideal man, wrote Castiglione, is athletic but not overactive. He is good at games but not a gambler. He plays a musical instrument and knows literature and history but is not arrogant. The ideal woman offers a balance to men. She is graceful and kind, lively but reserved. She is beautiful, “for outer beauty,” wrote Castiglione, “is the true sign of inner goodness.”

**Machiavelli's Advice to Princes** **Niccolò Machiavelli** (mahk ee uh VEL ee) wrote a different kind of handbook. He had served Florence as a diplomat and had observed kings and princes in foreign courts. He had also studied ancient Roman history. In *The Prince*, published in 1513, Machiavelli offered a guide to rulers on how to gain and maintain power. It combined his personal experience of politics with his knowledge of the past.

*The Prince* did not discuss leadership in terms of high ideals, as Plato had. Instead, it looked at real rulers in an age of ruthless power politics. Machiavelli stressed that the end justifies the means. He urged rulers to use whatever methods were necessary to achieve their goals.



**>> Analyze Information** In *School of Athens*, Italian painter Raphael imagines a gathering of great thinkers and scientists. Why did he include Renaissance artists in the scene?



**>> This 1474 painting by Italian Renaissance artist Andrea Mantegna is called *The Court of Mantua*. An Italian nobleman was Mantegna's patron and commissioned art works like this.**



NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI.

*From a Print by Raphael. Original after a Picture by Verrocchio.*

>> **Analyze Information** Niccolò Machiavelli, the Italian Renaissance political philosopher and writer. Would Machiavelli have considered *The Court of Mantua* painting as realistic or not? **Why?**

Machiavelli saw himself as an enemy of oppression and corruption, but critics attacked his cynical advice. (In fact, the term “Machiavellian” came to refer to the use of deceit in politics.) Later students of government, however, argued that Machiavelli provided a realistic look at politics. His work continues to spark debate because it raises important ethical questions about the nature of government and the use of power.

**? IDENTIFY** How did Renaissance writings express realism?

## ASSESSMENT

- 1. Analyze Information** What were some of the characteristics of the Italian Renaissance?
- 2. Identify Cause and Effect** How did Italy's trade with the Muslim world contribute to the Italian Renaissance?
- 3. Analyze Information** What new ideas and techniques resulted in more realistic and accurate portrayals of people in Renaissance paintings?
- 4. Draw Conclusions** What Renaissance theme appears in Machiavelli's book *The Prince*?
- 5. Identify Central Ideas** What was the impact of the Italian Renaissance in the field of architecture?