The Renaissance (c. 1350–c. 1550)

The word **Renaissance** means *rebirth* in French. The Renaissance was a period of artistic and cultural achievement in Europe from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century. It was characterized by a number of distinctive ideas about life, specifically secularism, individualism, Humanism, and materialism. The spirit of the Renaissance influenced European society for generations, making the Renaissance truly a golden age in European history.

If the Renaissance was a rebirth of culture, you might think that the period before the Renaissance was one of gloom and darkness. Actually, historians have shown that the Medieval Era, or Middle Ages, did produce art, architecture, literature, and other ideas in law, languages, and economics that influenced Europe in the fourteenth century and provided the foundation for the Renaissance. However, during the Middle Ages, writers and philosophers viewed society as a preparation for the afterlife. Renaissance writers were interested in the present or secular world.

The table below explains some of the important differences between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance:

Differences between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance		
	Middle Ages	**Renaissance**
Purpose of art	Glorify God	Glorify the individual
Politics	Local/feudal lords ruled	Kings in England, France, and Spain centralized power
Society	Church as center of activity	Secular/material world became a vital part of life
Religion	Focus of one's life	Important but not most dominant
Education	Church promoted education to prepare students for religious life	Stressed teaching of history, arts, ethics, and public speaking

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Italian Renaissance

The Renaissance began in Florence, Italy, and subsequently spread to the rest of Italy and then to Northern Europe. Unlike other areas of Europe, Italian cities had survived the economic crises of the late Middle Ages. Italian towns had remained important centers of Mediterranean trade and boosted their production of textiles and luxury goods. Furthermore, Italy was the center of ancient Roman history. Architectural remains, statues, and amphitheatres were visible reminders to Italians of the "Glory of Rome."

The Italian City-States



At the time of the Renaissance, Italy was made up of numerous **city-states** that were geographically situated to benefit from the revival of trade that had developed as a result of the Crusades. The northern city-states of Florence, Venice, and Genoa acted as middlemen in the lucrative trade with the East. These northern, independent city-states marketed goods such as wool, silk, and other products to countries in Europe and Asia. They became prosperous centers of banking, trade, and manufacturing.

The cities of northern Italy also benefited from being able to absorb stimulating new ideas from their advanced Byzantine and Muslim neighbors on the Mediterranean Sea. By 1350, the city-states of Florence, Venice, and Genoa were urban regions with populations of about 100,000, a large figure by medieval standards. The conditions were right for these cities to undergo a cultural explosion.

At the height of the Renaissance, several city-states, including the Republic of Genoa, the Republic of Florence, the Duchy of Milan, the Venetian Republic, the Papal States, and the Kingdom of Naples, were important. Within these city-states, merchants used their wealth as steppingstones to economic and political leadership. Bankers made loans to kings and supported other commercial ventures that contributed to economic growth across Europe. Men like Francesco Sforza in Milan and Cosimo de' Medici in Florence, who gained power because of their own merit and not based on birth, became sponsors of the arts. They began to realize that their wealth enabled them to enjoy the material pleasures of life as well as fine fashion, arts, and architecture.

Florence: The Symbol of the Renaissance

Florence, the most dominant of the Italian cities, became known as the symbol of the Renaissance. Like ancient Athens, Florence attracted people of talent from other Italian city-states. The **Quattrocento,** a common historical

term for the Golden Age of the Renaissance, began in the 1400s when the Medici family of Florence exerted power over that city. The Medicis were a merchant family who amassed a fortune in the wool trade and expanded into banking. They provided Florence with political and artistic leadership.

Through marriages, the Medici family became affiliated with the major houses of Europe. Besides acquiring the "Grand Dukes of Tuscany" title, the Medici family produced three popes (Leo X, Clement VII, and Leo XI), two queens of France (Catherine de' Medici and Marie de' Medici), and several cardinals of the Roman Catholic Church. The rise of the Medicis in Florence coincided with the triumph of the capitalist class over the guild merchants and artisans. The Medicis also exerted control over the government without holding any permanent official position, ruling Florence as part of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany until the 1700s. However, the Medicis were driven from power and expelled from Florence three times: from 1433 to 1434, from 1494 to 1512, and from 1527 to 1530. The attempts (such as the Pazzi conspiracy of 1478) of the Florentine republicans to restore their former liberties ultimately failed because of the Medicis' wealth and connections.

In 1434, **Cosimo de' Medici** (1389–1464) took control of the government of Florence. He was a shrewd political leader who was also the wealthiest man of his time but chose to rule Florence by staying behind the scenes. He controlled local politics by ensuring that all eight members of the city council were loyal to him. He ruled for thirty years as a dictator and won the support of the people by championing popular causes.

Cosimo's grandson, **Lorenzo de' Medici** (1449–1492), also known as Lorenzo the Magnificent, was a clever politician who never held any public office but ruled with absolute control behind the scenes. Lorenzo represented the Renaissance ideal. He was a generous patron of the arts who saw the beauty of present life as complete fulfillment. Poets and philosophers visited the Medici palace. Lorenzo, who wrote poetry, supported artists such as Michelangelo (1475–1564) and Botticelli (1445–1510) and encouraged them to visit Florence.

Lorenzo's son, **Giovanni de' Medici** (1475–1521), who became Pope Leo X from 1513 to 1521, was also an important patron of the arts. He is remembered more for his interest in art than as a pope. He was a patron of Raphael (1483–1520), who was one of the Renaissance's greatest Italian painters. Raphael painted a number of Madonnas, mostly during his time in Florence. Giovanni also promoted the rebuilding of St. Peter's Church in Rome.

Humanism and Society

The defining concept of the Renaissance was **Humanism,** a literary movement that began in Italy during the fourteenth century. Humanism was a distinct movement because it broke from the medieval tradition of having pious religious motivation for creating art or works of literature. Humanist writers were concerned with worldly or secular subjects rather than strictly religious themes. Such emphasis on secularism was the result of a more materialistic view of the world. Unlike the Medieval Era, Renaissance people were concerned with money and the enjoyment of life and all its worldly pleasures. Humanist writers glorified the individual and believed that man was the measure of all things and had unlimited potential.

Humanism had far-reaching effects throughout Italy and Europe. The advent of Humanism ended Church dominance of written history. Humanist writers secularized the view of history by writing from a nonreligious viewpoint.

The Humanists also had a great effect on education. They believed that education stimulated the creative powers of the individual. They supported studying grammar, poetry, and history, as well as mathematics, astronomy, and music. Humanists promoted the concept of the well-rounded, or Renaissance, man who was proficient in both intellectual and physical endeavors.

Humanist writers sought to understand human nature through the study of classical writers such as Plato and Aristotle. They believed that the classical writers of ancient Greece and Rome could teach important ideas about life, love, and beauty. The revival of interest in the classical models of Greece and Rome was concentrated primarily among the educated people of the Italian city-states and focused on literature and writing.

During the Middle Ages in Western Europe, Latin was the language of the Church and educated people. The Humanist writers began to use the *vernacular,* the national languages of a country, in addition to Latin.

Some important Italian Humanists of the Renaissance included the following:

- **Giovanni Pico della Mirandola** (1463–1494) was an Italian who lived in Florence and expressed in his writings the belief that there were no limits to what man could accomplish.
- **Francesco Petrarca,** known as **Petrarch** (1304–1374), was the Father of Humanism, a Florentine who spent his youth in Tuscany and lived in Milan and Venice. He was a collector of old manuscripts, and through his efforts the speeches of Cicero and the poems of Homer and Virgil became known to Western Europe. Petrarch's works also led to the rise of the **Civic Humanists,** those individuals who were civic-minded and looked to the governments of the ancient worlds for inspiration. Petrarch also wrote sonnets in Italian. Many of these sonnets expressed his love for a beautiful woman named Laura. His sonnets greatly influenced other writers of the time.
- **Leonardo Bruni** (1369–1444), who wrote a biography of Cicero, encouraged people to become active in the political as well as the cultural life of their cities. He was a historian who today is most famous for the *History of the Florentine People,* a 12-volume work. He was also the Chancellor of Florence from 1427 until 1444.
- **Giovanni Boccaccio** (1313–1375) wrote *The Decameron.* These hundred short stories were presented within the framework of a group of young men and women who fled to a villa outside Florence to escape the Black Death. Boccaccio's work is considered to be the best prose of the Renaissance.
- **Baldassare Castiglione** (1478–1529) wrote one of the most widely read books, *The Courtier,* which set forth the criteria on how to be the ideal Renaissance man. Castiglione's ideal courtier was a well-educated, mannered aristocrat who was a master in many fields, from poetry to music to sports.

Humanism and Women

Humanism represented some advances for women. During the Middle Ages, few women could read or write outside of the convents. In the cities of the Italian Renaissance, upper-class girls received an education somewhat similar to boys. Young ladies studied the writings of ancient Greece and Rome. Some women could also speak one or two modern languages such as French or Spanish, and a small minority achieved some fame. In the latter sixteenth century, at least 25 women published books in Italy. Leonardo Bruni created an educational program for women. However, it did not include a provision for public speaking, which was essential for men but not considered vital for a woman's education. **Christine de Pisan** (1364–1430), born in Venice and the daughter of the physician to French King Charles V, was schooled by her father in Latin, philosophy, and various branches of science. In 1405, she wrote *The Book of the City of Ladies,* which was an attempt at a dialogue with male philosophers and writers who claimed that women had no capacity for education and were inferior to men in mind, body, and soul. Pisan used historical examples to show how women had been unjustly oppressed and how historic women had contributed to society. **Laura Cereta** (1469–1499) reflected the success and failure of Humanist women. Educated in a convent, she learned languages, philosophy, theology, and mathematics. However, by 15, like other educated women, she had to choose between marriage and full participation in social life, and study and withdrawal from the world. Although Cereta chose marriage, she was widowed after only eighteen months and spent the remaining twelve years studying and withdrawing from society.

Although some Renaissance women were better educated than their medieval counterparts, their education prepared them for the social functions of domestic or home life. They were expected to use their education to run a household. Educated men, however, were supposed to know how to rule and to participate in public affairs. The Renaissance ideal was different for men and women. The ideal woman offered balance to man. She was vibrant and not too reserved. She also had to be beautiful because that was a sign of goodness.

Spreading Humanism

Two inventions helped spread the ideas produced by the Humanists across Italy and the rest of Europe. About 1450, **Johannes Gutenberg** (c. 1398–1468) a German printer, invented printing through the development of a movable metal-type press. The first European book printed by machine was the **Gutenberg Bible** (1455). With the Gutenberg Bible, the European age of printing had begun. As compared to the medieval practices of hand copying or block printing books at a tediously slow pace, the movable-type press tremendously increased output and decreased costs. As books became more readily available, more people learned to read and write. The increased circulation of books by Italian writers helped to spread more of the ideas of the Renaissance to other parts of Europe.

Northern Renaissance

In the last quarter of the fifteenth century, the ideas of the Italian Renaissance spread to Northern Europe. Northern writers interpreted Italian ideas and attitudes toward classical antiquity in terms of their own traditions. These writers in Holland, England, Germany, and France were more Christian, or at least more pious, than those of Italy. The secular and pagan themes of Greece and Rome received more attention from the Italians. In Northern Europe, the Renaissance had a distinct religious character and stressed biblical and early Christian themes along with the original works of the classical world. These writers tried to create a more perfect world by combining the best elements of the ancient world with Christian culture. Unlike the Italian Humanists, who stressed secularism and individualism, the Northern Humanists focused on broad programs of social reform based on Christian ideals.

Some of the most important writers of the Northern Renaissance include the following:

- **Sir Thomas More** (1478–1535) of England, wrote his *Utopia* (which means "nowhere") in 1516 to describe a fictional, ideal society somewhere off the main land of the New World. In More's *Utopia,* all children received an education in the Greco-Roman classics. There was also social equality since all profits from business and property were held in common. *Utopia* asserts that man, through his own efforts, can construct a perfect world. More's ideas were original in that he contradicted the long-standing view that evil existed in society because man was basically corrupt. Instead, More maintained that the acquisition of private property promoted vice and corruption. If a society could reform or change the institution that molded an individual, society could improve. More played a major role in introducing Humanism into England. He was decapitated in 1535 by Henry VIII for not supporting Henry's break with the Catholic Church. In 1935 the Catholic Church made him a saint.
- **Desiderius Erasmus** (c. 1466–1536) of Holland, known as "The Prince of Humanists," dominated the intellectual thought of the northern Renaissance. His *The Praise of Folly* satirized ignorance, superstition, and many Church practices. He criticized the religious abuses of the Church and called for men to lead lives exemplifying simple Christian piety. In the book *Handbook of a Christian Knight,* he stressed the importance of Christians to act in accordance with the Christian faith rather than merely performing the necessary rites of the sacraments. Erasmus also wrote Greek and Latin editions of the Bible. Both he and Sir Thomas More are often referred to as **Christian Humanists** who criticized the Church but preached reason and reform rather than radical changes like Martin Luther.
- **William Shakespeare** (1564–1616) of England is often considered the greatest poet and playwright of all time. Shakespeare's best-known plays include the histories, *Henry IV* and *Henry V,* and the tragedies, *Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Julius Caesar,* and *Macbeth.* Shakespeare helped set the standards for the English language.
- **François Rabelais** (1494–1553) of France, a friar and classicist, wrote the romances *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel.* With tongue-in-cheek humor, he portrayed a comic world of giants whose adventures satirized education, politics, and philosophy.
- **Michel Eyquem de Montaigne** (1533–1592) of France introduced the essay as a literary form to Europe. He expressed skepticism towards accepted beliefs and urged people to reject superstition and intolerance.
- **Geoffrey Chaucer** (c. 1342–1400) of England wrote *The Canterbury Tales,* a collection of witty short stories. This is one of the early classics of English literature.

Politics of the Renaissance

Italy

During the Middle Ages, the test of a good government was whether it provided justice, law, and order. Politically, the Renaissance produced a different approach to power. During the Renaissance, the test of a good government was whether it was effective as well as able to increase the power of the ruler. The Florentine **Niccolo Machiavelli** (1469–1527) put this new approach into practice. Machiavelli served the Florentine Republic as secretary and diplomat but was dismissed from office when the Medici family came back to power in 1512. In an

attempt to regain the favor of the government, Machiavelli wrote *The Prince* (1513), a virtual instruction manual for a prince or ruler on the manner in which he should rule. This major work, which focuses on ethics and government, describes how rulers maintain power by methods that ignore right or wrong. Rulers need to accept the philosophy that "the end justifies the means." Machiavelli believed that politicians should manipulate people and use any means to gain power. He did not advocate amoral behavior, but thought that a politician's actions should not be governed by moral consideration. A prince had to combine the cunning of a fox and the power of a lion to achieve his goals. Machiavelli dedicated the book to Lorenzo de Medici in the hopes that that he would restore Italy to its former greatness. Throughout the sixteenth century, Italy was a battleground in which France and Spain fought for dominance. Machiavelli believed that Lorenzo was in the best situation to unite Italy because of his family's great influence in Florence and over the Church, since Lorenzo's uncle was Pope Leo X.

The most able practitioners of Machiavelli's approach to politics were the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century monarchs: Louis XI of France, Henry VII and Henry VIII of England, and Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain. These leaders acted according to the principles discussed in *The Prince.* They invested in their government a strong sense of authority and leadership. In the sixteenth century, **Jean Bodin's** (1530–1596) work, *The Six Books of the Commonwealth,* outlined the first systematic and clear conception that absolute sovereignty resided in the nation, regardless of the forms of government. The "state" was an absolute sovereign that tolerated no rival legal authority above it except God. Bodin's ideas would contribute to the rise of absolutism in Europe.

France

Although France won the **Hundred Years' War** (1337–1453), a series of wars fought between France and England, the French country was left devastated. Farmland was destroyed and many French nobles lost their lives. Yet, the French monarchy became stronger since the war had weakened the power of the nobles. A revival of commerce, leading to the rise of the *bourgeoisie* (middle class), further strengthened the power of the king. Throughout the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the French kings consolidated their power. Louis XI, who ruled from 1461 to 1483, was the most successful of these monarchs. He curbed feudal anarchy, set up an efficient government, and is considered to be the architect of French absolutism.

England

After the Hundred Years' War, England struggled to rebuild its economy. Unfortunately, the end of this war led to a civil war, known as the **War of the Roses** (1455–1485), between the House of York (symbolized by a white rose) and the House of Lancaster (symbolized by a red rose). After a 30-year struggle, a Lancasterian, Henry Tudor (1457–1509), gained control of England and his line ruled England until the seventeenth century. Called **Henry VII**, he reestablished the monarch's authority over the nobles and promoted trade and prosperity. His most famous accomplishment was the establishment of the **Star Chamber,** a court to check aristocratic power. There was no jury, and torture was a common remedy for all problems.

Spain

Spain, unlike France and England, was divided into many separate kingdoms. The various groups who lived on the peninsula lacked a common tradition. Muslims (Moors) and Jews had significantly influenced Spanish society. Until the 1100s, the Moors had controlled most of the country and many Jews had achieved high positions in finance, government, and medicine. The **Reconquista** was nearly an 800-year struggle to drive the Muslims out of Spain. By the late 1400s, the Muslims held only the kingdom of Granada. **Ferdinand V of Aragon** (1452–1516) married **Isabella of Castile** (1451–1504), in 1469, thus uniting the Christian kingdom of Spain and laying the foundation for the final stage of the Reconquista. In 1492 (the same year that Columbus landed in America) the combined armies of these kingdoms drove the Moors from Granada and from Europe, bringing the entire Iberian peninsula under Christian leadership. Ferdinand and Isabella worked together to consolidate royal authority and to strengthen the Spanish kingdom, although during their reign, Spain remained a loose confederation of separate states. Ferdinand and Isabella used the *hermandades,* a collection of local police forces, to

strengthen royal justice. They also used the Church as a vehicle of state authority, reviving in 1478 the **Inquisition,** a religious court controlled by the monarchy. The Inquisition, which ultimately led to the expulsion of all Jews, monitored and persecuted those who were suspected of heresy, especially converted Jews, known as the *marranos* or *conversos.* By the end of their reign, Ferdinand and Isabella had established a strong central government, which enabled Spain to become a leader in the exploration of Asia and the discovery of the New World in the Americas.

Artistic Achievements of the Renaissance

Renaissance art has the following characteristics:

- It imitates the classical work of ancient Greece and Rome and rejects the medieval forms of art.
- It is very realistic. Artists studied human anatomy in detail and worked from live models. They also created the technique of three-dimensional perspective.
- It portrays secular themes and glorifies the achievements of the individual.

Some Renaissance artists include the following:

- **Giotto** (1267–1337) was born in Florence and helped to make it the first great center of the Renaissance. He is famous for his frescoes (paintings on walls), such as *St. Francis Preaching to the Birds.* His realistic paintings replaced the artificial two-dimensional art represented in the Middle Ages. He also designed a bell tower, usually called Giotto's Tower, for the Cathedral of Florence.
- **Lorenzo Ghiberti** (1378–1455) was a Florentine sculptor. He is famous for the bronze doors of the Baptistery, a great cathedral in Florence. The ten panels on the door depict realistic scenes from the Bible and took 21 years to complete.
- **Donatello** (1386–1466) was the most influential Florentine artist before Michelangelo. He revived the classical figure of the nude body with its balance and self-awareness. His *David* was the first nude statue of the Renaissance.
- **Filippo Brunelleschi** (1377–1446) was born in Florence and was one of the pioneers of early Renaissance architecture in Italy. His most prestigious work was the Cathedral of Florence in 1434 because of its dome or cupola, which was supported without scaffolding, columns, arches, or pilasters. The dome was the biggest innovation in Renaissance architecture and the first to be completed in Western Europe since the fall of the Roman Empire.
- **Leonardo da Vinci** (1452–1519) is today known as an example of a "Renaissance man," an expert in many fields who has a wide range of interests. He was a painter, sculptor, inventor, architect, musician, engineer, and scientist. He dissected human corpses to see how muscles and bones worked. His sketchbooks include plans for a flying machine and underwater boats. His paintings also include *The Last Supper,* which was painted with oil on a plaster wall. His most famous painting is the *Mona Lisa.*
- **Michelangelo** (1475–1564), like da Vinci, was skilled in many areas. He was a sculptor, engineer, poet, painter, and architect. His murals of biblical figures and scenes on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel are his most famous works. His sculptured masterpiece of the fourteen-foot statue of *David* in the city of Florence is considered to have been a propaganda tool to inspire the citizens in their struggle against Milan. Michelangelo also carved the *Pieta,* showing Mary grieving over the dead Jesus, and designed the dome of St. Peter's Church in Rome.
- **Raphael** (1438–1520) worked in Florence and Rome. He is considered to be the greatest painter of the Renaissance. Although he is famous for his beautiful Madonnas, especially *Sister Madonna,* his fresco, *The School of Athens,* is considered to be the greatest masterpiece of Renaissance art. Raphael's realistic portrayal of Aristotle and Plato, combined with God, the Father, holding the globe and St. Augustine dictating *The City of God,* exemplify the realistic religious themes of the Renaissance. His use of proportion and perspective adds to the quality of the fresco.



Raphael's fresco, *The School of Athens.*

- **Frans Hals** (c. 1580–1666) painted portraits of everyday life that captured the spirit of the Dutch people. His well-known work, *The Laughing Cavalier,* is probably one of the most reproduced paintings in art.
- **Rembrandt** (1606–1669) is considered the greatest Dutch painter. He is famous for his realism and dramatic use of light and shade. His paintings include religious subjects and scenes from everyday life. His most famous works include *The Night Watch* and *Aristotle Contemplating a Bust of Homer.*
- **El Greco** (The Greek) (1541–1614) was a Spanish artist. He painted religious scenes, such as *The Assumption of the Virgin,* and landscapes, such as *View of Toledo.*
- **Albrecht Dürer** (1471–1528) was a German artist who is famous for his metal and wood engravings. His most noteworthy work is *Praying Hands.*

Chronology of the Renaissance

1337–1453	Hundred Years' War between England and France. The war leaves both nations crippled.
c. 1353	Boccaccio's *Decameron* becomes the first great prose work of the Renaissance.
c. 1390	Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* becomes one of the first works written in the vernacular (language of the people) of England, his homeland. Chaucer had become familiar with the works of Dante and Boccaccio while traveling in Italy.
1434	Cosimo de' Medici establishes his family's dominance in Florence.
1436	Filippo Brunelleschi finishes the Cathedral of Florence.
c. 1450	German Johannes Gutenberg revolutionizes the world of the written word with the introduction of the movable-type printing press.
1453	Ottoman Turks capture Constantinople; end of the Byzantine Empire.
1455–1485	The English House of York and House of Lancaster fight each other for political control in the War of the Roses.
1469	The marriage of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon.
1478	The Inquisition is introduced into Spain to control the activity of the *marranos* (Jews who had converted to Christianity).
1485	The Tudor dynasty is established in England with the end of the War of the Roses.
1492	Completion of the Reconquista; expulsion of the Jews from Spain.
1501–1504	Michelangelo creates the sculpture *David*.
1503–1506	Leonardo da Vinci labors on his signature piece, the *Mona Lisa*.
1508–1512	Michelangelo paints the Sistine Chapel ceiling.
1509	Erasmus publishes *In Praise of Folly*.
1513	Niccolo Machiavelli writes *The Prince*.
1516–1519	Desiderius Erasmus produces his Greek and Latin translations of the New Testament.
1527	The sack of Rome by Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V.

Sample Multiple-Choice Questions

1. Which situation contributed most to the beginning of the Renaissance?

   A. Strong rulers censored new ideas.
   B. Europe became increasingly isolated from other regions.
   C. The emphasis on religious uniformity increased.
   D. A wealthy class that supported the arts emerged.
   E. Europe began to discover the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas.

2. An important characteristic of Renaissance Humanists was their emphasis on

   A. accepting ideas based on Confucian thought.
   B. the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.
   C. magic and alchemy.
   D. the idea that the glorification of the individual was sinful.
   E. classical Roman and Greek writings.



3. The above painting of the painter known as Masaccio demonstrates what characteristics of Renaissance art?

   A. Elaborate ornamentation
   B. Realistic portrayal of individuals
   C. One-dimensional perspective of individuals
   D. Lack of inner perspective
   E. Gothic style of color and detail

4. Which of the following families used its powerful influence in banking to promote the creative artists in Florence during the Renaissance?

   A. Medici
   B. Sforza
   C. Donatello
   D. Bellini
   E. Condottieri

5. The Northern Humanists were different from the Southern Humanists because they emphasized

   A. economic gain and materialism.
   B. social reform based on Christian ideals.
   C. pagan virtues.
   D. scholastic dogma over reason.
   E. emphasis on democracy as a political system.

6. The best description of Machiavelli's *The Prince* is

   A. a satire on sixteenth-century politics.
   B. a call for Italian nationalism.
   C. an outline of constitutional principles for establishing a government.
   D. a handbook on politics as practiced in Renaissance Italy.
   E. a brief history of city-states of Florence.

7. "Tedious were it to recount, how citizen avoided citizen, how among neighbors was scarce found any that shewed fellow-feeling for another, how kinsfolk held aloof, and never met, or but rarely; enough that this sore affliction entered so deep into the minds of men and women, that in the horror thereof brother was forsaken by brother, nephew by uncle, brother by sister, and oftentimes husband by wife; nay, what is more, and scarcely to be believed, fathers and mothers were found to abandon their own children, untended, unvisited, to their fate, as if they had been strangers. . . . "

   The author of this passage was

   A. Baldassare Castiglione
   B. François Rabelais
   C. Leonardo Bruni
   D. Giovanni Boccaccio
   E. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola

8. Which of the following themes was dominant in the work of Erasmus?

   A. A complete break with the Catholic Church
   B. Support of classical literature
   C. A belief in the monastic life of contemplation and divorce from the material world
   D. A belief in scholasticism
   E. The importance of Christian education for moral and intellectual development

9. Renaissance men's view of educated women was that they should

   A. be encouraged and given an equal place in society.
   B. have a voice in the affairs of the city.
   C. not be encouraged in any manner.
   D. be allowed to add a social touch to the household, but otherwise remain subservient to men.
   E. be treated as equals in all activities.

10. A basic idea contained in Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* was that

    A. evil exists because men and women are basically corrupt.
    B. political leaders must learn how to manipulate their subjects.
    C. social order is only an unattainable ideal.
    D. corruption and war are due to acquisitiveness and private property.
    E. government derives power from a social contract with the people.

Multiple-Choice Questions: Answers and Explanations

1. **D.** In the fifteenth century, a wealthy class of merchants and bankers, such as the Medici family who had amassed large fortunes in Florence, became the major sponsors of Renaissance artists. Art was used as a way to glorify the success of the sponsors and their families. Strong Renaissance rulers were more concerned with developing countries into nations than with censoring new ideas. The Catholic Church, however, was more concerned with censorship, such as with Galileo and Copernicus. Religious uniformity declined in the Renaissance. Writers such as Erasmus criticized some of the abuses of the Church. These criticisms gave rise to the Protestant Reformation, which destroyed the religious unity of Europe. Humanism rejected the Scholastic philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas and focused on the writings of the Greeks and Romans. Europe became less isolated as it increased trade with Asia and explored new lands in the Americas.

2. **E.** Renaissance Humanists and writers emphasized classical Roman and Greek writings, examining the worldly subjects that the Romans and Greeks had studied. These Humanist writers hoped to use these ancient writings to increase their knowledge about their own times. Petrarch, a Humanist writer, saw the fourteenth century as a time of rebirth for ancient Roman culture. Humanism was not concerned with the ideas of Confucius nor with magic and alchemy. A basic tenet of Humanism was the importance of the individual as a unique personality capable of fulfilling all of his potential.

3. **B.** *Masaccio*, means "fat, clumsy or messy." Masaccio was the first great painter of the Quattrocento period of the Italian Renaissance art. He rejected the elaborate ornamentation and the Gothic style of bold colors. Masaccio used linear perspective and a more natural mode that provided a more realistic image of the individual. His self portrait shows a subject who is proportionally presented with a distinct individual identity, unlike the cardboard figures of the Middle Ages. His realistic art inspired great artists of the Renaissance such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Raphael.

4. **A.** The Medici family dominated Florence. They were a merchant family that amassed a fortune in trade and expanded into banking. Through their wealth, the Medici family provided Florence with political and artistic leadership. The Medicis supported artists such as Michelangelo, Botticelli, and Raphael. Through the efforts of the Medici family, Florence became the center of the Renaissance. The Medicis dominated politics in Florence throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The Sforza family controlled Milan. Donatello and Bellini were artists from Florence and Venice, respectively. *Condottieri* was the term used for Italian mercenary leaders or warlords that were contracted by the Italian city-states and the papacy.

5. **B.** The Northern Humanists promoted social reform based on Christian ideals as a way to develop an ethical way of life combining the best elements of classical and Christian cultures. The Dutch writer Erasmus ridiculed upper-class privileges in the hope of getting people to think about reforms in society. He stressed reason over scholastic dogma. Sir Thomas More of England wrote about an ideal country (*Utopia*) that was free from war, injustices, and poverty. His works did not consider democracy a viable form of government. The Northern Humanists based their program on Christian ideals, not economic gain and materialism. They stressed biblical and Christian themes and not the pagan themes characterized by the Italian Renaissance.

6. **B.** Machiavelli wrote *The Prince* to describe the competitive politics of the Italian city-states in the sixteenth century. Machiavelli was writing his book at the time when Italy was being invaded by the Spanish and French. He was calling for a strong leader to unite Italy and defeat the foreign invaders who were destroying the country. *The Prince* is neither a satire nor a plan for constitutional government. The book does not describe the politics of the Renaissance and does not provide a detailed history of Florence. Machiavelli calls for a strong leader who will use whatever means necessary to achieve success and help Italy restore its greatness.

7. **D.** Giovanni Boccaccio wrote *The Decameron.* These short stories describe the breakdown of social order during the Black Death. Groups of men and women fled from Florence to escape the bubonic plague. In his short stories, Boccaccio describes how individuals abandoned all forms of civilization in order to survive. Baldassare Castiglione wrote a handbook on how courtiers should behave. François Rabelais wrote *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel,* which satirized political life in France in the sixteenth century. Leonardo Bruni wrote a 12-volume work on the history of Florence. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's writings focused on the ability of an individual to achieve success.

8. **E.** One of the fundamental themes in all of Erasmus' scholarly works was the importance of Christian education for moral and intellectual development. As a Dutch Humanist, Erasmus rejected the paganism of classical literature and advocated the "philosophy of Christ." He had been forced to enter a monastery as a young orphan and disliked the monastic life. He also disliked the formalism of scholastic philosophy and the laws of the Church. Although Erasmus was critical of the Church, he remained loyal to it.

9. **D.** During the Renaissance, women did receive a better education, but this education was intended to adorn the home of the husband, not to challenge men intellectually. Renaissance men believed that educated women violated nature and thus ceased to be women. They felt they were a threat to male dominance and did not want them to have an equal place in society or a voice in the affairs of the city, or to be encouraged in any manner.

10. **D.** Sir Thomas More promoted the concept that corruption and war were due to society's flawed institutions, such as ownership of private property. His approach was extremely radical in that he contended that society, not the inherently corrupt nature of humanity, was responsible for corruption. Machiavelli, not More, stated that political leaders should learn how to manipulate their subjects. Exemplified by his *Utopia,* More believed that society could be perfected through the reform of the social institutions that mold the individual. John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau, not More, promoted the belief that government was a contract between government and the people.