The Renaissance

Introduction

Renaissance is the French word for rebirth. It is the time of change that happened in Europe between the 14th and 16th centuries. It was an age of growth in Europe. New, powerful city states emerged. A new middle class had more and more money to spend. Great artists, writers and thinkers lived during this time. During the Middle Ages many people who lived in the countryside worked on the land that they got from the noble-men. In return, they were protected by them.

City life changed towards the end of the Middle Ages. There was a small middle class population and people had more freedom than in the countryside.

The Plague

Between the middle and the end of the 14th century, the plague, also called “Black Death” killed almost half of Europe’s population. It spread most rapidly in the larger cities where many people lived.

This led to economic depression. Merchants and traders had fewer people to sell their goods to, so they lost a lot of money.

The New Middle Class

When the plague slowly decreased in the 15th century, the population in Europe began to grow. A new middle class emerged — bankers, merchants and tradespeople had a new market for their services.

People became wealthier and had more than enough money to spend. They began to build larger houses, buy more expensive clothes and get interested in art and literature.

The middle class population also had more free time, which they spent learning foreign languages, reading, playing musical instruments and studying other things of interest.

The Renaissance was especially strong in Italian cities. They became centres of trade, wealth and education. Many cities, like Venice, Genoa and Florence had famous citizens who were very rich and gave the city a lot of money.
Exploration and Trade

Exploring the seas and sailing to other continents became very important during this era. Sailors had better instruments and maps, ships were built so that they could endure longer journeys. Most of them had big sails that were driven by strong winds.

Portuguese navigators started to explore the western coast of Africa from which they brought gold and ivory home. Later on they discovered that sailing around the southern tip of Africa would bring them to India and Asia. These places offered spices, valuable cloths and silk. Explorers brought them home and sold them to wealthy families in Europe.

After Columbus had discovered America in 1492, many Spanish, French and Italian explorers followed. The Spanish were the most successful. They conquered much of Central and South America and brought home gold and silver from the Inca and Aztec empires.

Printing

In 1445 the German Gutenberg invented the printing press. He changed the lives of millions of people throughout Europe. For the first time, bookmaking became cheap and Gutenberg was able to print many books very quickly.

In the Middle Ages books were very expensive because they were written by hand. Only priests and monks could read them because most of them were written in Latin.

In the Renaissance the middle classes had the money to buy books but they wanted books that they could read in their own language. A publishing boom broke out and buying and selling books began to prosper in many European countries. People bought travel books, romances, poetry and almanacs. They read more and became better educated.

Humanism

The printing of books led to a new way of thinking. Scholars of the Renaissance returned to the writings of Greek and Roman philosophers. These writings are called the “classics”. More and more scholars learned to read Greek and Latin and studied old manuscripts on topics like science, art and life.

During the Middle Ages people were guided by the church, which was against wealth, trading goods and other worldly interests. Humanists, however, did not believe that...
The Renaissance

much in religion. They thought that money and trade were important in life and that citizens needed a good general education.

During the Renaissance a churchman named Martin Luther changed Christianity. In 1517 he wrote a list of things that he didn’t like about the church and posted them on the door of his church in Wittenberg, Germany.

Luther also wanted the church to hold masses in German instead of Latin so that people could understand them better. Many other Christians agreed that the church was in need of change. Luther and others founded new religions and split away from the Roman Catholic church.

Art and Architecture

In the Renaissance artists and architects used mathematics to plan their works. They discovered that many objects in nature have a certain proportion. They called this the golden mean. It is often found in the shape of a leaf or in the form of buildings. Many of them found out that the human body also displayed proportions. Renaissance architects built new buildings that were symmetrical.

Artists of the Renaissance started to experiment with perspective in their works. They learned that if they made an object smaller and put it in the background of a picture it appeared farther away. They also painted with more realism than earlier artists.

Many great artists of that time started their studies or worked in Florence. Michelangelo was the most famous artist of the Renaissance. He studied painting and sculpture in Florence, where he created his famous sculpture of David for the Florence cathedral. In his later life he painted the ceiling of the Sistine chapel in the Vatican—probably his most famous painting.

Florence

Although changes took place everywhere in Europe, Florence was the centre of the Renaissance. Fifteenth century Florence was an exciting place to be. At that time the city was independent and had a population of about 60,000.

12 guilds controlled trade in the city. The members of these guilds were very rich and held high positions in the city’s government. They also gave the city a lot of money.

Most powerful among the guilds were the textile workers. Florence was the centre of cloth making and cloth trading. Wool of excellent quality came from England. In Florence the raw material was cleaned, spun, dyed and woven. The finished material was very expensive and sold in other European cities.

Another source of income was banking. Many families of Florence were successful bankers. They even produced a gold coin, the “florin”, which became popular in all of Europe. The most famous bankers were the Medici. They controlled Florence up to the beginning of the 18th century.
Leonardo da Vinci (1452—1519) was one of the most famous people of the Renaissance period. He was not only a famous painter but also studied science, designed machines and drew plans for new inventions.

Young Leonardo grew up near Florence and studied painting with the great painters of the city. After a few years in Milan, where he painted for a famous duke, he came back to Florence and painted a new hall for the city council.

In his paintings da Vinci experimented with many techniques that artists hadn’t used before. For example, he started to use perspective in his paintings. He put small objects in the background to make them appear far away. He also experimented with light, shade and colours.

The Adoration of the Kings is an unfinished painting. You can only see the figures as outlines of light and dark areas. In this painting he shows three kings who worship the Christ child.

Da Vinci finished painting The Last Supper in 1497. The painting shows the last meal of Jesus Christ and his 12 apostles. In the picture Jesus has just announced that one of them will betray him. He created this famous scene on a wall of a dining room in a monastery.

Mona Lisa is probably the most famous painting ever painted. It is a portrait of the young wife of a Florentine silk merchant. It shows a young woman with her famous smile sitting on a balcony high above a landscape.

Da Vinci’s other interests

Leonardo was interested in mechanics and he had ideas that no one had thought about before. For example, he drew plans for an airplane, a helicopter and a parachute. He sometimes worked as an engineer or military architect and designed tanks, machine guns and bridges that could be moved.

Leonardo showed great interest in the human body. He dissected dead people in order to study bones and other parts of the body. He also made drawings to show how the human body worked. Like other artists, da Vinci was interested in the proportions of the human body. In his drawing of the Vitruvian Man, he showed that a human being fits perfectly into a circle and a square. It is one of the most famous pictures of European art.

Nature and the growth of plants and trees was also one of da Vinci’s fields of interests. He tried to find out what made birds fly.

Later on, da Vinci started writing books on many of these topics but never completed them. They were forgotten but when they appeared again centuries later, they showed that Leonardo da Vinci was much ahead of his time.
The ceiling of *The Sistine Chapel* in the Vatican was painted by Michelangelo between 1508 and 1512.

Michelangelo’s *The Last Judgement* finished in 1541. Many people didn’t like it because it shows naked figures.

*The Vitruvian Man* by Leonardo da Vinci shows how human beings have proportions.

*The Ponte Vecchio* is the most famous bridge in Florence with many shops built on it.
The Renaissance

Answer the following questions!

When and where did the Renaissance take place? ______________________________________________________

What happened when the plague spread across Europe? ___________________________________________________

What kind of people belonged to the new middle class? ____________________________________________________

Which city became the centre of the Renaissance in Italy? _________________________________________________

Why could explorers travel longer distances? _______________________________________________________________

Why was India and Asia so important to Europeans? _______________________________________________________

Which places did the Spanish explore and conquer? _______________________________________________________

How did Gutenberg change the lives of many Europeans? ___________________________________________________

What kind of books did people in Europe want to read? ____________________________________________________

What was humanism and how did it change the lives of the people? __________________________________________

What did Renaissance artists experiment with? ______________________________________________________________

Which guilds were very important in Florence? ____________________________________________________________

Which was the most famous family in Florence? __________________________________________________________

Name three famous paintings of Leonardo da Vinci: _________________________________________________________

What else was he interested in? ________________________________________________________________

Why did people, many centuries, later think he was ahead of his time? ___________________________________
1 Renaissance is the French word for
a. destruction
b. rebirth
c. the plague
d. middle class

2 Before the Renaissance merchants couldn’t sell their goods because
a. the plague killed half of Europe.
b. cloth was too expensive
c. cloth was of bad quality
d. bankers didn’t give them any money

3 Portuguese navigators explored
a. the southern part of Europe
b. the western part of Africa
c. North America
d. South America

4 What did traders bring back from Asia?
 a. new books
 b. meat
 c. gold and silver
 d. spices and cloth

5 The “classics” are about
 a. Italian artists
 b. French singers
 c. Greek and Roman writers
 d. German bookmakers

6 Martin Luther
 a. thought the church should be changed
 b. became the first German pope
 c. was a priest in Italy
 d. liked what the church did

7 The most powerful city of the Renaissance was
a. Paris
b. Rome
c. Venice
d. Florence

8 Michelangelo studied painting and
 a. mechanics
 b. science
 c. literature
 d. sculpture

9 The Medici were famous
 a. priests
 b. bankers
 c. artists
 d. traders

10 Da Vinci’s Last Supper shows Jesus with
 a. his twelve apostles
 b. Maria
 c. God
 d. Holy Peter

11 Perspective in art means to put
 a. all objects in the background
 b. large objects in the background
 c. small objects in the background
 d. small objects at the top

12 People read a lot during the Renaissance because
 a. there was a lot of paper
 b. they had nothing else to do
 c. traders brought them home from India
 d. books became very cheap
The Renaissance

What do you know about the Renaissance?
Write information into the boxes

The Middle Class:

Humanism:

Art:

Religion:

Exploration and Trade:
<table>
<thead>
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The Renaissance was an age of _______________ in Europe. A new mid-
dle class __________________ after the _____________ had killed
millions of people. Many people became __________ because they
had more money to spend. They bought clothes made of valuable
______________ and paintings from well-known artists. They also read a
lot because books were written in their own ______________ and not
in Latin any more.

The cities became the centres of the Renaissance. They had famous
________________ who gave them much money. Bankers and
______________ were the wealthiest people during this time in his-
tory.

Explorers were able to ____________ longer distances with the help
of boats that had sails. They also had better instruments and _________.
Many explorers tried to find a route to India and other parts of Asia
where they could buy _______________ and silk.

The _________________ in the Renaissance did not believe that much
in religion and god. They thought that being rich and having money was
more important. Martin Luther, a German _______________ , wrote
a list of things he didn’t like about the church and _______________ them on the door of his own church in Germany.

Artists found new ways of _______________ pictures. They experi-
mented with _______________ and painted with realism. One of
the most famous was Leonardo da Vinci, who also drew plans for new
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Complete the text by filling in the words
from the box !

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Look for 12 words about the Renaissance (ReLUReLUReLU) and mark them.
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Crossword—Renaissance

Across
4. the twelve people that Jesus chose to teach his religion
5. rich
6. to cut up the body of a dead person or an animal
7. a person who plans and builds roads, bridges, and buildings
10. a group of people who have the same job
12. famous artist of the Renaissance
14. a German who didn't like what the church said
15. from another country
16. an object made of stone, wood or another material by an artist

Down
1. place where monks live
2. a person who buys and sells things
3. an illness that leads to death and spreads very quickly
8. to lead
9. an intelligent person
11. material used for making clothes
13. a book that is made each year and has information about many things
The Renaissance was an age of growth in Europe. A new middle class emerged after the plague had killed millions of people. Many people became wealthier because they had more money to spend. They bought clothes made of valuable silk and paintings from well-known artists. They also read a lot because books were written in their own language and not in Latin any more.

The cities became the centres of the Renaissance. They had famous citizens who gave them much money. Bankers and merchants were the wealthiest people during this time in history.

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Artists found new ways of painting pictures. They experimented with perspective and painted with realism. One of the most famous was Leonardo da Vinci, who also drew plans for new machines and tried to find out a lot about the human body.
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Word Search -Key

Multiple Choice—Key

1b - 2a - 3b - 4d - 5c - 6a - 7d - 8d - 9b - 10a - 11c - 12d
The Renaissance

Crossword - Key

1. M
2. M
3. P
4. APOSTLES
5. WEALTHY
6. DISSECT
7. ENGINEER
8. GUILD
9. SCHOOL
10. T
11. COL
12. MICHELANGELO
13. T
14. LUTHER
15. FOREIGN
16. SCULPTURE
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