The Renaissance and Reformation

If YOU lived there...
You live in Florence, Italy, in the 1400s. Your father, a merchant, has just hired a tutor from Asia Minor to teach you and your sisters and brothers. Your new teacher starts by stating, “Nothing good has been written in a thousand years.” He insists that you learn to read Latin and Greek so that you can study Roman and Greek books that were written long ago.

What can you learn from these ancient books?

Building Background The end of the Middle Ages brought important changes to European politics and society. These changes set the stage for an exciting new period of learning and creativity. During this period, new ideas influenced the arts, science, and attitudes toward religion.

The Renaissance
Do you ever get the urge to do something creative? If so, how do you express your creativity? Do you like to draw or paint? Maybe you prefer to write stories or poems or create music.

At the end of the Middle Ages, people across Europe found the urge to be creative. Their creativity was sparked by new ideas and discoveries that were sweeping through Europe at the time. This period of creativity, of new ideas and inspiration, is called the Renaissance (ren-uh-sahns). It lasted from about 1350 through the 1500s. Renaissance is French for “rebirth.” The people who named this period believed it represented a new beginning, or rebirth, in Europe’s history and culture.

New Ideas
The Renaissance started in Italy. During and after the Crusades, Italian cities such as Florence and Venice became rich through trade. Goods from faraway Asia moved through these cities...
goods made the people who lived curious about the larger world. At the
time, scholars from other parts of the
came to Italy. They brought books
by ancient Greeks and Romans.
Inspired by these books and by the
ruins around them, some people in
became interested in ancient cultures.
people began reading works in Greek
Latin and studying subjects that had
taught in Greek and Roman schools.

These subjects, known as the humanities,
included history, poetry, and grammar.
Increased study of the humanities led to a
new way of thinking and learning known
as humanism.

Humanism emphasized the abilities
and accomplishments of human beings.
The humanists believed that people were
capable of great things. As a result, they
admired artists, architects, leaders, writers,
scientists, and other talented individuals.

**Major Trade Routes, 1350–1500**

**Geography Skills**

**Movement** Traders brought
goods to Europe from distant
lands, including Africa and Asia.
1. Identify Which seas served
as routes for trade?
2. Analyze How do you think
the geographic location of
the Italian trading cities
helped them control trade in
the Mediterranean region?

**Florence** Florence was a banking and trade center. The
city's wealthy leaders used their money to beautify Florence.

**Venice** Venice was the most successful of the Italian
trading cities. Traders brought goods to Venice from
as far away as China and India.
Renaissance Art

The Renaissance was a period of talented artistic achievements. Artists of the period created new techniques to improve their work. For example, they developed the technique of perspective, a method of showing a three-dimensional scene on a flat surface so that it looks real.

Many Renaissance artists were also humanists. Humanist artists valued the achievements of individuals. These artists wanted their paintings and sculptures to show people's unique personalities. One of the artists best able to show this sense of personality in his works was the Italian Michelangelo (mee-kay-LAHN-jay-loh). He was both a great painter and sculptor. His statues, like the one of King David above, seem almost to be alive.

Another famous Renaissance artist was Leonardo da Vinci. Leonardo achieved the Renaissance goal of excelling in many areas. He was not only a great painter and sculptor but also an architect, scientist, and engineer. He sketched plants and animals as well as inventions such as a submarine.

He collected knowledge about the human body. Both Leonardo and Michelangelo are examples of what we call Renaissance people—people who can do practically anything well.

Renaissance Literature

Like artists, Renaissance writers express the attitudes of the time. The most famous Renaissance writer is probably the English dramatist William Shakespeare. He wrote excellent poetry, but Shakespeare is best known for his plays. They include more than 30 comedies, histories, and tragedies. In his plays, Shakespeare turned popular stories into great drama. His writing shows a deep understanding of human nature and skillfully expresses the thoughts and feelings of his characters. For these reasons Shakespeare's plays are still highly popular in many parts of the world.

Renaissance writings were read and enjoyed by a larger audience than earlier writings had been. This change was largely due to advances in science and technology such as the printing press.
Renaissance Science

Some of the ancient works rediscovered during the Renaissance dealt with science. For the first time in centuries, Europeans could read about early Greek and Roman scientific advances. Inspired by what they read, some people began to study math, astronomy, and other fields of science.

Using this new scientific knowledge, Europeans developed new inventions and techniques. For example, they learned how to build enormous domes that could rise higher than earlier buildings.

Another invention of the Renaissance was the movable type printing press. A German named Johann Gutenberg built the first movable type printing press in the mid-1400s. This type of printing press could print books quickly and cheaply. For the first time, people could easily share ideas with others in distant areas. The printing press helped the ideas of the Renaissance spread beyond Italy.

The Printing Press

Printing was not a new idea in Renaissance Europe. What was new was the method of printing. Johann Gutenberg designed a printing system called movable type. It used a set of tiny lead blocks, each carved with a letter of the alphabet. These blocks could then be used to spell out an entire page of text for printing. Once copies of the page were made, the printer could reuse the blocks to spell out another page. This was much faster and easier than earlier systems had been.

Generalizing How did movable type improve printing?

Reading Check Summarizing How did life in Europe change during the Renaissance?
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