

# The European Renaissance



World History Workbook Series

© Student Handouts

## What was the Renaissance?

*Renaissance* is a French word that means “rebirth.” The European Renaissance lasted approximately from 1400 until 1700. It began with a “rebirth” of interest in classical (Greek and Roman, sometimes written as Greco-Roman) art, education, and literature. As the European Renaissance progressed, it developed a new spirit. It began to experiment and question in architecture, art, law, economics, literature, music, science, and trade. Perhaps most importantly, the lives of individual people took on an importance in Western culture that had never before existed. The Renaissance marks the dividing line between medieval and modern Europe.

1. The term *renaissance* means what in the French language?

---

---

---

During the Middle Ages, prevailing religious thought

brought people to believe that life was a constant struggle to be endured, with the reward being a place in heaven after death. During the Renaissance, people came to believe that rather than simply be endured, life on earth could be enjoyable and pleasant. Society grew to accept the idea that human beings are intelligent, rational creatures who are capable of deciding their own fates and managing their own lives. According to Renaissance thinking, human beings not only can lead fulfilling lives on earth, but deserve to do so.

2. During the Middle Ages, people generally believed that life on earth should be pleasant.
  - a. True
  - b. False

## What brought about the Renaissance?

As medieval Europe began to recover from the Crusades and the Black Death, trade flourished, creating a wealthy class. The Italian city-states of Florence,

# The European Renaissance – World History Workbook

Genoa, and Venice were particularly prosperous. In order to show civic pride and religious devotion, and perhaps as one of the earliest examples of “public relations,” the wealthy class invested in the arts and education.

3. What Italian city-states were particularly prosperous during the Renaissance?

---

---

---

During the Middle Ages, towns grew near churches, castles, and trading centers. Because residency in a town for a certain number of years granted freedom from serfdom, a large number of peasants fled from feudal manors to towns. Over the centuries, these towns flourished and grew. The larger the town, the more new ideas were quickly shared.

Although the Crusaders ultimately lost their foothold in the Middle East, the wealth of knowledge they brought back to Europe was immeasurable. Apart from isolated libraries in monasteries, medieval Europeans,

led by the descendants of illiterate barbarian tribes from northern Europe, had largely lost the historical, mathematical, and scientific knowledge of the Greeks and Romans. Fortunately, however, the Muslim caliphates of Asia and Africa had preserved and built upon this knowledge. Through their own vast trading networks, these Muslims acquired additional knowledge from places such as India and China. The Crusaders were able to learn this knowledge during their sojourn in the Middle East, and brought it back to Europe.

4. Who preserved and built upon ancient Greco-Roman knowledge during the European Middle Ages?

---

---

---

**Why did the European Renaissance begin in Italy?**

Italy forms a peninsula, jutting into the Mediterranean Sea. Because of Italy’s location, it has historically been a major trading

# The European Renaissance – World History Workbook

center. Italian traders had, of all European powers, perhaps the easiest and most efficient access to places under Muslim rule. Have you ever heard of Marco Polo (circa 1254-1324)? He was an Italian merchant from Venice who managed to travel as far as China thanks to the peaceful rule then existing in Muslim areas. Marco's book detailing his adventures served as inspiration for future explorers and traders.

5. What famous Venetian merchant traveled as far as China in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century?

---

---

---

Italy, with the city of Rome at its center, was of course the home of the ancient Roman Empire. However, over the centuries, Italy inherited Roman culture. Moreover, the wealthy merchants of Italy wanted to reestablish the prominence of Italy by harkening back to the “glory days” of ancient Rome.

Italian merchants were the wealthiest merchants in Europe,

and were thus best able to fund the arts. Wealthy people who funded the arts were known as patrons. Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael—all owed their livelihoods to the patronage of wealthy Italian trading families.

6. Renaissance Italy inherited the culture of ancient \_\_\_\_\_.

---

---

---

7. Wealthy people who funded the arts were known as what?

---

---

---

**How did the Renaissance spread throughout Europe?**

Over time, the Renaissance spread throughout Europe. Countries such as England, France, Germany, Holland, and Spain were particularly affected. In each new area to which it spread, the Renaissance began with new ideas in architecture and art. Over time, however, the Renaissance grew to include developments in geography,

# The European Renaissance – World History Workbook

literature, mathematics, and science. Eventually, religious dogma would be questioned in what came to be known as the Protestant Reformation.

A revolutionary leap forward in the dissemination of knowledge came with the printing press in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century. Before the printing press, books were written by hand. The time needed to copy books made them much too expensive for most people. As a consequence, the vast majority of Europeans were illiterate. Johann Gutenberg of Germany invented a printing press with moveable type. At last, books and other documents could be printed cheaply. As a consequence, more people became interested in learning to read, further increasing human knowledge.

8. The Renaissance never spread beyond architecture and art.

- a. True
- b. False

9. Who invented the printing press with moveable type?

---

---

**How did printing, writing, and literacy spread during the Renaissance?**

William Caxton (1422-1491) was an English printer. He was known for printing medieval romances. In 1477, he became the first person in England to print a dated book.

In Italy, the printer Aldus (1450-1515) published the classics in Greek, Italian, and Latin. For centuries following these printings, European scholars routinely learnt Greek and Latin in order to read the Bible and other works in the original Greek and Latin.

10. Who was the first person in England to print a dated book?

- a. Aldus
- b. Johann Gutenberg
- c. Thomas More
- d. William Caxton

During the Middle Ages, the only literate Europeans were, for the most part, members of the clergy. The monks copying manuscripts in monasteries wrote in Greek and Latin, languages which remained popular among



# The European Renaissance – World History Workbook

Renaissance scholars and theologians. However, in order to appeal to the larger masses, writers began to use the vernacular—that is, the common, or vulgar, language of the people. For the first time, English, French, German Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, and other languages were commonly used in written works.

11. Renaissance writers wrote predominantly in Greek and Latin.
- a. True
  - b. False

Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), an Italian from Florence, became known as the “father of Italian poetry.” He led the way in writing in the vernacular when he penned the *Divine Comedy*, an epic poem describing a trip to the afterlife, in Italian.

For English readers, Geoffrey Chaucer (circa 1343-1400) penned the *Canterbury Tales*, describing people engaged in a pilgrimage. For Spanish readers, there was *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616), which ridiculed medieval chivalry and

customs. The following table highlights other leading writers of the European Renaissance. Most of their works are still widely read and highly regarded today.

Match each writer to his written work.

- 12. \_\_\_\_\_ Dante Alighieri
- 13. \_\_\_\_\_ Geoffrey Chaucer
- 14. \_\_\_\_\_ Miguel de Cervantes

- (a) *Don Quixote*
- (b) *The Canterbury Tales*
- (c) *The Divine Comedy*

15. Imagine that you lived in the period before the Renaissance. Do you believe that you would have learned how to read? Why or why not? What if you lived during the Renaissance?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# The European Renaissance – World History Workbook

Who were some of the leading writers of the Renaissance?

Name	Dates	Nationality	Contribution(s)
Giovanni Boccaccio	1313-1375	Italian	<i>The Decameron</i> ; Known as the father of Italian prose
Francois Villon	c. 1431-c. 1463	French	Poet and romantic vagabond
Niccolo Machiavelli	1469-1527	Italian	<i>The Prince</i> ; Political writer
Sir (Saint) Thomas More	1478-1535	English	<i>Utopia</i> ; Humanist writer; Beheaded by Henry VIII
Francois Rabelais	1494-1553	French	<i>Gargantua</i> ; Wrote satire
Luis de Camoes (Camoens)	1524-1580	Portuguese	<i>The Lusiad</i> ; Poet
Michel de Montaigne	1533-1592	French	Popularized the essay as a literary genre
Edmund Spenser	c. 1552-1599	English	<i>The Faerie Queene</i> ; Poet
William Shakespeare	1564-1616	English	<i>Hamlet</i> , <i>Macbeth</i> ; <i>Richard II</i> , <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> ; Dramatist and poet
Ben Jonson	1572-1637	English	<i>Volpone</i> ; Dramatist

16. Who is known as the “father of Italian prose”?

- a. Dante Alighieri
- b. Francois Rabelais
- c. Giovanni Boccaccio
- d. Niccolo Machiavelli

17. What Italian political writer penned *The Prince*?

---



---



---

# The European Renaissance – World History Workbook

18. What English humanist writer, later to be sainted, was beheaded under the rule of Tudor monarch Henry VIII?

---

---

---

19. What English dramatist wrote *Romeo and Juliet*, *Richard II*, and *Macbeth*?

---

---

---

**What were the artistic achievements of the Renaissance?**

Many of the world's most beloved artists lived and worked during the European Renaissance. With the revival in classical learning came a renewed interest in classical artistic themes. Additionally, achievements in science added new colors to the painter's palette. Renaissance artists used perspective and perfected portraiture.

## Word Search Puzzle



### TERMS

Boccaccio  
Camoens  
Caxton  
European  
Gutenberg  
Jonson  
Machiavelli  
Montaigne  
More  
Rabelais  
Renaissance  
Shakespeare  
Spenser  
Villon



# The European Renaissance – World History Workbook

Who were some of the leading artists of the Renaissance?

Name	Dates	Nationality	Contribution(s)
Ghiberti	1378-1455	Italian	Beautiful metalwork on the bronze church doors in Florence, Italy
Donatello	1386-1466	Italian	Sculpted figures on horseback
Leonardo da Vinci	1452-1519	Italian	Painted the <i>Mona Lisa</i> and <i>The Last Supper</i> ; Referred to as the “first modern man”; Excelled in multiple fields, including anatomy, botany, engineering, mathematics, painting, and sculpture
Durer	1471-1528	German	<i>Adoration of the Magi</i> ; Metal engraver, painter, and wood carver
Michelangelo	1475-1564	Italian	<i>David</i> ; <i>Moses</i> ; <i>The Last Judgment</i> ; Architect, painter, and sculptor; Painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome
Titian	1477-1576	Italian	<i>Assumption of the Virgin</i> ; Painter known for his use of color, especially red
Raphael	1483-1520	Italian	<i>The Sistine Madonna</i> ; <i>Transfiguration</i>
Holbein	1497-1543	German	<i>The Virgin and the Child</i> ; Portrait painter and wood engraver
Cellini	1500-1571	Italian	Famous silversmith
Rubens	1577-1640	Flemish	<i>Descent from the Cross</i> ; Religious painter
Hals	1581-1666	Dutch	<i>Laughing Cavalier</i> ; Famous portrait painter
Van Dyck	1599-1641	Flemish	Portrait painter
Velasquez	1599-1660	Spanish	<i>The Surrender of Breda</i> ; Painted realistic historical and religious scenes
Rembrandt	1606-1669	Dutch	<i>Night Watch</i> ; <i>The Anatomy Lecture</i> ; Known for his use of color

# The European Renaissance – World History Workbook

20. Who is best known for painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel?

- a. Da Vinci
- b. Michelangelo
- c. Raphael
- d. Velasquez

21. Who is often referred to as the “first modern man”?

---

---

---

22. What German artist is known for his *Adoration of the Magi*?

---

---

---

23. What Dutch master, painter of *The Anatomy Lecture*, is known for his use of color?

---

---

---

24. Name a famous Dutch portrait painter.

---

---

**What were the achievements in music during the Renaissance?**

The Italian Palestrina (1525-1594) is perhaps the best known composer of the Renaissance. Palestrina wrote church music. His many hymns, litanies, magnificats, and masses are still played today.

The orchestra was extremely popular during the Renaissance. Many of today’s instruments, including the ancestors of the piano, organ, and violin, were invented at this time.

The first operas were likewise developed during the Renaissance. *Dafne*, composed by Jacopo Peri in 1597, is the earliest known opera. Jacopo Peri also composed, in 1600, the famous opera *Euridice* (or *Eurydice*).

25. Who is the best known Renaissance composer?

---

---

26. Who composed the first opera?

---

---

# The European Renaissance – World History Workbook

## What about math and science?

From India, via the Middle East, Europe was introduced to what are known as Arabic numerals, as well as the concept of zero. Compared to cumbersome Roman numerals, Arabic numerals are much easier and more efficient when crafting and testing scientific theories.

27. What style of numerals is most popular in the Western world today?
- Arabic
  - Roman

The sciences flourished during the Renaissance. The leading scientific figures were Copernicus (1473-1543) and Galileo (1564-1642). Copernicus proposed a heliocentric theory for the universe, placing the sun at its center. Galileo invented the telescope and was able to prove that the earth does indeed revolve around the sun.

A great number of other scientific discoveries were made between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, placing them technically in the

Renaissance, but historians give them a name and branch of study all of their own—the Scientific Revolution.

28. Who proposed a heliocentric theory for the universe?

---

---

---

29. Who invented the telescope?

---

---

---

30. The period between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, which saw great progress in science, is known as what?

---

---

---

## What discoveries were made?

Advances in science and engineering improved the art of sailing. Sailing was, of course, tied to international trade. Sailing was the fastest mode of transportation until the invention of the airplane in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Traders

# The European Renaissance – World History Workbook

were eager to find a route to East Asia that bypassed the Middle East. To do so, they sailed south and east around Africa. Later, they circumnavigated (circled) the globe.

This search culminated in Christopher Columbus' voyage to the Americas in 1492. These achievements and discoveries

belong more appropriately to an era commonly called the Age of Exploration.

31. What European famously sailed to the Americas in 1492?

---

---

---

## Word Search Puzzle



### TERMS

arts  
Copernicus  
Da Vinci  
Durer  
Galileo  
Ghiberti  
Hals  
Holbein  
Michelangelo  
oil  
opera  
patron  
Peri  
Raphael  
Rubens  
Sistine  
Titian  
Velasquez



32. The portrait on the left is of England's Richard II. Painted by an anonymous artist in the 1390s, before the Renaissance reached England, it is medieval in style. (Interestingly, it is the earliest known portrait of an English monarch.) The portrait on the right is of England's Henry VIII, painted around 1537 by Renaissance artist Hans Holbein the Younger. Compare and contrast these two works of art based on the use of three of the following: (a) color, (b) detail, (c) perspective, (d) realism. Use standard five-paragraph essay formatting (a free printable five-paragraph essay writing guide is available on the Student Handouts website here: <http://www.studenthandouts.com/Assortment-01/Graphic-Organizers/Five-Paragraph-Essay-Organizer-Instructions.html>).

---

---

---

---

