

*History*  
UNFOLDING

# EUROPEAN RENAISSANCE



**MindSparks**  
CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO THINK HISTORICALLY

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# Introduction

## An Emerging Europe

In the mid-1300s, the Black Plague swept away perhaps a fourth of Europe's population. Most of the rest faced a bleak and limited existence. Life was lived in the village or manor. Political loyalties rarely extended beyond the local lord or prince. And knowledge of the world beyond this local setting was scanty and usually more myth than fact.

Europe lagged far behind China, India, and the Islamic Middle East in terms of scientific knowledge, technical prowess, and awareness of the world at large.

And yet, this time of stagnation was already passing. Since the 1100s, some parts of Europe had begun to revive. Trade with the outside world was expanding. Knowledge of ancient classical writers such as Aristotle was filtering in from Islamic cultural centers in Spain and elsewhere. At first, this revival did not upset older ways of thinking or the Church-dominated cultural patterns of the Middle Ages. It was left to the Italian Renaissance to do that.

Historians argue about how much of break with the past the Renaissance actually was. Every era of change always builds on what came before. But with the Renaissance, a whole new spirit does shine through in literature, art, architecture, politics, and more. It is a spirit that celebrates with new force the powers of the individual and the value of human existence in this world. While looking backward to its classical past, this spirit actually laid the foundation for a powerful and dynamic future.

This set uses 12 visual displays to focus on some of the key themes in the history of the European Renaissance. Each lesson uses three visual displays to explore one broad topic in the overall story. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

### **The Passing of the Middle Ages**

A look at the shifting social context that helps explain why the Renaissance arose first in the city-states of Italy in the 1300s and 1400s.

### **The Spirit of Humanism**

The Renaissance looked to the classical past not for the first time, but in a very new way. It found in that past a celebration of the individual, of the striving for excellence, and of a vigorous life of action in this world.

### **The Renaissance in Art**

Renaissance art reflected a new fascination with the world. The technique of perspective must be seen in this context—that it helped artists to focus on actual human experience, rather than on depicting physical objects symbolically in order to reveal higher spiritual truths.

### **The Renaissance in the North**

The spirit of the Renaissance shifted as it moved north, where it was more strongly influenced by the Reformation and by the emergence of a wider, less elite audience.

## Using Photos, Cartoons, and Other Visuals to Teach History

Many textbooks are full of colorful visuals. However, all too often these visuals function primarily as window dressing. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable. Only occasionally do the visuals in textbooks do more than offer simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, they pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help young people master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as historical documents. The lessons in this booklet focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power, and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general, as well as their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

## How to Use This Booklet

The booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

**A BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET** This page provides brief summaries explaining the three illustrations on which the lesson is based and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

**DIGITAL IMAGES** The booklet's PDF allows you to project the images for use in your class discussions.

### **DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY SHEETS**

Each sheet displays one illustration. It includes a sequence of questions to help you plan an all-class discussion while using the projected images. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the illustration. If you wish, you may reproduce these pages and hand them out. In addition to the discussion questions on the illustration itself, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. Some of these can be made into individual assignments. Others will work best as small-group or all-class activities.



**OBJECTIVE**

1. Students will gain a better understanding of some of the key underlying factors helping to bring about the change from medieval Europe to the time known as the European Renaissance.

# The Passing of the Middle Ages

*Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.*

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION****Illustrations 1A & 1B**

“Renaissance” means “revival” or “rebirth.” The European Renaissance was a time when Europeans looked back to the ideas and achievements of the ancient Greeks and Romans. It was also a key turning point for the future, launching the modern age for Europe and, in time, the world. It began in the late 1300s as Europe was slowly emerging from the poverty and backwardness of the Middle Ages. The fortified manor house on the left suggests the local and rural basis of society as well as the insecurity of life then. Adding to the insecurity were frequent famines and the horrors of the “Black Death” of the mid-1300s, depicted on the right. Memories of that awful time were still fresh as the Renaissance began.

**Illustration 2**

In the late Middle Ages, some regions of Europe did start to thrive. This was most true at first of Italy, where powerful city-states arose whose wealth was based on trade. A city-state was made up of a governing city and the land around it. Venice, shown here, was one such city-state. Venice grew rich as a key end-point on trade routes from Asia across the Middle East to Europe. Trade with Asia put the Italian city-states in contact with much more advanced civilizations, such as the Byzantine Empire, the Islamic lands of the Middle East, India, and China. With greater leisure time and wealth, the rulers and merchants of the Italian city-states began to take a new interest in the world around them, both past and present.

**Illustrations 3A & 3B**

To carry on trade, merchants often needed to borrow money. So, too, did Europe’s kings and princes—in part to pay for increasingly costly wars. Powerful families of merchant bankers arose in the Italian city-states to make these loans—for example, the Medici family of Florence. Cosimo di Medici (left) was a shrewd banker who also gave generously to the arts. Pope Leo X (right) was also a Medici. This painting typical of Renaissance art depicts him with a wary look, a man with power and politics as well as spiritual matters on his mind. Pope Leo was also a great patron of the arts. Many rich Italian bankers and merchants supported Italy’s great flowering of art and scholarship. The economic and political power of this rising, worldly middle class was what made the Renaissance possible.

## Lesson 1 – The Passing of the Middle Ages

# Illustrations 1A & 1B



1A: Stock Montage, Inc.



1B: Stock Montage, Inc.

### Discussing the Illustrations

1. These images are of Europe in the late 1300s. One great era in Europe's history was coming to an end. It had been a time when life was difficult and insecure. What this era in European history called?
2. What do Illustration 1A's details help show about farming, level of technology, family life, and security in the Middle Ages?
3. In the Middle Ages, famine and disease were all too common. Illustration 1B shows a procession during the Black Death. What was the Black Death? What do you think this solemn procession was about? What does it suggest about reactions in Europe to the Black Death?
4. As the Middle Ages drew to a close in the late 1300s, it was followed, at first in Italy and then elsewhere in Europe, by a time known as the "Renaissance." The word "renaissance" means "rebirth." Based on your history reading so far, can you explain what was supposedly being "reborn" in Europe at this time?

### Follow-up Activities

1. Read more about everyday life in the late Middle Ages. Imagine you live in this fortified manor house. It is 1350. The plague is devastating Europe, as are numerous wars. Your area is suffering terribly as well. You have seen the effects of the plague up close. Write a letter to a friend in a far off city about the latest developments in your community. Be sure to describe the entire course of the plague from first exposure until death. One account of the plague can be found at the beginning of Boccaccio's *The Decameron*.
2. The Renaissance supposedly restored Europe's interest in the ancient classical literature of Greece and Rome. But was there no interest at all in the ancient classics prior to the Renaissance? Read parts of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Write a brief report on the *Divine Comedy* and its view of the world. Find out who Virgil was, and explain why Dante has him as his guide through Hell and Purgatory. Finally, explain what this says about Dante's view of the classical world in the centuries before the Renaissance.



## Illustration 2



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### *Discussing the Illustration*

1. The Renaissance began in Italy, in cities such as the one shown here. It is a city in the northeast corner of Italy, and it has always been famous for overseas trade. Can you name it? What parts of this illustration help you to recognize it?
2. Venice was one of several “city-states” in Italy. What is meant by the term “city-state”? What were some other major Renaissance city-states of Italy?
3. A key factor in bringing about the Renaissance in Italy was the increased contact its merchants had with far-off lands. With what far-off lands did Venice and the other Italian city-states trade? Why might this contact have led to a “rebirth” of interest in knowledge, art, and human achievement?
4. As bankers and merchants in the Italian city-states grew wealthy and powerful, they began to take a great interest in the world around them—its geography, cultures, history, and art. Why would this have been important in making the Renaissance possible?

### *Follow-up Activities*

1. **Small-group activity:** Read more about the Italian city-states of the Renaissance and their trade links with other parts of the world. Then create a bulletin-board display, making the centerpiece a map of the Italian city-states, their colonies, and the trade routes linking them with the Byzantine Empire, the Islamic lands of the Middle East, India, and China. In addition to the map, include photos and drawings about points of interest on the routes, pictures of typical products, and explanations of their value.
2. **Small-group activity:** Venice was an Italian city-state. Each member of your group should learn more about a different Italian city-state (e.g., Milan, Genoa, or Florence). Find and make a copy of at least one image of that city. Together, create a bulletin board display, including a map showing these city-states. Summarize key facts about each city-state, such as its trade patterns, its forms of government, its famous Renaissance-era figures, etc.

## Lesson 1—The Passing of the Middle Ages

# Illustrations 3A & 3B



3A: Stock Montage, Inc.



3B: Stock Montage, Inc.

### *Discussing the Illustrations*

1. Many historians consider Florence the birthplace of the Italian Renaissance. That's in part because of the men shown here. Both of them were members of a powerful banking family in Florence. This family gave generously to scholars and artists in Florence. Can you name this famous family?
2. On the left is Cosimo di Medici. He began the Medici family tradition of support for the arts. On the right is another Medici, Pope Leo X. Who were the Popes?
3. Like many Renaissance Popes, Pope Leo X was as concerned with politics and worldly matters as with his spiritual duties. Why was this typical of Popes in Italy during these centuries?
4. Some say that the painting of Leo X does emphasize the worldly side of this Pope. What features of the painting help to do this? How do both paintings together convey a theme common in Renaissance art—a sense of the power and confidence of its subject, especially a leader?

### *Follow-up Activities*

1. **Small-group activity:** The Medici ruled Florence for almost three centuries. Learn more about this powerful Italian banking and political family. Then create a family tree. Using the family tree as a guide, prepare and give a brief talk to the class about the Medici. Then guide the class in a discussion of the general role played by the Medici in the Renaissance.
2. At above right is a famous painting of Pope Leo X, a member of the Medici family, by the artist Raphael. Learn more about Leo X, his relationship with Raphael, and about the painting itself. Based on what you learn, write a brief essay discussing how Raphael chose to portray his subject. Offer your own views as to what the relationship between this artist and this Pope suggests about the two men, the Medici in general, the Renaissance Popes, and the overall spirit of the Renaissance.



**OBJECTIVE**

1. Students will understand the term “Renaissance humanism” as it is illustrated in the literature, architecture, and political thought of some key Renaissance figures.

# The Spirit of Humanism

*Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.*

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION****Illustration 1**

The term “humanism” is often used for some of the key ideas and the overall spirit of the Renaissance. Renaissance humanism encouraged a new sense of the worth of the individual and of life in this world, rather than the next. And it looked back to the classical Greek and Roman past for its ideas and ideals. This same ancient past had been of interest to scholars in the Middle Ages, but only if it could support Christian teachings. Now ancient Rome and Greece were valued for their own ethical teachings and earthly concerns. Italian poet Petrarch here gives expression to this new humanist point of view. He is shown here wearing a laurel wreath, a mark of honor in classical times.

**Illustration 2**

It's no surprise that a reawakened interest in the past in Italy would center on ancient Greece and Rome. The ruins of ancient Rome were all around. This classical influence can be best seen in Renaissance architecture, as in the famous dome of the Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore, the cathedral church of Florence (shown here). The architect of the cathedral's dome, Filippo Brunelleschi, was one of many in the early 1400s who created a new kind of art. Here, the soaring otherworldly arches and flying buttresses of medieval Gothic cathedrals are replaced by rounded arches and classical columns that recall the more earthly glory of ancient Rome.

**Illustration 3**

Perhaps the most important political thinker of the Renaissance was Niccolò Machiavelli (shown here). In his book *The Prince*, Machiavelli described how a ruler can acquire and keep power. He advised his “prince” that success mattered above all else. Many critics of Machiavelli say *The Prince* justifies immoral behavior in politics, or a view that “the ends justify the means.” Others say the book does have a moral focus, but one that is true to human nature with all its defects, not to an ideal or spiritual view of humanity. Machiavelli did want his prince to rule well. But he tried to be realistic about what it takes to do this successfully. This realism about both what exists and what is best in human life is what makes Machiavelli typical of the entire Renaissance.



## Lesson 2—The Spirit of Humanism

# Illustration 1

*“Neither exhortations to virtue nor the argument of approaching death should divert us from literature; for in a good mind it excites the love of virtue, and dissipates, or at least diminishes, the fear of death. To desert our studies shows want of self-confidence rather than wisdom, for letters do not hinder but aid the properly constituted mind which possesses them; they facilitate our life, they do not retard it. . . . Cato, I never forget, acquainted himself with Latin literature as he was growing old, and Greek when he had really become an old man. Varro, who reached his hundredth year still reading and writing, parted from life sooner than from his love of study. Livius Drusus, although weakened by age and afflicted with blindness, did not give up his interpretation of the civil law, which he carried on to the great advantage of the state. . . .”*

Petrarch, *A Letter to Boccaccio*



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### Discussing the Illustrations

1. The Renaissance focused more on life in this world than the next, as well as on the writing, art, and other accomplishments of ancient Greece and Rome. The word “humanism” came to be used for this twin set of interests. Why do you think that is so?
2. Petrarch (shown here) was an early humanist thinker. He is portrayed wearing a laurel wreath, which is meant to emphasize his connection with the great writers and artists of the classical past. Why would a laurel convey this meaning? What else about this portrait seems to evoke this classical past?
3. Petrarch believed it was important to study the works of the ancient Greeks and Romans—not only when they supported Christian teaching but for their own sake. Shown here is an excerpt from a letter to his friend Boccaccio. Based on this, what do you think Petrarch most admired about the ancient civilizations of Greece and Rome?

### Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** First, read more about Petrarch and his love sonnets to Laura. Then as a group, choose two or three of these sonnets and two or three sonnets by Shakespeare. Have each member of the group read one of these sonnets in front of the class and explain any parts of it that may be hard to understand. As a group, lead the class in a discussion of Petrarch, his influence on Shakespeare, and the similarities and differences in their sonnets.
2. Petrarch was a founder of literary humanism, a movement to revive classical literature and the values or attitudes held up as admirable in classical writings. One classical writer very much admired by Petrarch and others in the Renaissance was Cicero. Read more about Cicero. Next, read a translation of one of his famous orations. Finally, write a brief report on Cicero’s life and the place in his career of the oration you have read. Also be sure to discuss why you think Renaissance writers like Petrarch so admired him.

## Illustration 2



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### Discussing the Illustration

1. We see the humanist spirit not just in Renaissance literature and art, but also it in the architecture. Here is a good example of Renaissance architecture. It is a cathedral located in a very old Italian city—a city many call the “birthplace of the Renaissance.” Can you guess what city?
2. This cathedral was finished in the mid-1400s. At the time, it was seen as a major change from the famous Gothic cathedrals of the Middle Ages. What do you know about Gothic architecture and cathedrals of the Middle Ages? Using this illustration, point to some details that show how the Florence Cathedral differs from Gothic cathedrals?
3. The Florence Cathedral has many features meant to remind people of classical architecture. What is meant in this case by the term “classical”? What are some of the “classical” features of this cathedral? Why do you think the classical style appealed to the architects of Renaissance Italy?

### Follow-up Activities

1. The eight-sided dome of the Florence Cathedral was designed by Filippo Brunelleschi and finished in 1436. The story of the dome goes back to 1296, when work first began on the cathedral. But it was only in 1420, when Brunelleschi won a competition to design the dome, that work really began in earnest. Learn more about Brunelleschi and his achievement by reading *Brunelleschi's Dome: How a Renaissance Genius Reinvented Architecture* (Penguin, 2000) by Ross King. Prepare a brief report on the man and his cathedral and share it with the class.
2. **Small-group activity:** Collect images of famous cathedrals and other buildings in Europe that date from the 12th or 13th centuries. Then find images of similar structures from the time of the Renaissance. Write brief captions for each of these images. Along with the captions, show the images on a bulletin-board display titled, “From Gothic to Renaissance in Brick and Stone.”



## Lesson 2—The Spirit of Humanism

### Illustration 3



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*“The question arises whether it is better [for a prince] to be loved more than feared or feared more than loved. The reply is that one ought to be both . . . but as it is difficult for the two to go together, it is much safer to be feared than loved. . . . For it may be said of men in general that they are ungrateful, voluble, dissemblers, anxious to avoid danger, and covetous of gain; as long as you benefit them, they are entirely yours . . . but when necessity approaches, they revolt. . . . Love is held by a chain of obligation which . . . is broken whenever it serves [men’s] purpose; but fear is maintained by a dread of punishment which never fails.”*

Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*

#### Discussing the Illustrations

1. The words shown here are from a famous book written during the Renaissance. The book is *The Prince*, by Niccolo Machiavelli. What do you know about Machiavelli and *The Prince*?
2. *The Prince* is often criticized for having an immoral philosophy, one that says, “the ends justify the means.” Explain the phrase, “the ends justify the means.” Why do you think people say this is an immoral idea? Do you think the ends ever do justify the means? Why or why not?
3. Some people defend Machiavelli. They say he wanted his prince to be a good leader, yet he was realistic about human nature and what a leader must do to be effective. Do you think these words from *The Prince* are realistic in this way? Why or why not?
4. According to many historians, it is this effort to be realistic that makes *The Prince* an example of the humanist spirit of the Renaissance. What do you think they mean?

#### Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** Should today’s leaders follow the advice Machiavelli gave in *The Prince*? As a group, discuss its relevance to today’s political leaders. Choose three passages in it that you would most want the president to keep in mind. Evaluate each passage as to how well or how poorly it applies to the current president. Then, as a group, explain and discuss with the class the passages you have chosen.
2. Read *The Prince*. Then decide which one of these 20th-century figures Machiavelli would have most admired and which he would have least admired:

Winston Churchill  
Franklin D. Roosevelt  
Yasser Arafat  
Bill Clinton

Adolf Hitler  
Joseph Stalin  
Ronald Reagan  
George W. Bush

In a brief essay, give your answer. Be sure to back it up with citations from the book, as well as specific incidents in the careers of the two leaders you chose.

**OBJECTIVES**

1. Students will better understand the way Renaissance art differed from medieval art.
2. Students will better appreciate the way in which Renaissance art reflects the humanistic spirit of the Renaissance itself.

# The Renaissance in Art

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*Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.*

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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION****Illustrations 1A & 1B**

Medieval art rarely showed objects as they actually appear. Instead, it tried to reveal the spiritual essence of things. Renaissance art was different: for Renaissance artists, showing what a scene or person was really like was very important. These two paintings show this shift in its earliest stages. On the left is the medieval work *St. Peter and Two Saints*, a fresco in Baucaire, France. On the right is *Christ Between St. Peter and St. James Minor*, by Giovanni Cimabue (1240–1302). In the fresco, the figures are two-dimensional and very unrealistic in a manner typical of medieval painting. In Cimabue's painting, the three-dimensional figures seem more uniquely individual and full of emotion. Cimabue's art is often seen as one of the first examples of the greater realism that reached its high point in the Renaissance.

**Illustration 2**

The artist Raphael painted this piece, called *The School of Athens*. The painting shows ancient Greek philosophers, including Plato and Aristotle. In its subject, it illustrates the importance that Renaissance artists placed on classical learning, education, and the Greek ideal of human reason. The painting is also a good example of a major Renaissance achievement in artistic technique—perspective. Artistic perspective is an exact way of creating a sense of depth by showing objects as smaller the farther away they are supposed to be. This discovery was not just a clever technique; it was a way to achieve the Renaissance goal of depicting the world as it truly appears, not just as an idea or ideal.

**Illustration 3**

Raphael's painting shows the admiration Renaissance artists felt for the pagan world of ancient Greece. However, Renaissance art was itself still deeply religious and thoroughly Christian. This is one of the several relief panels of the east doors of the Florence Baptistery. The panels were sculpted by Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378–1455). Each panel realistically depicts a scene from the Bible, humanizing religion in a way rarely seen before. This panel shows Moses receiving the Ten Commandments from God on Mount Sinai while his Hebrew followers wait for him below. In this scene, a humanized yet still awesome God dramatically hands down the law to his chosen people.

## Lesson 3—The Renaissance in Art

# Illustrations 1A & 1B



1A: © Instructional Resources Corporation



1B: © Instructional Resources Corporation

### Discussing the Illustrations

1. The Renaissance involved scholarship, literature, philosophy and architecture. But it is perhaps best known for its great breakthroughs in art. These two paintings help to show why. One of these paintings is typical of medieval art, the other is very early evidence of what Renaissance artists would do. Can you tell which one is medieval and which a forerunner of the Renaissance?
2. The fresco on the left is entitled *St. Peter and Two Saints*. The painting shows halos around the heads of these figures, and it shows Peter with a large key. These objects are symbols. Can you explain what they are symbols of?
3. One the right is *Christ Between St. Peter and St. James Minor*, by Giovanni Cimabue. The symbolic halos can still be seen, but only very faintly. Otherwise, the painting is closer to the realistic style of Renaissance art. What features do you think give it this more realistic look?

### Follow-up Activities

1. Find copies of at least ten paintings from the late Middle Ages through various periods of the Renaissance. In a bulletin-board display or PowerPoint presentation, arrange the paintings in chronological order. Write a brief description for each. In these descriptions, try to explain how the Renaissance style can be seen evolving from one painting to the next.
2. Leonardo da Vinci painted his *Last Supper* on the wall of a hall in the Santa Maria delle Grazie monastery in Milan, Italy. Find a copy of this painting. Imagine it is 1497, when the painting was probably finished. You are one of the monks living in the monastery. Write a diary entry for the day that you first see Leonardo's *Last Supper*. Be specific in describing what you do or do not like about the painting. Try to be as believable as possible in your role as a 15th-century monk. That is, try to imagine what such monks would actually have felt about the painting, not what you personally think of it.



## Lesson 3—The Renaissance in Art

# Illustration 2



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### Discussing the Illustration

1. This painting by Raphael is called *The School of Athens*. It illustrates the Renaissance fascination with ancient Greek civilization. What do you know about *The School of Athens*? What features of this painting most express a sense of admiration for ancient Greek culture?
2. At the center of the painting are Aristotle and Plato. Who were they and what do you know about them? Why do they form the painting's central focus?
3. The painting is also a good example of a key artistic technique developed by Renaissance artists—perspective. Can you explain the artistic technique of “perspective”? How does this technique contribute to giving Renaissance paintings a “real-life” quality?
4. Why do you think the technique of perspective was so important to Renaissance artists? Do you think it was just a clever idea they liked? Or does it express their broader views about what is important about life and important in art?

### Follow-up Activities

1. Aristotle actually had long been a key figure in medieval thought—since at least the 12th century when his works were first rediscovered in Europe. Learn more about Aristotle's influence on the late Middle Ages. Then write a brief report comparing the way medieval scholastic thinkers differed from Renaissance humanists in their views about Aristotle.
2. **Small-group activity:** Create a bulletin-board display of Renaissance art in which themes from classical Greek or Roman history and literature are illustrated. Write a brief caption for each work. Organize the works you choose in chronological order. Give a presentation to the class in which you discuss the works and explain how each one shows the Renaissance's fascination with ancient Rome or Greece.



## Lesson 3—The Renaissance in Art

# Illustration 3



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### ***Discussing the Illustration***

1. This is one of the panels by Lorenzo Ghiberti from the east doors of the Florence Baptistery. Can you identify the story from the Bible that this scene is meant to depict?
2. Some people think of the Italian Renaissance as a turn away from the deep religious concerns of the Middle Ages. Art historians would say this and other panels that Ghiberti created show that this view is far too simplified. What do you think they mean? Do you agree with them? Why or why not?
3. At the same time, many would say the view of God and Moses in this painting differs in spirit substantially from the way people in the Middle Ages thought of these Biblical figures. Do you agree with this view? Why or why not?
4. In general, what features of this relief sculpture do you think show it to be an example of Renaissance art?

### ***Follow-up Activities***

1. Ghiberti won the commission to work on the doors of the Florence Baptistery in 1401. He spent much of his life on this project, working on the north doors from 1403 to 1424 and the east doors from 1425 to 1452. Learn more about Ghiberti and this great work of his. Find illustrations of the other panels in these doors. Arrange these in a bulletin-board display or in a PowerPoint presentation that explains the panels and as much as you can about Ghiberti's life and work.
2. From 1508 to 1512, Michelangelo painted some of the most memorable images of all time on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Vatican City in Rome. Read more about the day-to-day, year-to-year process by which Michelangelo painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Find photographs of parts of the Sistine Chapel and share them with the class. Then give a brief presentation using these photos, slides, or a PowerPoint presentation to add to what you say. Try to convey a sense of the drama of the story, as well as the painfully slow, arduous work involved.

**OBJECTIVE**

1. Students will better understand some of the factors explaining the shift in emphasis in the Renaissance as it moved to Northern Europe.

# The Renaissance in the North

*Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.*

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION****Illustration 1**

The Italian Renaissance put forth new ideals of human achievement, greatness, and artistic excellence. Its audience was made up mainly of the wealthy merchants and nobility of the Italian city-states. *The Prince* is an example of what interested them most. As the Renaissance spread to northern Europe, its focus shifted. Renaissance writers and artists there expressed a somewhat more traditional religious spirit. And their focus was more on the life of ordinary people and the community as a whole. Johannes Gutenberg may have had something to do with this change in emphasis. His moveable-type printing press made it vastly easier to spread ideas to a wider audience. As a growing middle class gained more access to books, prints, and engravings, the topics and themes of artists also may have shifted to reflect the interests of this audience.

**Illustration 2**

Another force shifting the focus of the Northern Renaissance was the Reformation. The Dutch humanist Erasmus, for example, longed to reform the Catholic Church, which he viewed as corrupt and worldly. Like other Renaissance thinkers, he drew on the wisdom of the ancient Greeks and Romans. He did not break with the Church, as Martin Luther did. But he did condemn religious bigotry and corruption, and he favored a more humane and tolerant spirit based on both human reason and faith. His words here suggest the humane and reasonable spirit typical of the Renaissance. They also show how Erasmus's views differed from someone like Machiavelli in *The Prince*.

**Illustrations 3A & 3B**

This 1570 world map by Abraham Ortelius (1527–1598) of Antwerp shows how rapidly Europe's knowledge of the world was increasing after the voyages of Columbus. It is also evidence of the Renaissance's emphasis on careful observation and realistic detail. Ortelius published maps by another Flemish cartographer, Gerardus Mercator. Mercator's famous projection actually distorts flat maps, but in a way that gave practical help to navigators. Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592), also shown here, was one of the most famous writers of the French Renaissance. In his essays, he advocated a tolerant and self-doubting skepticism that was part of the legacy of the European Renaissance.



## Lesson 4—The Renaissance in the North

# Illustration 1



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### Discussing the Illustration

1. In time, the ideas of the Renaissance began to spread throughout Europe. And Johannes Gutenberg's invention (shown here) helped to spread these ideas to many more people than might otherwise have learned of them. Can you explain what his invention was and how it might have helped to spread the ideas of the Renaissance?
2. Gutenberg's printing press may also have contributed to a shift in emphasis in the Northern Renaissance. Northern Renaissance artists focused more often on scenes of ordinary daily life, including life among the middle classes or even the poor. Can you name some Northern Renaissance artists?
3. Many say the printing press was a key element in helping to "democratize culture and learning." What do you think they mean? How do the features in this drawing help illustrate how printing presses could spread so rapidly and how they could contribute to this process of democratizing culture?

### Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** In 1456, Johannes Gutenberg printed a complete edition of the Bible using moveable metal type. This was the first book known to have been created this way. Each member of the group should assume the role of one of the people in this image. Now, as a group, write and perform a brief one-act play. Be sure to talk about what you see as the momentousness of the new invention. Present your one-act play to the class.
2. Some aspects of printing were already known in China long before Gutenberg. The Chinese invented paper, for example, perhaps as early as the first century CE. They also perfected the art of printing from letters and pictures cut in relief into wood blocks. But the huge impact that printing had after the 1450s was due largely to several innovations in the process developed in Europe. Read more about and report on all of the key aspects of the printing process that made it such a revolutionary force in the 16th century.



## Illustration 2

### Desiderius Erasmus

*“This then is the only road to happiness: first, know yourself; do not allow yourself to be led by the passions, but submit all things to the judgment of the reason. . . . Nothing is harder than for a man to conquer himself, but there is no greater reward or blessing.”*

*Handbook of the Militant Christian*

*“We must look for peace by purging the very sources of war, false ambitions, and evil desires. As long as individuals serve their own personal interests, the common good will suffer. No one achieves what he desires if the methods employed be evil. The princes should use their wisdom for the promotion of what is good for the entire populace.”*

*The Complaint of Peace*



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### Discussing the Illustrations

1. This man did not launch the Reformation in the early 1500s. But he was a key figure in it—and in the Renaissance in Northern Europe. Can you identify him? What was the Reformation, and who is credited with starting it?
2. Erasmus was nearly as critical of the Catholic Church as Luther was. However, many historians say his strong Renaissance humanist spirit kept him from being as fierce a fighter for reform as Luther, or from breaking entirely with the Church. Do you think these quotations from Erasmus help to show what these historians mean? Why or why not?
3. In a way, the second of these quotations actually shows how different the Renaissance ideas of Erasmus were from those of, say, Machiavelli. Can you explain?
4. Notice the way Erasmus is depicted here. In what ways is this image itself a reflection of the Renaissance spirit in art?

### Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** As a group, create a bulletin-board display featuring a timeline and map of the major events, works of art, and people of the Renaissance. Make a special effort to indicate how the Renaissance spread northward. Use tacks and string to connect timeline specifics with appropriate locations on the map. Give a brief presentation to the class explaining your bulletin-board display.
2. Read more about Erasmus and Martin Luther and their criticisms of the Catholic Church in the early 1500s. Based on what you learn, write a brief essay explaining why Erasmus has always been seen as more of a humanist and a Renaissance figure than Martin Luther.



## Lesson 4—The Renaissance in the North

# Illustrations 3A & 3B



3A: © Instructional Resources Corporation



3B: © Instructional Resources Corporation

### Discussing the Illustrations

1. These are two very different illustrations. They touch on two very different aspects of the Renaissance and its ongoing influence. The first is a 1570 map of the world by Abraham Ortelius of Antwerp. What events made it possible for Europeans to draw maps of the world as complete as this?
2. What parts of the map seem least accurate? Why might that have still been so in 1570?
3. How might the Renaissance spirit in art, science, and politics have influenced Ortelius in creating his map?
4. At upper right is 16th-century French writer Michel de Montaigne. One quote from Montaigne is: "Nothing is so firmly believed as that which we least know." Another is: "We can be knowledgeable with other men's knowledge, but we cannot be wise with other men's wisdom." What do you think Montaigne means by these two statements? Explain why you do or do not think these ideas are typical of the spirit of the Renaissance.

### Follow-up Activities

1. Abraham Ortelius published maps by another Flemish geographer, Gerardus Mercator. Read more about Mercator's life. In particular, learn about his education, his training as an engraver, his Protestant religious beliefs, and his work as a cartographer, including his reasons for developing what came to be called the "Mercator projection." This is the use of parallel lines of longitude in creating flat maps and charts. Prepare a brief talk to give in class in which you explain why you think Mercator was or was not a typical Renaissance man of the 1500s.
2. **Small-group activity:** Collect examples of Northern and Italian Renaissance art. As a group, discuss and compare the works you choose. Divide the works of art among the members of the group and write brief summaries of key characteristics of each work. Use these in a class talk comparing the art of the Northern Renaissance and the Italian Renaissance.



# **Image Close-ups**





## The Passing of the Middle Ages

# Illustrations 1A & 1B



1A :Stock Montage, Inc.

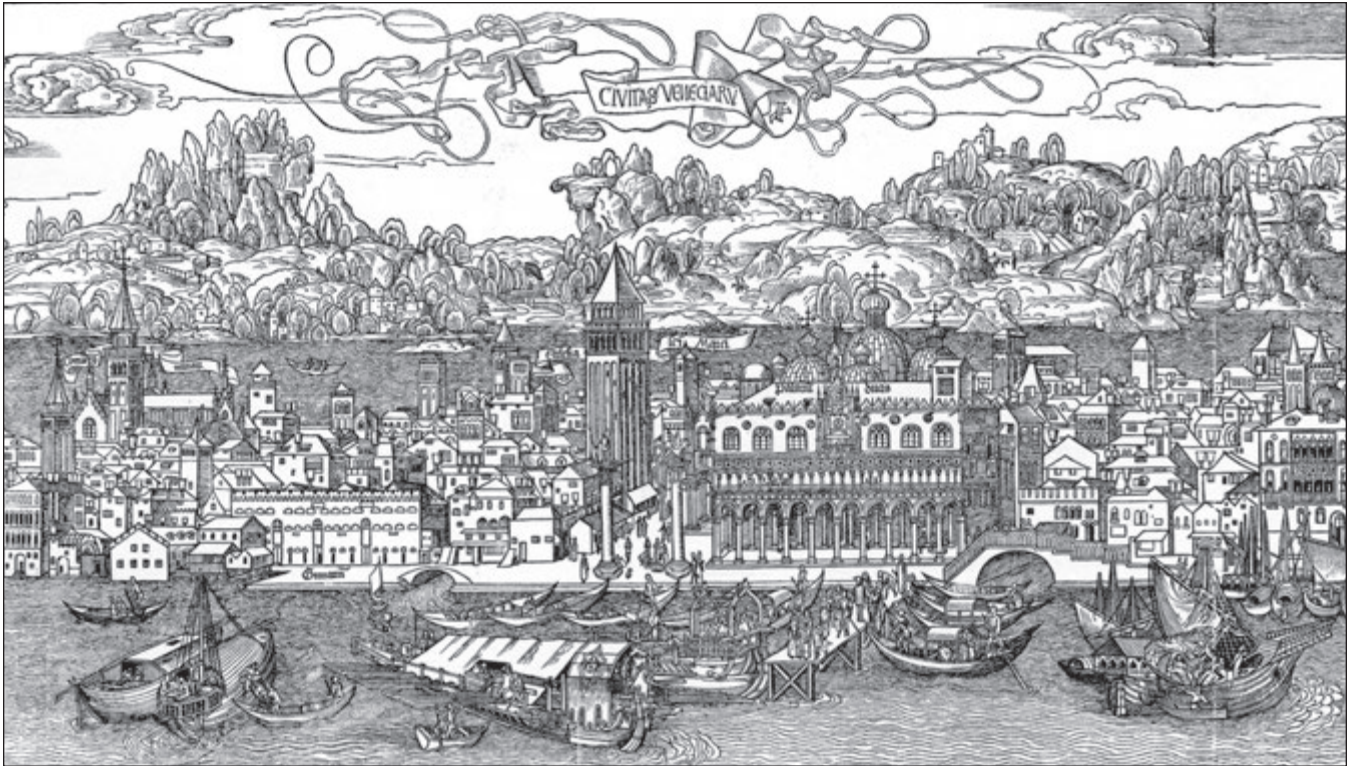


1B: Stock Montage, Inc.



## The Passing of the Middle Ages

# Illustration 2



Stock Montage, Inc.

## The Passing of the Middle Ages

# Illustrations 3A & 3B



3A: Stock Montage, Inc.



3B: Stock Montage, Inc.



## The Spirit of Humanism

# Illustration 1

*“Neither exhortations to virtue nor the argument of approaching death should divert us from literature; for in a good mind it excites the love of virtue, and dissipates, or at least diminishes, the fear of death. To desert our studies shows want of self-confidence rather than wisdom, for letters do not hinder but aid the properly constituted mind which possesses them; they facilitate our life, they do not retard it. . . . Cato, I never forget, acquainted himself with Latin literature as he was growing old, and Greek when he had really become an old man. Varro, who reached his hundredth year still reading and writing, parted from life sooner than from his love of study. Livius Drusus, although weakened by age and afflicted with blindness, did not give up his interpretation of the civil law, which he carried on to the great advantage of the state. . . .”*

Petrarch, *A Letter to Boccaccio*



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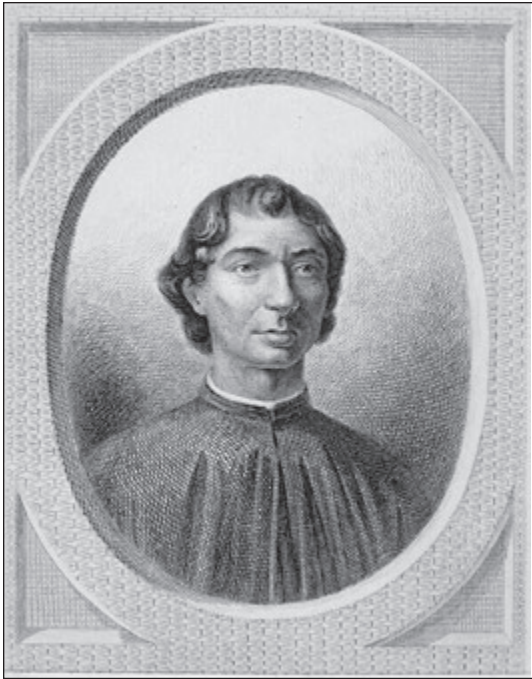
The Spirit of Humanism  
**Illustration 2**



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## The Spirit of Humanism

## Illustration 3



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*“The question arises whether it is better [for a prince] to be loved more than feared or feared more than loved. The reply is that one ought to be both . . . but as it is difficult for the two to go together, it is much safer to be feared than loved. . . . For it may be said of men in general that they are ungrateful, voluble, dissemblers, anxious to avoid danger, and covetous of gain; as long as you benefit them, they are entirely yours . . . but when necessity approaches, they revolt. . . . Love is held by a chain of obligation which . . . is broken whenever it serves [men’s] purpose; but fear is maintained by a dread of punishment which never fails.”*

Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*



**The Renaissance in Art**

# Illustrations 1A & 1B



1A: © Instructional Resources Corporation



1B: © Instructional Resources Corporation



## The Renaissance in Art

# Illustration 2



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**The Renaissance in Art**

# **Illustration 3**



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## The Renaissance in the North

# Illustration 1



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## The Renaissance in the North

# Illustration 2

### Desiderius Erasmus

*“This then is the only road to happiness: first, know yourself; do not allow yourself to be led by the passions, but submit all things to the judgment of the reason. . . . Nothing is harder than for a man to conquer himself, but there is no greater reward or blessing.”*

*Handbook of the Militant Christian*

*“We must look for peace by purging the very sources of war, false ambitions, and evil desires. As long as individuals serve their own personal interests, the common good will suffer. No one achieves what he desires if the methods employed be evil. The princes should use their wisdom for the promotion of what is good for the entire populace.”*

*The Complaint of Peace*



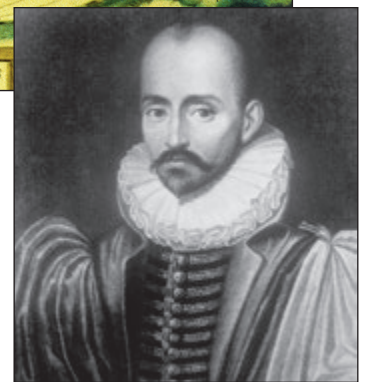
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The Renaissance in the North

# Illustrations 3A & 3B



3A: © Instructional Resources Corporation



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