

Year 5 General Studies

The Renaissance

Renaissance, (French: “Rebirth”) period in European civilization immediately following the Middle Ages and conventionally held to have been characterized by a surge of interest in Classical scholarship and values.

During the Middle Ages there were two institutions that controlled much of Europe. The Holy Roman Empire influenced the political life of the people. The popes of the Roman Catholic Church controlled the religious life. Both of these institutions began to lose power by the 1300s. Individual European nations also grew stronger. People started writing in their own languages instead of Latin (the language of the Catholic church). People felt freer to think in new ways.



Art

Some of the greatest Renaissance artists worked in Florence and in other cities in Italy. The rulers of Florence, the Medici family, spent great amounts of money to have artists create pictures, buildings, and statues. Leonardo da Vinci worked during the late 1400s and early 1500s. He painted two of the world’s most famous works: the Mona Lisa and the Last Supper. Leonardo also made statues and designed weapons. He even drew up plans for a helicopter. Michelangelo and Raphael were also important artists of this period. They painted religious figures but gave them a realistic, human quality.

Science

The spirit of inquiry and discovery also led to a Renaissance in science. In the Middle Ages, scholars usually took their scientific knowledge from books. During the Renaissance, however, people began to experiment and observe for themselves. Nicolaus Copernicus, who was born in Poland, was one of the greatest astronomers of the Renaissance. He showed that Earth revolves around the Sun. For more than 1,000 years before that people had believed that everything in the universe revolved around Earth.

Exploration

While many artists and thinkers used their talents to express new ideas, some Europeans took to the seas to learn more about the world around them. In a period known as the Age of Discovery, several important explorations were made.

Voyagers launched expeditions to travel the entire globe. They discovered new shipping routes to the Americas, India and the Far East, and explorers trekked across areas that weren’t fully mapped.

Famous journeys were taken by Ferdinand Magellan, Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci (after whom America is named), Marco Polo, Ponce de Leon, Vasco Núñez de Balboa, Hernando De Soto and other explorers.

The Renaissance

Questions

1. What does the word 'renaissance' mean in French?

2. What two institutions controlled much of Europe during the Middle Ages? _____

3. Which famous Polish astronomer showed that Earth revolves around the Sun? _____

4. Why did people begin to feel freer to think in new ways?

5. The continents of North and South America are named after the famous Italian explorer Amerigo Vespucci. True / False

6. Who painted the Mona Lisa and the Last Supper?

7. Michelangelo and Raphael were famous explorers. True / False