

# Reading Essentials and Study Guide



## The Renaissance in Europe, 1350–1600

### Lesson 2 Ideas and Art of the Renaissance

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

*How can ideas be reflected in art, sculpture, and architecture?*

#### Reading HELPDESK

##### Academic Vocabulary

**attain** to gain or achieve

**core** the basic or essential part

**perspective** artistic techniques used to give the effect of three-dimensional depth to two-dimensional surfaces; viewpoint

**style** having a distinctive quality or form

**circumstance** a determining condition; state of affairs

##### Content Vocabulary

**humanism** an intellectual movement of the Renaissance based on the study of the humanities, which included grammar, rhetoric, poetry, moral philosophy, and history

**vernacular** the language of everyday speech in a particular region

**fresco** painting done on fresh, wet plaster with water-based paints

#### TAKING NOTES: *Organizing*

**ACTIVITY** Use this chart to identify how Renaissance education was affected by humanism.

<b>Area:</b>
<b>Effects:</b>
<b>Effects:</b>
<b>Effects:</b>

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### Lesson 2 Ideas and Art of the Renaissance, *continued*

#### IT MATTERS BECAUSE

Renaissance humanism focused European culture on the individual. It marked a major change from the religion-centered view of the Middle Ages. The goal of the humanists was to educate the whole person, much as modern educators try to do. Today's liberal arts curriculum got its start in the Renaissance.

#### Italian Renaissance Humanism

**Guiding Question** *How did humanism help define the Italian Renaissance?*

The Renaissance was an age of secularism, or rejection of religious thought. It also emphasized the individual. The writings and artworks of the period have these two characteristics. The key intellectual movement of the Renaissance was called **humanism**.

#### Development of Humanism

Humanism was based on the study of the classics, the literature of ancient Greece and Rome. Humanists studied grammar, rhetoric (ways of writing and speaking to persuade people), poetry, moral philosophy, and history. Today these subjects are called the humanities.

Humanists looked at the classics in new ways. In the Middle Ages, writers had quoted classic texts. They mostly used the classics to give support to the ideas in their religious writings. The humanists used the classics for a different reason. They used the ideas in the classics to give new life to their culture. The humanists felt a different relationship, or connection, to the writers of antiquity (ancient times). The writers of the Middle Ages had seen the writers of antiquity as intellectual giants. The humanists saw the ancient Greek and Roman writers as their intellectual equals.

Francesco Petrarch (PEE•TRAHRK) is often called the father of Italian Renaissance humanism. He did more than any other person in the fourteenth century to develop the humanist movement. He looked for lost Latin manuscripts. He had others search for manuscripts in monastic libraries throughout Europe. He also began the humanist emphasis on the use of pure classical Latin. This meant Latin as used by the ancient Romans, not the Latin used during the Middle Ages. Humanists used the works of Cicero—an ancient Roman politician and philosopher—as a model for prose. For poetry, they used the works of Virgil, a well-known poet of the Roman Empire.

Humanists of the 1300s like Petrarch described the life of an intellectual as one of solitude, or being alone. They rejected family life and a life of action in the community. In contrast, during the 1400s, humanists took a new interest in civic life. They believed that intellectuals had a duty to participate in community life. They were supposed to use their study of the humanities to help the state. As a result, it is not surprising that many humanists served as secretaries to Italian city-states, princes, and popes.

Byzantine and Islamic influences were also important to the development of Renaissance humanism. Byzantine scholars provided knowledge of the ancient Greek language. Islamic scholars served as transmitters of ancient Greek culture.

#### Vernacular Literature

In their writings, scholars, lawyers, and theologians (experts in the study of religion and God) used classical Latin. They followed the lead of humanists. However, some writers wrote in the **vernacular**, the local spoken language. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Italian authors Dante Alighieri and Christine de Pizan helped make vernacular literature popular. People in different parts of Italy

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spoke different dialects of Italian. The Italian spoken in different places had some differences in words, grammar, and pronunciation.

Dante wrote his masterpiece, the *Divine Comedy*, in the dialect of his native Florence. This dialect would later become the Italian language. *The Divine Comedy* is a long poem that describes the soul's journey to **attain** (reach or gain) Paradise. Dante later defended his use of the vernacular in the *Divine Comedy*. He explained that he wanted everyone to understand and enjoy his poem—not just well-educated people who could read Latin.

Christine de Pizan also wrote in the vernacular. She was an Italian who lived in France and wrote in French. She is best known for her works in defense of women. She wrote *The Book of the City of Ladies* between 1404 and 1405. In it she denounced the many male writers who had argued that women, by their very nature, were not able to learn. De Pizan argued that women were as intelligent as men. She said that women would learn just as well as men if they could attend the same schools.



#### Reading Progress Check

**Explaining** How did the Renaissance contribute to the rediscovery of classical civilization and the development of vernacular literature?

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## Renaissance Education

**Guiding Question** *How was education during the Renaissance shaped by humanism?*

The humanist movement had a great influence on education in the 1300s and 1400s. Education became focused on worldly matters rather than on religion. The humanists believed that education could change people. They wrote books on education and opened schools based on their ideas about education.

Liberal studies were at the **core**, or center, of humanist schools. What were the liberal studies? They were very much like today's liberal arts. Humanists believed that students should learn history, ethics, public speaking, grammar, logic, poetry, mathematics, astronomy, and music. Humanists thought that liberal studies helped students reach their full potential. The purpose of liberal studies was to produce people who follow a path of virtue and wisdom. Students also needed to have rhetorical skills—that is, be able to use language well. Then they could, in turn, persuade others to follow the same path.

Humanists thought that education should help students prepare for everyday life. Its purpose was to create well-rounded citizens, not great scholars. For example, sons of aristocrats needed a humanist education to prepare themselves for leadership roles.

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Humanists also emphasized physical education. This followed the ancient Greek ideal of a sound mind in a sound body. Students learned the skills of throwing a javelin, archery, and dancing. They ran, wrestled, hunted, and swam. The few female students who attended humanist schools studied the classics. They were encouraged to learn some history, as well as how to ride, dance, sing, play the lute, and appreciate poetry.

The use of printing developed during the Renaissance. Printing had an influence not only on education, but on most areas of Renaissance culture. In the mid-fifteenth century, the German printer Johannes Gutenberg (GOO•tehn•BURG) helped start the use of movable type, and he improved the printing press. Movable type is made up of individual letters of wood or metal. Printers can quickly put movable type into pages for printing presses. A press can print many copies of the same page. Gutenberg's new printing methods could produce many copies of a book quickly and easily.

Before Gutenberg, most books were written by hand. Individuals slowly copied the books word by word. Printers also printed books page by page using large wooden blocks. They first had to slowly and carefully cut words into the wooden blocks. Then they printed pages one at a time. Both ways of making books were very slow, and so books were rare and expensive. After Gutenberg, there were more and more books that were less and less expensive.

The new ways of printing started a true revolution. Because people could get books more easily, knowledge could spread much more widely. Scholars could more readily get books for their research, and this helped advance knowledge. It also stimulated the creation of a general reading public. The reading public has continued to grow ever since.



#### Reading Progress Check

**Identifying Central Issues** What was the focus of education for the Renaissance humanists?

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## Italian Renaissance Art

**Guiding Question** *How did humanism influence the works of Renaissance artists and authors?*

Renaissance artists tried to imitate nature. They wanted viewers to see the real world in their works. At the same time, these artists were focusing on showing human beings in their works. As a result, the human body became an important subject in painting.

### New Techniques in Painting

The works of the fourteenth-century Italian painter Giotto began some of the innovations in the art of the Renaissance. Frescoes by Tommaso di Giovanni, called Masaccio (muh•ZAH•chee•oh), are considered the first masterpieces of Early Renaissance (1400–1490) art. A **fresco** is a painting done on

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fresh, wet plaster with water-based paints. Human figures in medieval paintings look flat. In contrast, Masaccio's figures have depth and seem to come alive. Masaccio mastered the laws of **perspective** (rules of how to make objects in a painting look closer or farther away). With their use, Masaccio made the objects on a flat two-dimensional painting look three-dimensional. This is the way the objects look in the real world. Masaccio helped start a new, realistic **style**, or way of presenting things. *The Tribute of Money* is a famous fresco of Masaccio, which he was commissioned to paint. It can be seen in the Brancacci Chapel in Florence.

Other fifteenth-century Florentine painters continued to develop the new Renaissance style. Artists made developments in two major areas. One area was the technical side of painting. This area included the study of laws of perspective. It also included studying, with the use of geometry, how outdoor space and light are organized. The second major area artists studied was movement and the human body. The realistic portrayal, or picture, of the individual, especially the human nude, became one of the chief aims of Italian Renaissance art.

### Sculpture and Architecture

The Renaissance also produced amazing advances in sculpture and architecture. Like painters, Renaissance sculptors tried to show a human-centered world. The sculptor Donatello studied the statues of the ancient Greeks and Romans. His works included a realistic, free-standing figure of George, a Christian saint.

The buildings of classical Rome inspired the work of architect Filippo Brunelleschi (broo-nuh-LEHS-kee). His design of the church of San Lorenzo in Florence reflects this. The classical columns and rounded arches in the church's interior design create an environment that does not overwhelm the worshiper, as Gothic cathedrals might. The church creates an open airy space to fit human needs, not divine. Brunelleschi used his mathematical and artistic skills to come up with a way to build the large exterior dome. Likewise, he rediscovered the classical principles of linear-perspective construction. These principles had disappeared from use during the Middle Ages. These principles helped Renaissance artists create realistic imagery.

### High Renaissance Masters

The last stage, or period, of Italian Renaissance painting lasted from about 1490 to 1520. This period is called the High Renaissance. The artists Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, and Michelangelo painted during this period.

Leonardo was the model of a well-rounded "Renaissance man." He was an artist, inventor, and visionary. Leonardo mastered the art of realistic painting. He even dissected human bodies. He did this to better understand how the human body worked. However, in his paintings, he wanted to go beyond realism. He wanted to create idealized (perfect) forms. These forms would show the perfection of nature and of the individual. Leonardo could not express his ideas fully in a realistic style.

At age 25, Raphael was already one of Italy's best painters. He was admired for his many paintings of the Madonna (Mary, the mother of Jesus). In these, he achieved an ideal of beauty far beyond human standards. Raphael is also well known for his frescoes in the Vatican Palace. His *School of Athens* reveals a world of balance, harmony, and order. These are the underlying principles of classical Greek and Roman art.

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Michelangelo Buonarroti was an excellent painter, sculptor, and architect. Michelangelo's desire to create, along with his great passion and energy, resulted in a remarkable number of projects. His figures on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome depict the ideal human being with perfect proportions. The beauty of this idealized human is meant to reflect divine beauty. The more beautiful the body, the more godlike the figure.



#### Reading Progress Check

**Specifying** In what ways did Italian artists use the ideas of the humanist movement in their works?

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## The Northern Artistic Renaissance

**Guiding Question** *How did the works of northern European artists differ from those of Italian artists?*

Like Italian artists, the artists of northern Europe worked to portray their world realistically. However, their approach was different from that of the Italians.

**Circumstance** (the conditions that influence a situation) helps explain the differences. The large wall spaces of Italian churches had encouraged the art of fresco painting. On these spaces, Italian artists portrayed humans in realistic settings. The artists were able to show their mastery of the technical skills of painting, such as perspective. In the north, the Gothic cathedrals, with their stained glass windows, did not have space for large frescoes. Instead, northern European artists painted illustrations for books and wooden panels for altarpieces. Painters used great care to depict each object accurately on a small scale.

The most important northern school of art in the 1400s was in Flanders, one of the Low Countries (present-day Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands). Flemish artists typically placed their subjects among everyday objects. This was done in Robert Campin's *Merode Altarpiece*. Campin was an early Flemish master of painting. He used shadows to create depth and very small details to reflect reality. The Flemish painter Jan van Eyck (EYEK) was among the first to use and perfect the technique of oil painting. He used a special mixture of linseed oil and nut oils, together with the colors, for his paints. This medium gave van Eyck a wide variety of brilliant colors to work with. With his oil paints, he could create striking realism through the use of tiny details. He did this in his painting *Giovanni Arnolfini and His Bride*. Like other Northern Renaissance artists, van Eyck imitated nature. He studied it carefully and portrayed its details as best he could. Unlike the Italians, he did not use the laws of perspective to copy nature.

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By 1500, artists from the north had begun to study in Italy. They were influenced by what artists were doing there. Albrecht Dürer, a German artist, was greatly influenced by the Italians. He made two trips to Italy and learned the laws of perspective. Like the Italian artists of the High Renaissance, Dürer tried to attain a standard of ideal beauty, which was based on a careful study of the human body. Dürer did not reject the use of minute, or tiny, details, which northern artists typically used. He did try, however, to fit those details more harmoniously into his works. In this way, he still tried to follow Italian artistic theories.



#### Reading Progress Check

**Contrasting** What was a key difference between the northern European artists and the Italian artists?

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