

History Revision – The Renaissance

Renaissance means “**Rebirth**” and it refers to the time in European history from 1350 – 1600 when scholars began to take an interest in the Art, Science, Architecture, Literature of ancient Greece and Rome.

The scholars of the Renaissance were called **Humanists**, because they placed humans rather than God at the centre of their culture. The Renaissance began in Italy and slowly spread to the rest of Europe.

WHY DID THE RENAISSANCE BEGIN IN ITALY?

Italy was the birthplace of the Renaissance for many reasons;

- **Physical Remains** – Italy contained the majority of the remains from the Roman Empire. These provided models and inspiration for the artists of the Renaissance.
- **Libraries** – The works of the great classical authors, such as Homer, Virgil and Cicero had been neglected for centuries. However, copies of these works were to be found in the libraries of the monasteries and universities of Italy.
- **Trade and Wealth** – All trade in silk and spices, between Europe and the East passed through Italy. This made the Merchants very wealthy and they spent this money on paintings and other works of art.
- **Patrons** – Some of the wealthiest people in Europe lived in Italy e.g. the Pope and the Medici family in Florence. These families used their wealth to sponsor great artists who were interested in the learning of ancient Greece and Rome.
- **Greek Scholars** – in 1453 the Ottoman Turks conquered the city of Constantinople. Many of the city’s scholars fled to Italy to teach in the universities there. They brought with them the ancient learning, which had not been neglected in their city.
- **The Medici Family** – The wealthiest family in Europe. From 1434 – 1469 Cosimo De Medici was the head of the Medici. He was a leading Renaissance Patron who spent huge sums of money buying copies of ancient Greek and Roman manuscripts and gathering them together into Libraries in Florence. His son Lorenzo De Medici sponsored Leonardo Da Vinci and Michelangelo and paid them to produce works of art for his palaces. He was known as “Lorenzo the Magnificent”.

THE SPREAD OF THE RENAISSANCE;

Bishops and Clergy from all over Europe attended the universities of Italy to study the “New Learning” and when they returned home, they brought with them the ideas of the Renaissance.

The invention of printing meant that books could be reproduced more quickly and much more cheaply and this greatly helped the spread of the ideas of the Renaissance

PRINTING;

Before printing was invented, scholars wrote down their ideas on Parchment. This was very slow work. About 1450 a German, John Gutenberg invented a system known as “Movable Metal Type”. The first book he printed was the Bible; his system soon became copied all over Europe.

IMPORTANCE OF PRINTING;

- It was now possible to produce cheaply, many copies of any piece of writing.
- It became more difficult to make new ideas disappear.
- The ability to read and write became much more widespread.

RENAISSANCE WRITERS;

Francesco Petrarch 1304 – 1374;

He was the first Renaissance man. He discovered the speeches of the Roman Orator Cicero, which had been believed to be lost. He translated them and made them available to a wider audience. He believed that Christians could learn a lot from the ancient world. He is also remembered for his “Sonnets” which he wrote to a young girl called Laura.

Desiderius Erasmus 1469 – 1536;

He was a Dutch priest who was famous throughout Europe for his learning. He counted Thomas More and King Henry VIII among his friends. His most famous work is called “In Praise of Folly” in which he pours scorn on badly educated priests, lazy monks and bad Popes. He wrote a new Latin Bible and believed it should be written in the language of the people.

William Shakespeare 1564 – 1616;

Born in Stratford-upon-Avon, the son of a wealthy merchant. In 1584, he married Anne Hathaway and afterwards moved to London to work as an actor and a writer of plays. He was a shareholder in the Globe Theatre where many of his plays were performed. In all he wrote 37 plays such as Hamlet, Macbeth and Richard III. He also wrote 154 Sonnets to two people whose identities remain a mystery to this day.

RENAISSANCE ARCHITECTURE;

Palaces that were comfortable to live in began to replace cold, dark castles during the Renaissance. Architects began to base their designs on the remains of ancient Roman Villas.

Fillipo Brunelleschi 1377 – 1446;

Trained as a Goldsmith, but turned to Architecture after he lost a contest to design the doors of the Baptistery in Florence. He studied a book of Roman Designs by the Roman Architect **Vetruvius Polio**. He was awarded the job of building a dome for the cathedral in Florence. No one had built a dome like this in Europe for 1500 years. There were many problems to be overcome. It took 16 years to complete and 100 years later Michelangelo based his design for the dome of St Peters in Rome on it.

Andrea Palladio 1508 – 1580;

He studied the designs of ancient Rome and wrote “**Four Books on Architecture**”. For almost 400 years afterwards, many public buildings all over the world were built in the “**Palladian style**”.

RENAISSANCE SCULPTURE;

The Sculptors of the Renaissance copied the statues of the ancient Greeks and Romans. Their work had a quality of “lifelike realism” that had not been seen for over 1000 years.

Lorenzo Ghiberti 1378 – 1455;

He designed the doors of the Baptistery of the cathedral in Florence. Michelangelo said that they were good enough to be the “gates of Paradise” itself.

Donatello 1386 – 1466;

He was a pupil of Ghiberti. His most famous work is the nude bronze statue of David. All the great artists of the Renaissance said that he influenced them.

RENAISSANCE PAINTING;

There were many developments in painting during the Renaissance.

- **Oil based paints** were developed. They dried more slowly and gave artists more time to put detail in their work.
- Paintings became more **lifelike and realistic** as painters studied human bodies by cutting up corpses.
- **Perspective** was developed as a way of giving a picture the appearance of depth.
- **Fresco** was developed. This was a method of painting directly on to wet plaster, so that the painting became part of the plaster as it dried. This made the painting less likely to fade over time.
- Leonardo da Vinci developed **Sfumato**, which allowed artists to show shades of skin colour and lighting. It was first used in the “Mona Lisa”.

Leonardo da Vinci 1452 – 1519;

The perfect Renaissance man he was interested in Engineering, Architecture, Science, Sculpture, weapons design and painting. He was born near Florence and Lorenzo de Medici was his patron. From 1481 – 1499 he worked for the Duke of Milan; while there he painted the Virgin on the Rocks and the Last Supper. In 1499, he returned to Florence where he painted the **Mona Lisa**, using Sfumato for the first time. He kept many notebooks, which employed mirror writing these survive today and contain important ideas on Biology, Physiology, Physics, and Gravity. In 1516, the French King gave him a pension and a house near Paris he died in 1519.

Albrecht Durer 1471 – 1528;

Born in Nuremberg, Germany. He trained in a workshop, which produced paintings and woodcuts. He was a poet as well as an author of books on everything from military strategy to art. Durer travelled widely through Europe and used these journeys as an opportunity to study the art of Renaissance Italy and to perfect his technical skills. His drawings of nature in particular are remarkably precise in their detail, for example “Great piece of Turf”. Durer was a painter of genius and his works include The Adoration of The Trinity. In 1512, his talents were recognised when he was appointed as chief painter to the Holy Roman Emperor, Maximilian. Durer also produced hundreds of woodcuts and engravings, among the most famous are St Jerome in his study and The Prodigal Son. He supported Luther in his dispute with the Pope. He died in 1528.

RENAISSANCE SCIENCE;

Educated people began to experiment in science and mathematics and because of their work; people began to see the world around them in a completely new way. This was especially true of Astronomy and Medicine.

Nicholas Copernicus 1473 – 1543;

Born in Poland, he was a Catholic priest, but he had a deep interest in Astronomy. He studied the night sky and using mathematics, he began to develop new theories about the Universe. He began to believe that the earth revolved around the sun, the exact opposite of what people believed at the time. He put his ideas into a book “*On the Revolution of the Celestial Orbs*”, but was afraid of the reaction he might receive so it remained unpublished until his death in 1543.

Galileo Galilei 1564 – 1642;

Born in Pisa, he was Professor of Mathematics by the age of 25 at the University of Pisa. His first great discovery was that objects of different weight fall at the same speed. He dropped a cannon ball and a bullet from the Leaning Tower of Pisa and they hit the ground at almost the same time. This was an important stage in the discovery of the forces of gravity later. In 1609, he heard about the invention of the Telescope in Holland. Without waiting to see one, he figured out how it was made and began to manufacture and sell his own. With it, he discovered that Jupiter had four Moons. This helped him prove that Copernicus’s theory about the movement of the Planets was correct. However, in 1633 the Catholic Church condemned this work. The Inquisition forced him to withdraw his ideas and state that he was wrong. He remained under house arrest for the rest of his life. He is called “*The Father of Modern Science*”. He died in 1642.

Andreas Vesalius 1514 – 1564;

Born in Brussels in 1514, he is one of the greatest doctors of the Renaissance. He taught Medicine at the University of Padua in Italy and became private doctor to the King of Spain. In 1543 he published “*On the Fabric of the Human Body*” It contained incredibly detailed drawings of the Anatomy of the body based on dissections he had done himself. From then on dissection became established as the basis for human anatomical studies and not the work of ancient writers such as Galen.

William Harvey 1578 – 1657;

Born in England in 1578, he was private doctor to King Charles 1. In 1628, he published ***“On the Motion of the Heart and the Blood”***. In this, he proved the amazing discovery that the heart was a pump that sent blood racing around the entire body. This fact was so astounding that many people refused to believe it and it was to be some time before it was recognised that Harvey had made one of the greatest breakthrough discoveries in Medicine. He died in 1657.