

The Renaissance - Introduction to the Renaissance

by ReadWorks



Leonardo da Vinci

Mona Lisa, a famous painting from the Renaissance period

Exciting changes started happening in Europe beginning in the 1300s. People woke up to the world around them. Art, literature, and philosophy came alive with new ideas. This time period, which ended in about 1600, is known as the Renaissance. "Renaissance" comes from the Latin word meaning "rebirth." The Renaissance was the rebirth of learning in Europe after the Middle Ages.

The Middle Ages began with the fall of the Roman Empire. Throughout the Middle Ages, the thoughts of very wise classical philosophers were lost and forgotten. The papacy had control and wanted people to live righteously. They wanted people to think only about theology, or the study of God. Noblemen had to follow the Catholic Church or they would be excommunicated,

or kicked out. Peasants were too tired with their daily toil to pursue any interests like art or writing. Neither people, nor their ideas, traveled very far. People were not as curious about the world around them. This is why the Middle Ages is sometimes called the Dark Ages.

During the Renaissance all of this changed. If the Middle Ages were dark, the Renaissance was the bright dawn of a new era. Scholars and teachers began to rediscover the old thoughts of the classical philosophers from Greece and Rome. Instead of just accepting everything the leaders of the Church said, people wanted to experience and learn about the world for themselves. Ships began exploring different parts of the world. They brought back new goods to trade. People started to explore new thinking, too. They realized that they didn't just have to study their religion. They could enjoy many things here on earth, too. They called their new philosophy humanism because it focused on humans, not just God.

The Renaissance movement got its start in Italy in the early 1300s. More and more ships began arriving from foreign places to Italy's many port cities. With them came goods to trade and many new ideas. Art, literature, thought, and government began to blossom. New cities started to form. A new middle class of merchants grew from all the foreign trade. These middle class people had money and time to explore art and literature. They were not as stuck in the tradition of the Church as the noblemen were, and they had more freedom than peasants. Eventually, these changes would spread to the rest of Europe's mainland. But first, they arrived in Italy - via the sea!

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. How did the ideas of the philosophers of ancient Greece and Rome get lost for so many years?

- A. The philosophers went on a really long trip, and no one knew where they were.
- B. The books of the philosophers were buried in a mystery cave, which no one could find.
- C. No one could study the philosophers' ideas, so they lost their importance.
- D. All the books were written in languages that no one understood.

2. According to the passage, why didn't people during the Middle Ages care that much about the world around them?

- A. None of them had families, so their lives were pretty boring.
- B. They didn't think this world mattered - they were only focused on what their lives would be like in heaven.
- C. Their brains weren't very developed, so they weren't really able to experience deep emotions about anything.
- D. They all believed that what mattered most was what they learned from dreams while they were sleeping.

3. How were the people of the Renaissance different than those of the Middle Ages?

- A. They were more interested in exploring the world around them.
- B. They tended to be better looking.
- C. They were all philosophers.
- D. They all became priests.

4. What caused the Renaissance to arrive in Italy first?

- A. Italians tended to be less religious than other Europeans, even during the Middle Ages.
- B. Most of the books by the ancient philosophers had been stored in a library in Italy, so Italians were the first to rediscover them.
- C. Italy had fertile soil, so it was easy for ideas to blossom there, like flowers.
- D. Italy had a lot of port cities, so new ideas sailed in from all over the world.

5. Why didn't peasant pursue art or literature during the middle ages?

- A. They were not interested.
- B. They were too poor.
- C. They were too tired from their work.
- D. They were lazy.

6. Reread the last two paragraphs. Can you find two examples of figurative language? Write the two examples below.

7. What is humanism?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

The Middle Ages are sometimes referred to as the Dark Ages _____ to the lack of art, philosophy and learning of that time.

- A. because
- B. due
- C. after
- D. while