

The Intellectual and Artistic Renaissance

Guide to Reading

Main Ideas

- The most important intellectual movement associated with the Renaissance was humanism.
- The Renaissance produced many great artists and sculptors such as Michelangelo, Raphael, and Leonardo da Vinci.

Key Terms

humanism, fresco

People to Identify

Petrarch, Dante, Michelangelo, Jan van Eyck, Albrecht Dürer

Places to Locate

Canterbury, Flanders

Preview Questions

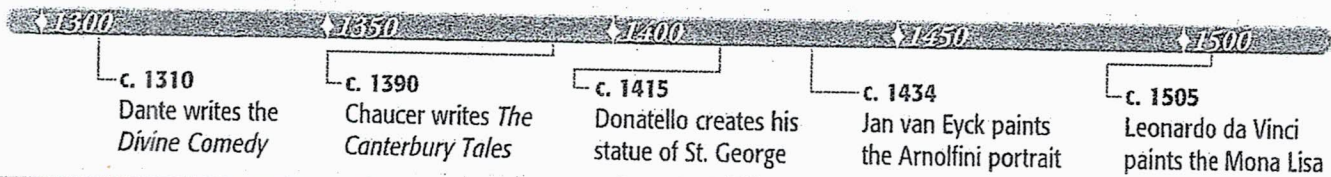
1. What were the characteristics of Italian Renaissance humanism?
2. What were the chief achievements of European Renaissance painters?

Reading Strategy

Summarizing Information Use a table like the one below to describe the three pieces of literature written by Dante, Chaucer, and de Pizan. What was the primary importance of each of these works?

<i>Divine Comedy</i>	<i>The Canterbury Tales</i>	<i>The Book of the City of Ladies</i>

Preview of Events



Voices from the Past



Pico della Mirandola

Pico della Mirandola, a Renaissance philosopher, said in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*:

“You, constrained by no limits in accordance with your own free will, shall ordain for yourself the limits of your nature. We have set you at the world’s center that you may from there more easily observe whatever is in the world. We have made you neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so that with freedom of choice and with honor, as though the maker and molder of yourself, you may fashion yourself in whatever shape you shall prefer.”

—*The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, Ernst Cassirer, Paul Kristeller, and John Randall, Jr., eds., 1948

There is no better expression of the Renaissance’s exalted view of the importance of the individual.

Italian Renaissance Humanism

Secularism and an emphasis on the individual characterized the Renaissance. These characteristics are most noticeable in the intellectual and artistic accomplishments of the period. A key intellectual movement of the Renaissance was humanism.

Humanism was based on the study of the classics, the literary works of ancient Greece and Rome. Humanists studied such things as grammar, rhetoric, poetry, moral philosophy, and history—all of which was based on the works of ancient Greek and Roman authors. Today these subjects are called the humanities.

Petrarch (PEE•TRAHRK), who has often been called the father of Italian Renaissance humanism, did more than any other individual in the fourteenth century to foster the development of humanism. Petrarch looked for forgotten Latin manuscripts and set in motion a search for similar manuscripts in monastic libraries throughout Europe.

He also began the humanist emphasis on using pure classical Latin (Latin as used by the ancient Romans as opposed to medieval Latin). Humanists used the works of Cicero as a model for prose and those of Virgil for poetry.

In Florence, the humanist movement took a new direction at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Fourteenth-century humanists such as Petrarch had described the intellectual life as one of solitude. They rejected family and a life of action in the community. In contrast, humanists in the early 1400s took a new interest in civic life. They believed that it was the duty of an intellectual to live an active life for one's state, and that their study of the humanities should be put to the service of the state. It is no accident that they served as secretaries in the Italian city-states and to princes or popes.

Reading Check **Examining** Why is Petrarch called the father of Italian Renaissance humanism?

Vernacular Literature

The humanist emphasis on classical Latin led to its widespread use in the writings of scholars, lawyers, and theologians. However, some writers wrote in the vernacular (the language spoken in their own regions, such as Italian, French, or German). In the fourteenth century, the literary works of the Italian author Dante (DAH•tay) and the English author Geoffrey Chaucer helped make vernacular literature more popular.



Dante

Dante's masterpiece in the Italian vernacular is the *Divine Comedy*. It is the story of the soul's journey to salvation. The lengthy poem is divided into three major sections: Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven, or Paradise. Dante is led on an imaginary journey through these three realms until he reaches Paradise, where he beholds God, or "the love that moves the sun and the other stars."

Chaucer used the English vernacular in his famous work *The Canterbury Tales*. His beauty of expression and clear, forceful language were important in making his dialect the chief ancestor of the modern English language.

The Canterbury Tales consists of a collection of stories told by a group of 29 pilgrims journeying to the tomb of Saint Thomas à Becket at Canterbury, England. This format gave Chaucer the chance to portray an entire range of English society, from the high to the low born.

Another writer who used the vernacular was Christine de Pizan, a Frenchwoman who is best known for her works written in defense of women. In *The Book of the City of Ladies*, written in 1404, she denounced the many male writers who had argued that women, by their very nature, are unable to learn and are easily swayed.



Christine de Pizan

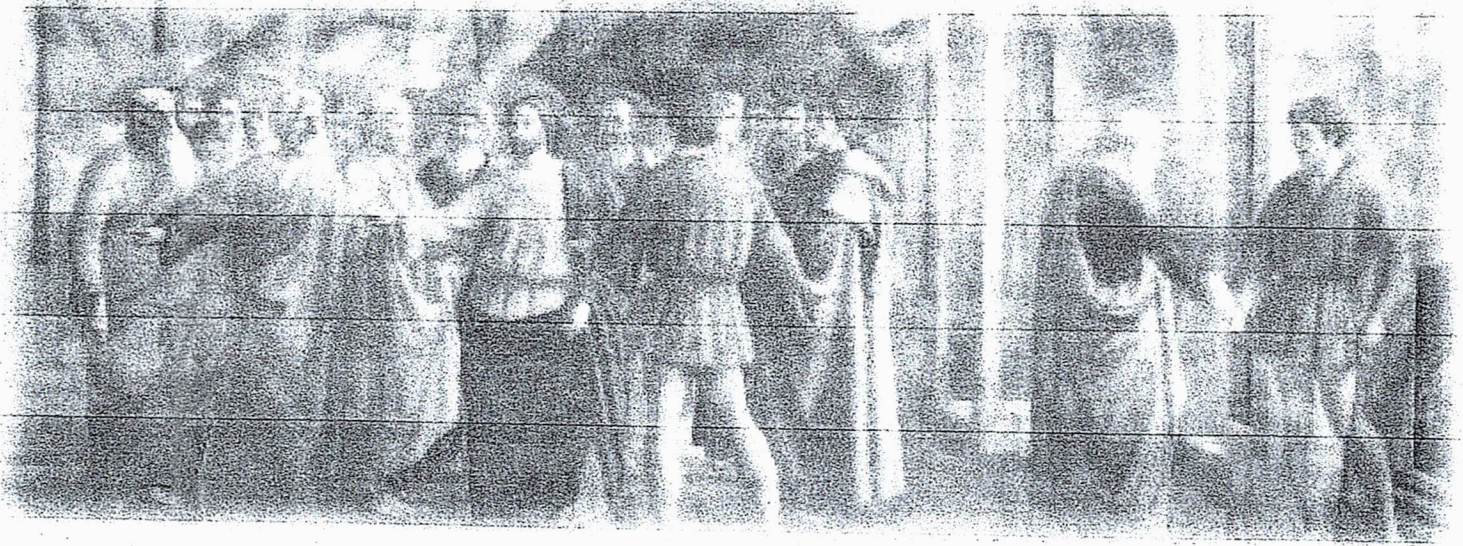
Women, de Pizan argued, could learn as well as men if they could attend the same schools:

“Should I also tell you whether a woman's nature is clever and quick enough to learn speculative sciences as well as to discover them, and likewise the manual arts. I assure you that women are equally well-suited and skilled to carry them out and to put them to sophisticated use once they have learned them.”

Reading Check **Explaining** What literary format does Chaucer use to portray English society?

Education in the Renaissance

The humanist movement had a profound effect on education. Renaissance humanists believed that education could dramatically change human beings.



History through Art

The Tribute Money by Masaccio, c. 1426

In this church fresco, Masaccio creates a realistic relationship between the Biblical figures and the background. Identify the Renaissance artistic elements used by Masaccio in this work.

They wrote books on education and opened schools based on their ideas.

At the core of humanist schools were the liberal studies. Humanists believed that the liberal studies (what we call today the liberal arts) enabled individuals to reach their full potential. One humanist wrote, "We call those studies liberal by which we attain and practice virtue and wisdom; which calls forth and develops those highest gifts of body and mind which ennoble men."

What, then, were the liberal studies? According to the humanists, students should study history, moral philosophy, eloquence (or rhetoric), letters (grammar and logic), poetry, mathematics, astronomy, and music. In short, the purpose of a liberal education (and thus the reason for studying the liberal arts) was to produce individuals who follow a path of virtue and wisdom. These individuals should also possess rhetorical skills so they can persuade others to take this same path.

Following the Greek ideal of a sound mind in a sound body, humanist educators also stressed physical education. Pupils were taught the skills of javelin throwing, archery, and dancing, and they were encouraged to run, wrestle, hunt, and swim.

Humanist educators thought that a humanist education was a practical preparation for life. Its aim was not to create great scholars but complete citizens. Humanist schools provided the model for the basic education of the European ruling classes until the twentieth century.

Females were largely absent from these schools. The few female students who did attend humanist schools studied the classics and were encouraged to know some history as well as how to ride, dance, sing, play the lute (a stringed instrument), and

appreciate poetry. They were told not to learn mathematics or rhetoric. It was thought that religion and morals should be foremost in the education of "Christian ladies" so that they could become good mothers and wives.

Reading Check Explaining How did a humanist education prepare a student for life?

The Artistic Renaissance in Italy

Renaissance artists sought to imitate nature in their works. They wanted onlookers to see the reality of the objects or events they were portraying. At the same time, these artists were developing a new world perspective. In this new view, human beings became the focus of attention—the "center and measure of all things," as one artist proclaimed.

New Techniques in Painting The frescoes painted by Masaccio (muh•ZAH•chee•oh) in Florence at the beginning of the fifteenth century have long been regarded as the first masterpieces of early Renaissance (1400–1490) art. A fresco is a painting done on fresh, wet plaster with water-based paints. Whereas human figures in medieval paintings look flat, Masaccio's have depth and come alive. By mastering the laws of perspective, which enabled him to create the illusion of three dimensions, Masaccio developed a new, realistic style of painting.

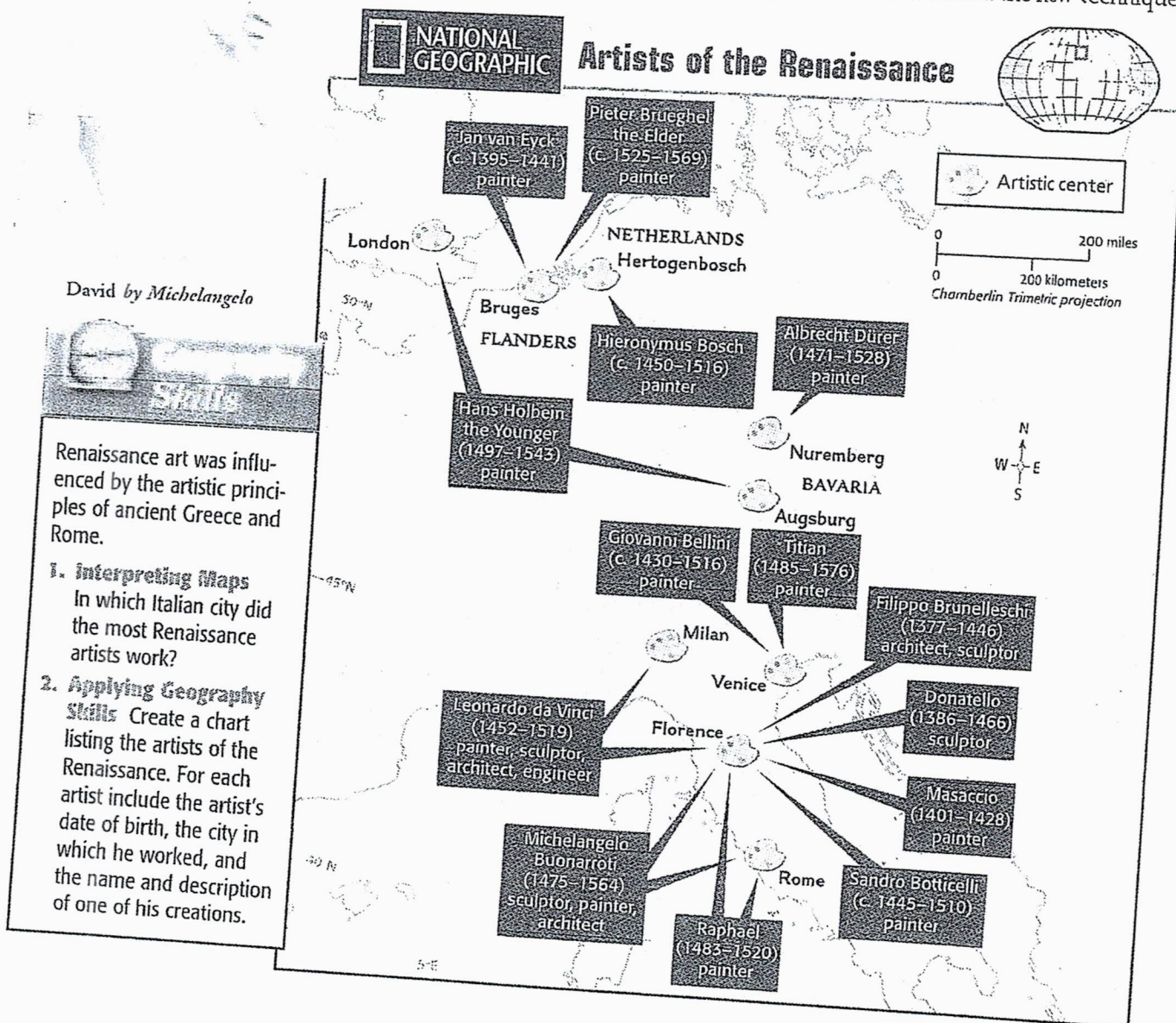
This new, or Renaissance, style was used and modified by other Florentine painters in the fifteenth century. Especially important were two major developments. One stressed the technical side of painting—understanding the laws of perspective and the organization of outdoor space and light through geometry. The second development was the investigation of movement and human anatomy. The realistic portrayal of the individual person, especially the human nude, became one of the chief aims of Italian Renaissance art.

Sculpture and Architecture The revolutionary achievements of Florentine painters in the fifteenth century were matched by equally stunning advances in sculpture and architecture. The sculptor Donatello spent time in Rome studying and copy-

ing the statues of the Greeks and Romans. Among his numerous works was a statue of Saint George, a realistic, freestanding figure.

The architect Filippo Brunelleschi (BROO•nuhl•EHS•kee) was inspired by the buildings of classical Rome to create a new architecture in Florence. The Medici, the wealthy ruling family of Florence, hired Brunelleschi to design the church of San Lorenzo. The classical columns and rounded arches that Brunelleschi used in the church's design create an environment that does not overwhelm the worshiper, as Gothic cathedrals might. Instead, the church provides comfort as a space created to fit human, and not divine, needs. Like painters and sculptors, Renaissance architects sought to reflect a human-centered world.

By the end of the fifteenth century, Italian painters, sculptors, and architects had created a new artistic world. Many artists had mastered the new techniques



David by Michelangelo

Skills

Renaissance art was influenced by the artistic principles of ancient Greece and Rome.

1. Interpreting Maps

In which Italian city did the most Renaissance artists work?

2. Applying Geography Skills

Create a chart listing the artists of the Renaissance. For each artist include the artist's date of birth, the city in which he worked, and the name and description of one of his creations.



Raphael



History through Art

School of Athens by Raphael Raphael created this painting for the pope to show the unity of Christian and classical works. Research the painting to discover the identities of the historical figures that Raphael depicted.

for realistically portraying the world around them and were now ready to move into new forms of creative expression.

Reading Check Explaining How did Renaissance paintings differ from medieval paintings?

Masters of the High Renaissance The final stage of Italian Renaissance painting, which flourished between 1490 and 1520, is called the High Renaissance. The High Renaissance in Italy is associated with three artistic giants, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, and Michelangelo.

Leonardo mastered the art of realistic painting and even dissected human bodies to better see how nature worked. However, he also stressed the need to advance beyond such realism. It was Leonardo's goal to create idealized forms that would capture the perfection of nature and the individual—perfection that could not be expressed fully by a realistic style.

At age 25, Raphael was already regarded as one of Italy's best painters. He was especially admired for his numerous madonnas (paintings of the Virgin Mary). In these, he tried to achieve an ideal of beauty far surpassing 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—the underlying principles of the art of the classical world of Greece and Rome.

Michelangelo, an accomplished painter, sculptor, and architect, was another artistic master of the High Renaissance. Fiercely driven by his desire to create, he worked with great passion and energy on a remarkable number of projects.

Michelangelo's figures on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome reveal an ideal type of human being with perfect proportions. The beauty of this idealized human being is meant to be a reflection of divine beauty. The more beautiful the body, the more god-like the figure.

Reading Check Identifying Name the three Italian artists most closely associated with the High Renaissance.

The Northern Artistic Renaissance

Like the artists of Italy, the artists of northern Europe became interested in portraying their world realistically. However, their approach was different from the Italians'. This was particularly true of the artists of the Low Countries (present-day Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands).

Circumstance played a role in the differences. The large wall spaces of Italian churches had given rise to the art of fresco painting. Italian artists used these spaces to master the technical skills that allowed them to portray humans in realistic settings. In the north, the Gothic cathedrals with their stained glass windows did not allow for frescoes. Thus, northern artists painted illustrations for books and wooden panels for altarpieces. Great care was needed to depict each object on a small scale.

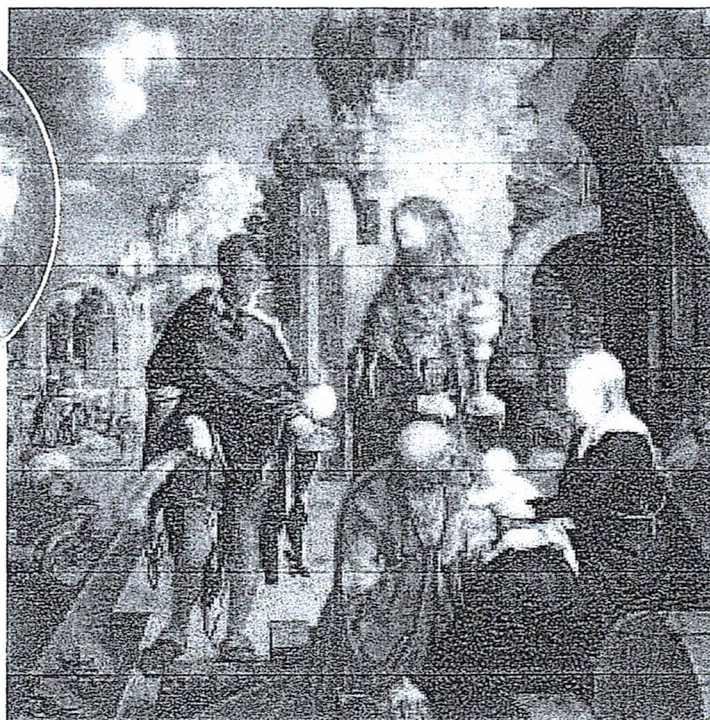


Dürer

The most important northern school of art in the fifteenth century was found in Flanders, one of the Low Countries. The Flemish painter Jan van Eyck (EYK) was among the first to use oil paint, which enabled the artist to use a wide variety of colors and create fine details as in his painting *Giovanni Arnolfini and His Bride*. Like other Northern Renaissance artists, however, van Eyck imitated nature not by using perspective, as the Italians did, but by simply observing reality and portraying details as best he could.

By 1500, artists from the north had begun to study in Italy and to be influenced by what artists were doing there. One German artist who was greatly affected by the Italians was Albrecht Dürer. He made two trips to Italy and absorbed most of what the Italians could teach on the laws of perspective.

As can be seen in his famous *Adoration of the Magi*, Dürer did not reject the use of minute details characteristic of northern artists. He did try, however, to fit



In the *Adoration of the Magi*, Albrecht Dürer retains the minute details associated with northern European painting, but he also makes use of perspective and proportion.

those details more harmoniously into his works in accordance with Italian artistic theories. Like the Italian artists of the High Renaissance, Dürer tried to achieve a standard of ideal beauty that was based on a careful examination of the human form.

Reading Check Examining Why was Jan van Eyck's use of oil paint significant?

SECTION ASSESSMENT

Checking for Understanding

1. **Define** humanism, fresco.
2. **Identify** Petrarch, Dante, Michelangelo, Jan van Eyck, Albrecht Dürer.
3. **Locate** Canterbury, Flanders.
4. **Summarize** Christine de Pizan's main argument in *The Book of the City of Ladies*. Why did her ideas receive so much attention?
5. **Compare** the underlying principles of both classical Greek and Roman art with Italian Renaissance art. How are the principles similar? How are they different?

Critical Thinking

6. **Compare and Contrast** How do the humanist goals and philosophy of education developed during the Renaissance compare with the goals of your high school education?
7. **Summarizing Information** Use a table like the one below to describe the greatest accomplishments of Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, and Michelangelo.

Leonardo da Vinci	Raphael	Michelangelo

Analyzing Visuals

8. **Compare** the paintings of Raphael and Dürer, shown on page 168 and above. What themes does each artist explore? How does each painting reflect the history of the culture in which it was produced?

Writing About History

9. **Expository Writing** Assume the role of an art docent (a person who guides people through museums). Prepare a lecture to be given to a group of students on the works of Jan van Eyck and how they differ from Italian Renaissance paintings.