Renaissance Connections

MAIN IDEA
The rebirth of art, literature, and ideas during the Renaissance changed European society.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW
Many accomplishments of the Renaissance are high points of Western culture and continue to inspire artists, writers, and thinkers of today.

TERMS & NAMES
- Crusades
- Renaissance
- Florence
- Leonardo da Vinci
- William Shakespeare
- Reformation
- Martin Luther
- Protestant

DATELINE

PARIS, FRANCE, 1269
Paris is buzzing with activity as thousands of European soldiers assemble here. This is the starting-off point for the eighth Crusade, which has nearly a thousand miles to travel. King Louis IX of France, who is in command, is confident that his armies can restore European power over the Holy Land. Since the Crusades began in 1096, the Christians have fought against the Muslims and founded four states in the eastern Mediterranean. European power has weakened since then. However, King Louis’s army looks ready to recapture the lost territory for Christianity.

Movement • Crusaders will make their way toward the Holy Land.

Europeans Encounter New Cultures
The Crusades—a series of expeditions from the 11th to the 13th centuries by Western European Christians to capture the Holy Lands from Muslims—greatly changed life in Western Europe. The Crusades opened up trade routes, linking Western Europe with southwestern Asia and North Africa. They also helped Europeans rediscover the ideas of ancient Greece and Rome.
Over time, this interest in the ancient world sparked a new era of creativity and learning in Western Europe. This cultural era, which lasted from the 14th to the 16th century, is called the Renaissance.

The Rebirth of Europe

The Renaissance began on the Italian Peninsula in the mid-14th century. During this time, many artists, architects, writers, and scholars created works of great importance. These included beautiful paintings, large sculptures, impressive buildings, and thought-provoking literature. As new ideas and achievements spread across the continent of Europe, they changed the way people viewed themselves and the world.

The Italian City-States

In the 14th century, the Italian Peninsula was divided into many independent city-states. Some of these city-states, such as Florence, were bustling centers of banking, trade, and manufacturing.
The wealthy businesspeople who lived in these city-states were members of a new class of aristocrats. Unlike the nobles of the feudal system, these aristocrats lived in cities, and their wealth came from money and goods rather than from the lands they owned.

A Changing View of the World  Religion was important to people’s daily life during the Renaissance, but many wealthy Europeans began to turn increased attention to the material comforts of life.

New wealth allowed aristocratic families to build large homes for themselves in the city centers, decorating them with luxurious objects. They ate expensive food and dressed in fine clothes and jewels, often acquired as a result of the expanded trade routes. Aristocrats also placed increased emphasis on education and the arts.

Learning and the Arts Flourish

Wealthy citizens were proud of their city-states and often became generous patrons. A patron gave artists and scholars money and, sometimes, a place to live and work. They hired architects and designers to improve local churches, to design grand new buildings, and to create public sculptures and fountains. As one Italian city-state made additions and improvements, others competed to outdo it.
As part of the competition to improve the appearance and status of their individual city-states, patrons wanted to attract the brightest and best-known scholars and poets of the time. Patrons believed that the contributions of these individuals would, in turn, add to the greatness of their city-states and attract more wealth.

The Visual Arts: New Subjects and Methods  Most medieval art was based on religious subjects. Painters and sculptors of the early Renaissance created religious art too, but they also began to depict other subjects. Some made portraits for wealthy patrons. Others created works showing historical scenes or mythological stories.

Leonardo da Vinci  One of the most famous artists and scientists of the Renaissance was Leonardo da Vinci (lee•uh•NAHR•doh duh VIHN•chee) (1452–1519). Among his best-known paintings are the Mona Lisa, a portrait of a young woman with a mysterious smile, and The Last Supper. Da Vinci was more than just a talented painter, however.

Throughout his life, da Vinci observed the world around him. He studied the flow of water, the flight of birds, and the workings of the human body. Da Vinci, who became a skilled engineer, scientist, and inventor, filled notebooks with thousands of sketches of his discoveries and inventions. He even drew ideas for flying machines, parachutes, and submarines—hundreds of years before they were built.

The Northern Renaissance  As the new Renaissance ideas about religion and art spread to Northern Europe, they inspired artists and writers working there. The Dutch scholar and philosopher Desiderius Erasmus (ih•RAS•muhs) (1466–1536), for example, criticized the church for its wealth and poked fun at its officials. During the late 16th and early 17th centuries, another writer—the Englishman William Shakespeare—wrote a series of popular stage plays. Many of his works, including Romeo and Juliet and Macbeth, are still read and performed around the world.
The Reformation

Roman Catholicism was still the most powerful religion in Western Europe. Some of the views of the northern Renaissance writers and scholars, however, were in conflict with the Roman Catholic Church. These new ideas would eventually lead to the Reformation, a 16th-century movement to change church practices.

Martin Luther  The German monk Martin Luther (1483–1546) was one of the most important critics of the church. The wealth and corruption of many church officials disturbed him. Luther also spoke out against the church’s policy of selling indulgences—the practice of forgiving sins in exchange for money.

In 1517, Luther wrote 95 theses, or statements of belief, attacking the sale of indulgences and other church practices. Copies were printed and handed out throughout Western Europe. After this, Luther was excommunicated, or cast out and no longer recognized as a member of a church, and went into hiding. While in hiding, he translated the Bible from Latin into German so that all literate, German-speaking people could read it. Under Luther’s leadership, many Europeans began to challenge the practices of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Growth of New Ideas

The Printing Press  Until the Renaissance, each copy of a book had to be written by hand—usually by monks or nuns. A Renaissance invention, however, changed that forever. Around 1450, a German printer named Johann Gutenberg (Yoh·HAHN GOO·tuhn·BERG) began to use a method of printing with movable type. This meant that multiple copies of books, such as this Bible, could be printed quickly and less expensively.

Although many Renaissance books dealt with religious subjects, printers also published plays, poetry, works of philosophy and science, and tales of travel and adventure. As greater numbers of books were published, more and more Europeans learned to read.

For more on the printing press, go to

THINKING CRITUICALLY

1. Recognizing Effects
   What were three effects of the invention of Gutenberg’s printing press?

2. Synthesizing
   Before the printing press, who produced the books?
A Conflict over Religious Beliefs

Luther’s followers were called Protestants because they protested events at an assembly that ended the church’s tolerance of their beliefs. Many people in Western Europe still supported the church, however. This conflict led to religious wars that ended in 1555. At that time, the Peace of Augsburg declared that German rulers could decide the official religion of their own state.

The Spread of Protestant Ideas By 1600, Protestantism had spread to England and the Scandinavian Peninsula. Protestants pushed to expand education for more Europeans. They did this because being able to read meant being able to study the Bible. They also encouraged translation of the Bible into the native language of each country.

The Counter Reformation The Roman Catholic Church responded to Protestantism by launching its own movement in the mid-16th century. As part of this movement, called the Counter Reformation, the church stopped selling indulgences. It also created a new religious order called the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuits. Jesuit missionaries and scholars worked to spread Catholic ideas across Europe, to Asia, and to the lands of the “new world” across the Atlantic Ocean.