

# What conditions led to the Renaissance starting in Italy?

## Reading



### Set a Purpose

As you read, look for reasons why the Renaissance first emerged in Italy.

**reason** the ability to think and draw conclusions

**city state** a politically independent city and the rural area around it. City states have their own government and armed forces

Why is the world the way it is? What is the right way to behave? What knowledge is really important? Do you ever think about questions like these? In earlier chapters about the European Middle Ages, you saw that people based their ideas about life on religious beliefs. During the Renaissance, there was a gradual shift in how people thought about the universe and their place in it. Instead of just looking to the Church to find meaning in their lives, many turned to their own powers of observation and **reason**. The Renaissance opened people's eyes to new possibilities of human achievement.

The Renaissance began in the part of Europe that is now Italy, and then spread slowly through the rest of Europe. Renaissance Europe did not look the way Europe looks today. Many countries had very different borders. Others, such as Italy, were not yet countries at all. Italy was a collection of **city states**, republics, and kingdoms.

## What role did Italy's geography play in the birth of the Renaissance?

Geographic features can contribute greatly to the economic success of an area. Think about the large cities of British Columbia. Why did they develop where they did? Why did they prosper?

During the Middle Ages, northern Italy had developed as a collection of independent city states. As trade increased, cities situated near or on good harbours became large and powerful because they served as centres for trade. The two largest Italian port cities were Venice, on the east coast, and Genoa, on the west. Venice became a major centre for both trade and ideas.

### Did You Know?

"Renaissance" is a French word meaning "rebirth."

## TIMELINE

1304 CE  
Francesco Petrarch is born



1450 CE  
Johannes Gutenberg  
begins printing books

1469 CE  
Birth of Niccolò  
Machiavelli

1492 CE  
Lorenzo de Medici dies



**FIGURE 9-2** This map shows the political geography of Renaissance Italy as well as the major rivers and mountain ranges. How does the physical geography of Italy help to explain where cities were built? Consider landforms and bodies of water.

### Mountains and Rivers

Italy, as we now know it, is a mountainous peninsula, a fact that greatly affected its development. Mountains make communication and travel difficult. Mountainous countries usually have only a few well-established, busy trade routes. In Italy, old Roman roads developed into trade routes. Cities located on these routes, such as Siena and Assisi, grew rich from trade.

### Reading



#### Ask Meaningful Questions

Effective readers generate questions before and during reading. With a partner, use the timeline information to create some meaningful questions you hope will be answered in this chapter.

1503 CE

Leonardo da Vinci begins painting the *Mona Lisa*

1508 CE

Michelangelo begins painting the Sistine Chapel

1513 CE

Machiavelli writes *The Prince*



1543 CE

*On the Revolutions of Heavenly Bodies* by Nicholas Copernicus is published

1609 CE

Galileo Galilei begins to study the heavens

## How did commerce contribute to the prosperity of the city states?

Merchants made money by purchasing goods in one place and then selling them for a higher price in another place. As well as dealing with goods that were ready for the marketplace, such as spices and luxury fabrics, merchants also bought and sold resources to be manufactured into goods. For example, they bought raw wool to be made into cloth.

Bankers also brought wealth to their city states. Bankers in Florence established banking houses across Europe. Florence's economy became so powerful that during the course of the Renaissance, its golden "florin" became the most important currency in Europe.

Usury, the practice of charging interest when lending money to someone, played an important part in creating wealth. The Church had forbidden usury during the Middle Ages. However, the growth of international trade required large investments of money. The Church began to allow people to charge interest for loans that involved risk, such as trading voyages where there was danger of shipwreck or pirates.

## Prosperity and the Arts

Wealthy **patrons** played an important role in the artistic flowering of the Renaissance. Merchants, nobles, popes, and monarchs supported the work of hundreds of artists. Wealthy citizens wanted to be known for their generosity. They helped make their cities more beautiful by spending huge sums to fund new buildings. Many also gave to charities.

**patron** a person who provides financial support for the arts



**FIGURE 9-7** This sculpture of Lorenzo de Medici was probably modelled on an original from the 1500s or 1600s. Lorenzo de Medici was both a ruler and a poet. What aspects of his character has the artist emphasized in this sculpture?

## The Medici Family

The Medici family was the richest, most powerful family in Renaissance Italy. The Medicis were an important part of Florence's cultural and political life for more than 300 years. They made a fortune as wool and silk merchants and as bankers. They built alliances with other wealthy families, acquired important positions in the Church, and married into Europe's royal families.

Lorenzo de Medici, who was known as Lorenzo the Magnificent, was a great patron of art and literature. He sponsored Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and other great artists. Poets and philosophers frequently visited the Medici palace at his invitation to share ideas. Artists learned their craft by sketching ancient Roman statues displayed in the Medici gardens. Lorenzo's nephew, Pope Clement VII, built a great library housing many thousands of manuscripts and books that the Medici family donated to Florence.

## Interpreting Art as a Primary Source

Sources other than the written word are valuable tools for understanding the past. Photographs for example are excellent primary sources of information about the past. Photography is a relatively recent invention, so for visual evidence about the more distant past, we rely on works of art such as paintings, drawings, and sculptures.

Knowing the background of a work of art is an important part of understanding it. Here is some information about the image below.

**Who painted it?** It is attributed to Renaissance painter and engraver Francesco di Lorenzo Rosselli. “Attributed” means that historians believe that he made it, but because the work is unsigned, they can’t be certain. Rosselli was born in Florence around 1445. He created many important maps, including one of the first maps showing the Americas after the voyages of Christopher Columbus.



**FIGURE 9-9** Rosselli's *Pianta della Catena*

**What is it?** This representation of Renaissance Florence is known as *Pianta della Catena*.

**When was it made?** Art historians place its date between 1471 and 1482.

## Gathering Information

A historian looking at this painting would want to find out information about the past. Study *Pianta della Catena* and answer the following questions:



**Detail questions:** What is Florence's geographic setting? Who might be the person in the bottom right-hand corner? What are the men in the bottom left-hand corner doing?

**Analysis questions:** What evidence is there that Florence is a prosperous city? What natural features make this a good site for a city? Why are there walls around the city and along its riverbanks?

## Looking at Bias and Reliability

No matter what the primary source, always consider who created it. Rosselli's point of view about Florence is reflected in his painting of the city.

Another factor to consider is why the work was created. The reason may also affect how reliably the subject is presented. An artist may be influenced by the interests and biases of potential buyers. For example, a portrait painted for a wealthy person might be more flattering than realistic.

**Bias and reliability questions:** Who created the work? Who might have been the audience for the work? How might the audience affect how the subject is portrayed?

## Apply It

1. Study *Pianta della Catena* and make a list of at least five facts about Renaissance Florence that you can learn from it.
2. Choose another painting in this chapter and create at least two detail, analysis, and bias and reliability questions for it. Exchange questions with a partner, and write answers for one another's questions.

# What is humanism?

## Reading



### Set a Purpose

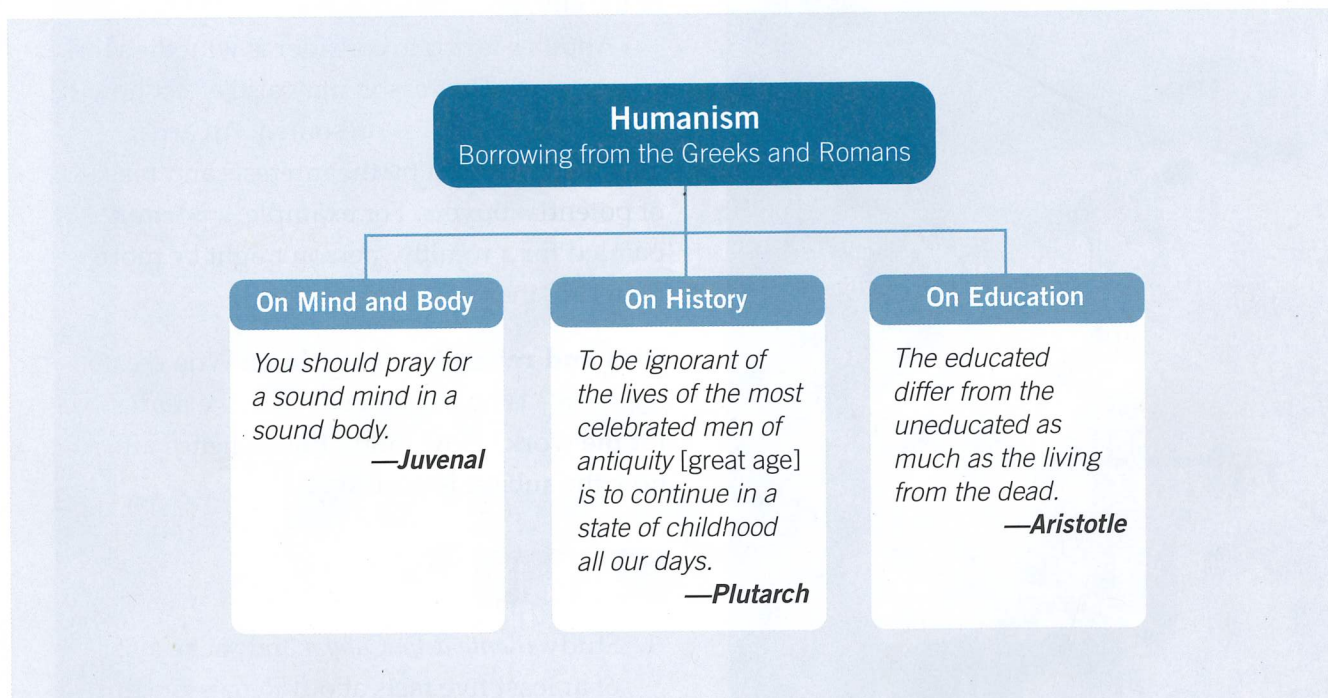
As you read, look for information that explains what the humanists believed in and how some of them challenged religious beliefs and authority.

**humanist** related to humanism, a system of thought that centres on humans and their values, capacities, and worth

Was there ever a time when you saw or heard or read something that made you change the way you think about people or the way the world works? What happened? Now imagine a new way of thinking taking place across an entire continent. This is what happened in Europe during the Renaissance.

Renaissance society was very different from the feudal society of the Middle Ages. The medieval world had been built around the closed system of the manor and the castle. By the time of the Renaissance, cities in southern Europe had grown tremendously, and the new merchant and business class had leisure time and wealth at their disposal. Influenced by great thinkers of the day, they began to read and discuss the ideas of the **humanist** philosophers of ancient Greece and Rome.

The humanists returned to the humanities—the subjects taught in ancient Greek and Roman schools. The main areas of study were grammar, rhetoric (the art of writing and speaking effectively), and history, based on Greek and Roman texts.



**FIGURE 9-10** Do you think the views expressed by Juvenal, Plutarch, and Aristotle remain part of our society's worldview? Explain.



**FIGURE 9-12** *Francesco Petrarca*, by Andrea del Castagno, mid-1400s. How does this portrait fit in with what you know about Renaissance humanist values?

**Renaissance man** a term traditionally used to describe a person skilled in many areas



**FIGURE 9-13** Machiavelli wrote that a leader must be like a fox and like a lion. What do you think he meant by this?

## Francesco Petrarch, Humanist Scholar

The Italian writer and poet Francesco Petrarch was one of the first humanists. Petrarch often said that he admired the culture of ancient Rome more than the culture of his own time. He spent much time and money collecting ancient manuscripts. Through Petrarch's efforts, many classical works that might otherwise have been lost survived.

Petrarch recommended that artists and writers study the ancient masterpieces to move art in a new direction, one that would emphasize beauty. He modelled his writing style on the works of the great Roman speaker Cicero. For Petrarch, the truly cultured person made an effort to read good books, see great works of art, and travel widely. Many Renaissance artists took Petrarch as their model of the well-rounded person who knew about and was skilled in many different areas—the true “**Renaissance man**.”

## Niccolo Machiavelli

Niccolo Machiavelli, who was born in 1469, worked for a time as a civil servant for the Republic of Florence. He was frequently sent on diplomatic missions to foreign courts where he saw first-hand the treachery and dishonesty of Italian politics. Based on his personal experiences and his studies of ancient history, Machiavelli concluded that results mattered most. In his book *The Prince*, Machiavelli did not tell leaders how to be honourable rulers; instead, he told them how best to win and hold onto power.

Some people believed that Machiavelli was simply applying reason to thinking about human nature and politics, but others condemned his ideas as evil. The term “Machiavellian” has come to refer to the use of dishonesty or trickery to stay in power.

*In actions of all men, especially princes, where there is no recourse to justice, the end is all that counts. A prince should only be concerned with conquering or maintaining a state...*

Machiavelli, *The Prince*

## Comparing Renaissance and Medieval Art

Both medieval and Renaissance artists used religious figures as subjects. New techniques allowed Renaissance painters to bring more realism to their works of art.



**FIGURE 9-15** This Renaissance painting of Mary and the infant Jesus titled *The Madonna of the Meadow* was painted by Giovanni Bellini around 1500.

### Thinking IT THROUGH

1. How is Renaissance painting different from medieval painting? Examine these works and discuss them in terms of perspective and proportion.



**FIGURE 9-16** *Enthroned Madonna and Child* was created in the 1200s. The artist is unknown.

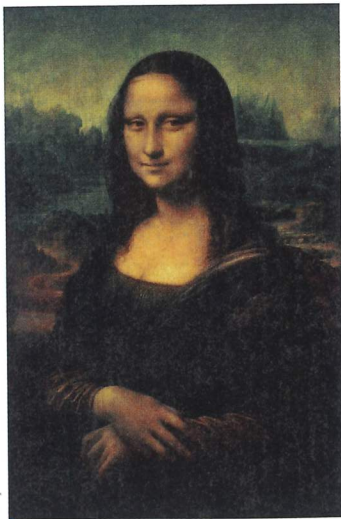
### Michelangelo

Perhaps the greatest artist of the Renaissance was Michelangelo Buonarroti. By the time he was 25, Michelangelo had already won fame as the best sculptor in Italy, creating masterpieces of great power and beauty. In 1501, he began to carve his statue *David* (page 274) from a single block of marble more than five metres high, a task that took him three years to complete. This work and others made Michelangelo wealthy and famous. Still, success was not always easy, especially when politics and the art world collided.

### WEB LINK

On the next two pages, you will read how Michelangelo came to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. For a virtual tour of the Sistine Chapel, visit our website.





**FIGURE 9-17** *Mona Lisa* was painted by Leonardo da Vinci between 1503 and 1506. Why do you think people are so fascinated by this painting?

**human anatomy** the science of the structure of the human body

## Leonardo da Vinci

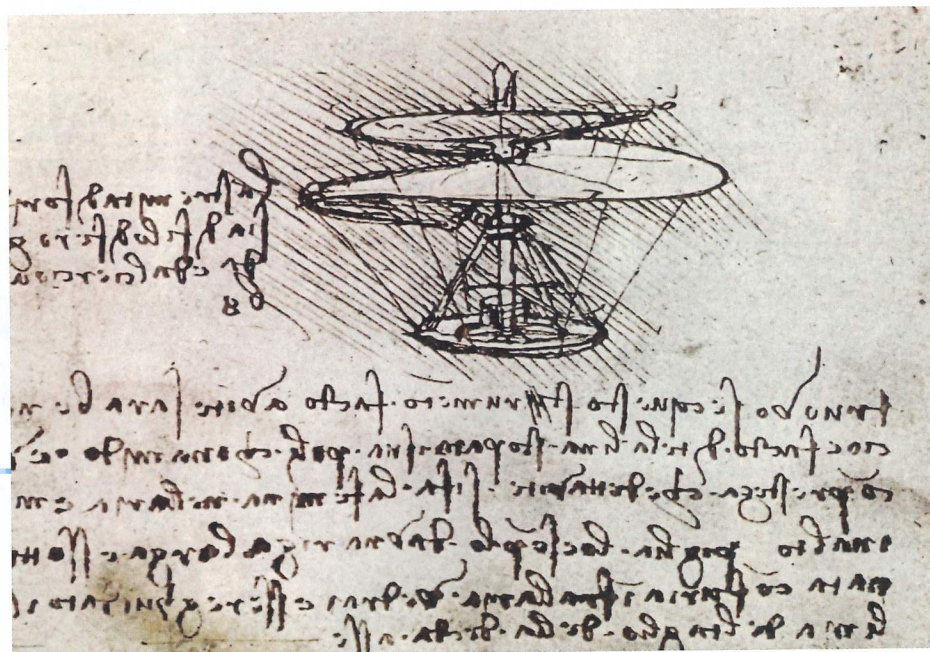
Leonardo da Vinci was apprenticed to a Florentine painter and sculptor at the age of 15. He became not just a great painter but an inventor, an engineer, and a scientist. Leonardo was one of the first great individuals of the Renaissance to try to learn about the truth of the natural world through direct observation and experiment. His experiments led him in many directions—he was the first to design a helicopter, a tank, a parachute, and a flying machine. Many regard Leonardo da Vinci as the ideal “Renaissance man,” meaning that he was highly skilled in many areas.

Leonardo had such a restless mind that he often started a new project before finishing the one he was working on. For much of his life, he planned to write a textbook on **human anatomy**, one of the many projects he never finished. In his determined pursuit of information, Leonardo dissected human corpses to find out how the human body was put together. He did this in secret, however. Cutting up dead bodies was considered blasphemous (showing contempt for sacred things), and he would have been punished if caught.

His notebooks do survive, however, and they are filled with detailed anatomical drawings of humans and sketches of inventions. His notes were written backwards so that they could be read only by holding them in front of a mirror. No one knows why Leonardo wrote this way. One possibility is that he was left-handed, and writing left-handed from right to left would cause his hand to smear the ink. Writing in reverse prevented smudging.

### WEB LINK

To learn more about Leonardo da Vinci, visit our website.



**FIGURE 9-18** This drawing from one of Leonardo's notebooks shows a design for a helicopter. Why do you think helicopters were not made for another 450 years?

# What was China like under foreign rule?

## Reading



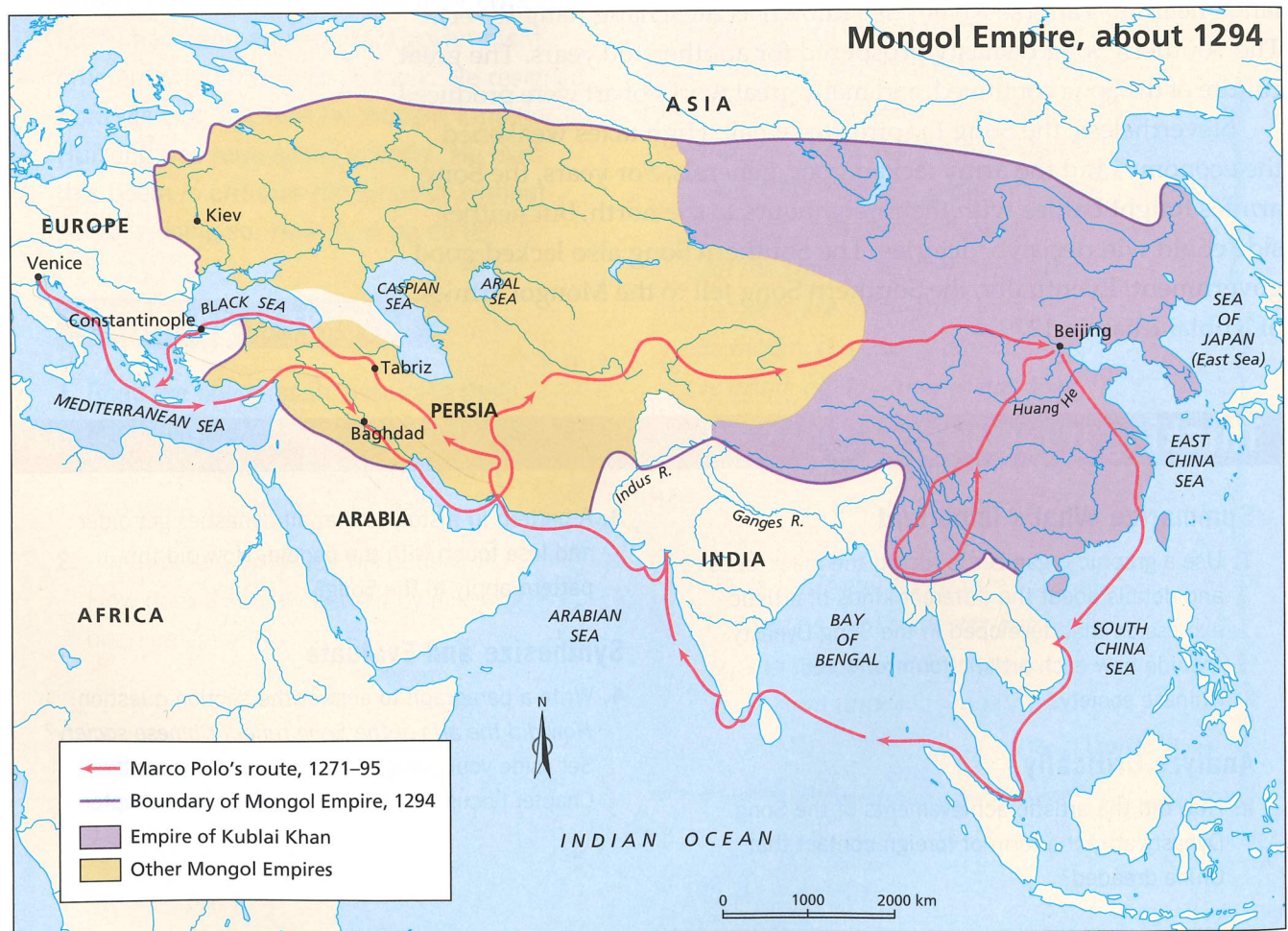
### Set a Purpose

As you read this section, look for how the Mongols took over China, and what it was like to live under their rule.

Imagine if British Columbia were occupied by Americans. Americans now run the military and the government, and British Columbians become second-class citizens. A similar scenario happened in China after the fall of the Song Dynasty—China's neighbours took over. How did this affect China and the people who lived there?

## Who were the Mongols?

The Mongols lived on the steppes of Central Asia, and were China's neighbours to the north. (In chapter 4, you learnt that the Mughals who invaded India in the 16th century were Mongols.) This warlike people had always been a threat to China, but because they were separated into smaller groups, they had not invaded. In 1206, something happened. Genghis Khan made himself into the Great Khan, the ruler of all the Mongols. He set his sights on the world, and he had the united Mongols fighting by his side.



**FIGURE 12-15** The Mongols created the largest land empire the world has ever seen. This map also shows the route of Marco Polo, who travelled from Venice to China in the 13th century. Mongolia, even today, is one of the most sparsely populated countries on Earth. What would it take for this people to take over the world?