

## ***The Italian Renaissance***



The Duomo and the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence

The word **renaissance** means rebirth. The renaissance began in the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century in Italy and ended in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Why did the Renaissance start in Italy?**

Italy was a nation of wealthy city-states and cities that emerged, such as Florence, invested their wealth in art and learning. Politically, Italy was a feudal nation and the Renaissance thinking that developed helped it emerge from this aged tradition and system.

The Renaissance is the re-discovery of the activities of human beings, especially art showing the way people really looked like. A new philosophy begins to emerge called **Humanism**, a more secular view of human beings.

The attached two-page article was taken from The Teaching Company® magazine of 2005. It has been scanned in color so that you can have a better view of the pictures shown in the article.

You need to know each of the five cities in the article as well as the key people.

Following the article I have attached samples of Renaissance art which you also need to study and comprehend. Please continue to the following pages...



The mountain principality of Urbino, a key center in the Renaissance

# THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

The first stirrings of the Renaissance took place in the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. During this time, Europe was beset by an unprecedented series of disasters. Climate change brought about famine, war raked the continent on all sides, and the Black Plague killed between 30 to 50 percent of the population. However, for a number of reasons, these disasters would have unexpected consequences for northern Italy. The collapse of the Byzantine Empire at the hands of the invading Ottomans created an influx of wealthy and educated Greek refugees from the east, who brought with them knowledge of classical Greek learning. The plague that killed so many people, left behind a smaller, wealthier, better fed population that had more surplus money to spend on luxury goods like art and architecture. And most crucially, war between two rival states in northern Italy, the Duchy of Milan and the Republic of Florence created the conditions necessary to spark one of the greatest periods of artistic and intellectual rebirth the world had ever experienced.

In the late 14<sup>th</sup> Century, under Giangaleazzo Visconti, Milan attempted to turn the power and wealth it had gained from its tool manufacturing enterprises and its control of Alpine trade routes into an empire. Milan defeated city after city in northern Italy finally besieging its archrival Florence in 1395. In 1402, with Florence on the verge of breaking, Giangaleazzo died of a high fever and his army and empire fell apart. Rule of the city was then usurped by the mercenary captain Francesco Sforza whose close personal ties to Cosimo di Medici of Florence culminated in the Peace of Lodi, which stabilized virtually all of Italy for its duration. Francesco, and his son Ludovico, were great patrons of the arts—Ludovico most famously as patron to Leonardo da Vinci, whom he employed not only as an artist but also as a military engineer.

## MILAN



Florence was the birthplace and epicenter of the Italian Renaissance. Under siege by the Visconti during its war with Milan, the city fathers were able to rally the citizens of Florence by casting the battle as one between a Florentine Republic modeled on Athens or the Roman Republic and a dictatorial Duchy of Milan, which represented a despotic government modeled on the Roman Empire or Medieval European states. After their escape from defeat, the citizens of Florence started a program of Humanist education, which actively sought answers to modern problems from classical Greek and Roman sources. Florence reached its zenith under Cosimo and Lorenzo Medici, whose tremendous wealth from the woolen cloth trade and the banking industry allowed them to lavish the city with masterpieces of art and architecture.



## FLORENCE

## ROME

The Renaissance came late to Rome. While the cities of the North were enjoying the effects of the Renaissance, Rome was reeling from a religious crisis (The Great Schism) that saw the removal of the Papacy to Avignon and the status of the city as the capital of Western Christianity endangered. Once the church had settled this conflict, the popes of Rome began rebuilding the city in spectacular fashion, engaging all the great artists of the period in this effort. As the heirs of St. Peter, the popes who ruled during the Renaissance were the leaders of Catholicism. But also, as the reputed heirs of the Roman emperors, they were regarded as universal sovereigns. Thus, the story of the Renaissance papacy is one of family and personal ambition, a desire to increase the grandeur of Rome and the see of St. Peter while also increasing the power of the pope's family so that it could outlast his death. In fact, the Renaissance popes were most often seen by their neighbors as powerful Italian princes, ruling a large state that cut across the center of the peninsula north of the Kingdom of Naples.

## VENICE

Founded by Romans fleeing the barbarian invasions in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, the trade routes created by the Crusades turned Venice from a local fishing economy into the most powerful maritime state in Europe and the richest city in the West. The social organization of the city resulted from its origins as well; fiercely independent, the inhabitants knew no prince or bishop but ruled themselves by choosing magistrates, who were seen only as *primi inter pares*, "first among equals." Famous for its glassware, the glass workers of Venice were highly paid and greatly respected but labored under threat. If a Venetian glassworker took his skills to another city, all his property was confiscated by the state and his name was added to the "hit list" of the republic's professional assassins.



Although a tiny principality of only 40 square miles perched in the Apennines, Urbino became one of the most celebrated sites of Renaissance culture. Because the inhospitable nature of the terrain made it difficult to coax much from the soil, the population sustained itself for generations by serving as mercenary soldiers fighting under the signori of the Montefeltro family. The most famous of the Montefeltros was Federigo. In addition to being a great leader, never losing a battle, and uncharacteristically for a mercenary never betraying a client, Federigo was among the greatest patrons of culture in the Italian Renaissance. His new palace was a center for study and art, welcoming such painters as Piero della Francesca and Giovanni Santi, father of Raphael. His library became one of the most important collections of manuscripts in Europe, and his books were among the most beautiful.

# URBINO

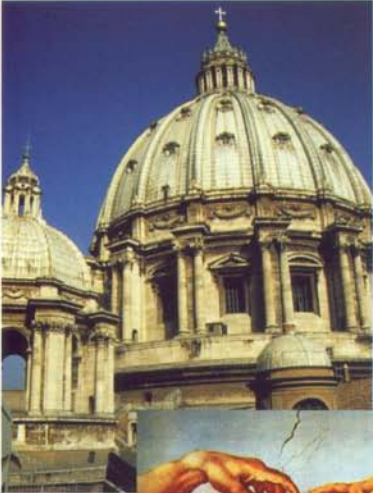
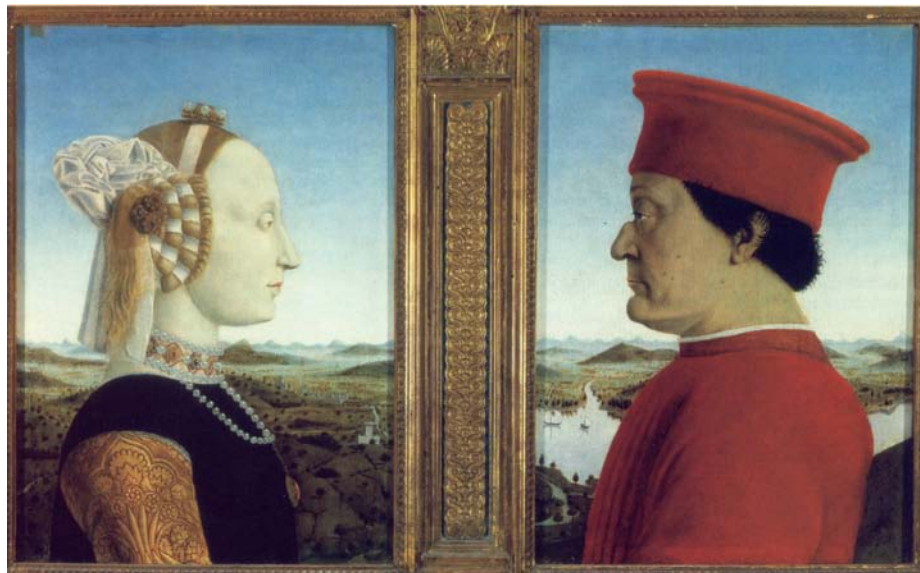


Image credits: Square and cathedral in Milan. © José Fuete Raga/tefa/Corbis; Giant Grouse by Leonardo da Vinci. © 2005 JupiterImages Corporation; The Dome of Santa Maria del Fiore. © Sergio Pissinatti/CORBIS; *The life of Duke Federigo da Montefeltro of Urbino* by Francesco di Antonio del Chier. © Alinari/SEAT/Art Resource, NY; Palazzo Ducale in Urbino. © Angelo Hornak/CORBIS; Dome, St. Peter's Basilica, Rome. © Corel Stock Photo Library; *The Creation*, Michelangelo. © Corel Stock Photo Library; Rialto Bridge and Grand Canal. © Sergio Pissinatti/CORBIS; and Detail of the Lion of St. Mark Crowning the Column of San Marco in Venice. © 2005 JupiterImages Corporation.

This painting is a portrait of Federigo Da Montefeltro (1422-1482) and his son, Pedro Berruguette. Note that the style of the portrait during the Renaissance is more of an everyday life situation. Also of note are that the faces of the people in the picture are as close to being the real person as possible. In the past, this was not the style.



The Portrait of Federigo Da Montefeltro and Battista Sforza painted by Piero Della Francesca.

Note that this is in fact three different pictures combined into one. The background is a landscape of the city of Urbino. The two portraits were then painted facing each other.



Raphael, the Famous Renaissance artist



A typical Renaissance painting of people in real life

This is a picture of artists submitting proposals to the local ruler (center). Note the horizon and the background. The use of perspective (making distant objects smaller than the close ones) is used. Many details were added simply to “beautify” the painting; examples are the intricate painting of the men’s clothing and the facial feature on the statue.