

The European Renaissance

The Renaissance was a period of European history, considered by modern scholars as that between 1300 and 1600. Many dramatic changes happened during the Renaissance. The Renaissance was a period of new inventions and beliefs.

The Renaissance was drastically different from the Middle Ages. During the Middle Ages the church held most of the power and its economy was agriculturally based. Exploration and learning was almost put to a stop. During the Renaissance society was transformed into a society increasingly dominated by central political institutions with an urban commercial attitude. Also, people's curiosity overcame their fear and many people started to venture out and explore. New schools and colleges became more and more common.

The Renaissance was started by many rich Italian cities, such as Florence, Ferrara, Milan, and Venice. Because these cities were very wealthy, many merchants started to spend money on different things, such as painting, learning, new banking techniques, and new systems of government. These things gave rise to a new type of scholar, the humanist. Humanism was subjects concerned with humankind and culture. They studied various things such as Latin, Greek language, literature and philosophy. Music and mathematics were also studied as well.

The Renaissance gave way to new forms of painting, art and sculpture. During the Renaissance, artists were no longer regarded as mere artisans, as they had been to the medieval past, but for the first time emerged as independent personalities, compared to poets and writers. Many artisans merged mathematics with art, in order to become more precise in their measurements and to make sure an object was supported both rationally and proportionally. As a result painters tried and often succeeded in making their painting a window into the world. Artists also studied the way light hits objects and the way our eyes perceive light. A new kind of paint called oil paint was used. This allowed the artist to create texture, mix colors, and allow more time for corrections before it dried.

The printing press was probably the most important advance in technology. Europeans first used movable metal type to print a book.

On small pieces of metal they engraved single letters of the alphabet. These could then be arranged and rearranged to form words and sentences. Johan Gutenberg is usually given credit for the first book printed, a copy of the Bible. By the 1500's printing presses were fairly well spread. The printing press had many effects on the world. First of all, it made books much easier to come by, which made them cheaper. That meant common people could afford them. As a result literacy became more widespread, in contrast to the Middle Ages where usually monks and church officials were the only able to read. Second, since many more people were able to read, they wanted to read subjects other than religious or scientific work. So books on other subjects were published as well. Also many books were published in

languages other than Latin, such as English, Portuguese, Spanish, French, and Italian. A third effect was that scholars had better access to one another's work. They could also read the great works of the ancient and medieval periods.

The Renaissance also had an effect on the general society. Many people became interested in politics. Also, people became interested in the world outside of their towns. Many became explorers, merchants, and mapmakers. Religion especially changed during the Renaissance. In the Middle Ages people were primarily concerned with serving the church and getting to heaven. But the increase in arts and education gave people something to look forward to, and a life worth living. So in turn, people based their lives around various other things instead of the church. Because of the increase in literacy people learned that the Catholic Church only told the people what they wanted them to hear. This caused many people to break away from the church and form Protestant religions.

The Renaissance produced many great minds. Leonardo da Vinci was one of these. Although he was not regarded as a genius in his time. He had numerous works of art such as the Mona Lisa and The Last Supper. He also is now regarded as a great inventor. He is credited for coming up with the idea of the helicopter. He dissected corpses to learn more about human anatomy. Another great man was a German monk, Martin Luther. He taught Biblical studies at the University of Wittenberg. Luther's beliefs challenged the church although many people agreed with his ideas. He was eventually excommunicated from the church and he started Protestantism.

In conclusion, the Renaissance was a time of new awakening in Europe. It included the general loss of power by the church, an increase in literacy and education, and an exploration period.