

The Renaissance

Renaissance Writing – Dante and Petrarch

One of the first books printed in Italy was a beautiful long poem, *Divine Comedy*.¹ An Italian writer named Dante Alighieri penned it. The poem's main theme is life after death. Dante himself is the main character. The book is a perfect example of the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance.

Like works that came before it, the *Divine Comedy* was about religion. However, it was written in Italian, not Latin. In the Middle Ages, most books were religious and were written in Latin, which was the language of the Church. Since most books were printed in Latin, Italy did not have a standard written language. Dante had to make up a lot of his style as he went along. Dante's book became a guidebook for future Italian writers. They copied parts of his style and the way he used the Italian language. The *Divine Comedy* helped make all the **dialects**² of Italy more **standardized**.³

In the *Divine Comedy*, Dante wrote about a journey from hell to heaven. He also wrote about the love of his life, Beatrice. Beatrice was Dante's **inspiration**.⁴ He thought all beauty came from her. He wanted only to admire her from afar. The idea of having a beautiful woman as a muse, or source of inspiration, was new to authors in the Renaissance. Dante's idea of divine love is an example of a Renaissance idea known as humanism. This way of viewing the world stressed the importance of focusing on human beings instead of just focusing on God. During the Middle Ages, the Church said it was the only way to experience godliness. Dante thought Beatrice was a way that he could come close to the divine or godly, in his own creativity and writing.

Below is part of a poem by another great Italian poet named Petrarch. In the Renaissance style, Petrarch also had a muse, or divine love light and inspiration. Her name was Laura. The excerpt, or piece, from the poem below is an example of one of his writings about Laura.

¹ **Divine Comedy** - the first big book written in any language besides Latin

² **dialects** - variations in the same language. Often people of different regions have their own dialect.

³ **standardized** - made the same

⁴ **inspiration** - someone or something that influences you so that you are moved to create a story or a picture

A young lady beneath a green **laurel**¹
I saw, whiter and colder than is a snow
untouched by the sun for many, many years;
and her speech and her beauty and her face and all her hair
so pleased me that I carry her before my eyes
forever, wherever I am, on hill or shore.

¹ **Laurel** - a type of tree especially associated with poets

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Why is the *Divine Comedy* a good example of the transition from the middle ages to the Renaissance?
 - a. Because Dante was born in the Middle Ages and wrote the book after the Renaissance had started
 - b. Because it has some characteristics of each time period
 - c. Because the book was made with a printing press
 - d. Because the book is about religion

2. Why did Petrarch and Dante want to admire beautiful women?
 - a. Because they were married to them
 - b. Because their muses inspired them to create
 - c. Because all Renaissance men had several wives
 - d. Because they didn't really have much else to do

3. Which of the following is an opinion and not a fact?
 - a. The *Divine Comedy* was a beautiful long poem.
 - b. Beatrice was Dante's inspiration.
 - c. The *Divine Comedy* helped make all the dialects of Italy more standardized.
 - d. Dante's book became like a guidebook for future Italian writers.

4. What effect did Dante's *Divine Comedy* have on Italian literature?
 - a. It didn't have an impact on Italian writers because they didn't like Dante's style
 - b. It created a model other writers used to create their own works
 - c. It ended the use of muses as a source of creative inspiration
 - d. It made Latin the official language of Italian writers

5. The passage "Renaissance Writing" is mostly about
 - a. two famous early Renaissance poems.
 - b. the lives of two famous Renaissance writers.
 - c. how the printing press helped cause the Renaissance.
 - d. the advantages of writing in Italian.

6. In Petrarch’s poem, the author feels Laura is beautiful. How do you know?

7. What is one thing the *Divine Comedy* has in common with books from the Middle Ages, and what’s one thing it has in common with Renaissance books?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

_____ most books used to be written in Latin the *Divine Comedy* was written in Italian.

- a. However
- b. Also
- c. Despite
- d. Although

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

Dante Alighieri had to invent a great deal of his style when he wrote the *Divine Comedy*.

Who? Dante Alighiere

(had to) What? _____

When? _____

10. **Vocabulary Word:** standardized: made to be the same.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: _____
