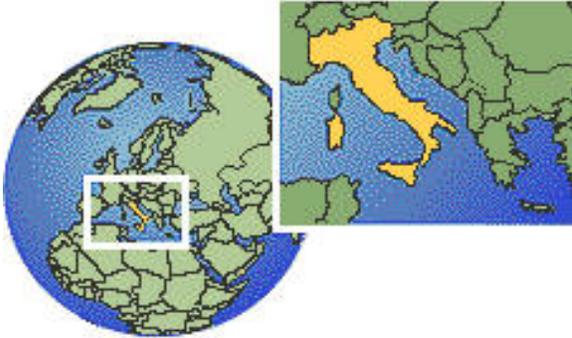


The Renaissance

Renaissance Italy: Where It All Started



The Renaissance was an important cultural movement that began in Italy during the early 1300's. One of the reasons Italy led all of the changes is because of its location. Look at Italy on the map. Italy's shape is often described as looking like a boot. The Mediterranean Sea surrounds Italy on three sides and a lot of Italy's cities are on the water. These port cities are ideal places for boats to stop and unload cargo.

Italy and Trade

In the 14th and 15th Centuries, sailing was one of the best means of transportation. Spain and Portugal led the way in exploring and discovering new land across the Atlantic. Italy, however, was a leader in trade. **Merchants**¹ took long, risky voyages to the East. They brought back spices, like cinnamon and pepper. The merchants sold these goods and riches in Europe. Many trading ships traveling to and from different countries also docked and sold their goods in Italy's port cities. With all this traffic and trade, Italy became the **crossroads**² of the West and the East.



¹ **merchants** – people who buy and sell goods to make a profit

² **crossroads** – the place where one road crosses another

The Middle Class and Arts

All of the new goods arriving in Italy really changed its economy. In the Middle Ages, people lived under a feudal system. The nobles owned land and the peasants worked on the land like servants. However, this system was not as strong in Italy as in other countries. As a result, Italy was more **receptive**¹ to change during the Renaissance. Italy's small cities started to grow. As they did, the **class structure**² of Italy began to change as well.

With feudalism, there were only two classes: the wealthy landowners, and the poor serfs or peasants. In Italy's larger cities, owning land wasn't the only kind of wealth. A person could earn money by making, trading or selling goods. Many different kinds of jobs were available. Soon there were three different classes of people. There were rich people. There were poorer servants and there was a middle class. The middle class was made of craftsmen and merchants. Craftsmen made things like wheels and tools. Merchants sold goods to other people. The middle class didn't own a lot of land. But, they didn't have to depend on rich people for their food or clothing. They made their own money and could support themselves. They helped make the changes during the Renaissance happen.

The middle class quickly realized that a good education was very important in order to survive. They couldn't rely on inherited wealth like the very rich or nobility. However, they could earn money if they had the right knowledge and tools. The middle class became very interested in mathematics and writing. They were also eager to learn other things, too. During their leisure time they became more interested in art and literature, especially the classics from Greek and Roman history. They wanted to be like the nobility who had the money to support art and literature. The middle class also wanted to separate themselves from the poorer people who had no time or money to be interested in culture. Before long, the middle class became wealthier and even began to support the arts as **patrons**³. Soon, many artists and writers thrived in Italy.

¹ **receptive** – ready to receive ideas

² **class structure** – when society is broken into groups based on income

³ **patron** – someone who supports another person or thing, usually authors or artists, or literature and art in general

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. The fact that Italy is shaped like a boot made it a good place for ships to stop because
 - a. people thought the idea of a boot-shaped country was funny, so many tourists wanted to see it for themselves.
 - b. everyone who lived during the Renaissance loved buying new shoes, and Italy seemed like the perfect place for boots.
 - c. it was easy to see from far away because it had such a unique shape.
 - d. a lot of cities were on the water, and cities were a perfect place to sell or trade goods.

2. Sailing was considered one of the best means of transportation during the 14th and 15th centuries because
 - a. cars hadn't been invented yet, so all of the cities had canals running through them instead of streets.
 - b. sailing was the only way to get from one country to another if they weren't connected by land.
 - c. boats were much cheaper than helicopters.
 - d. the horses at the time were too small to carry heavy loads.

3. The fact that merchants went on long, potentially dangerous voyages to bring spices back from the East suggests that these spices were probably
 - a. used as medicine in European hospitals.
 - b. much cheaper in the East than in Europe.
 - c. only found in the East and worth the trip because they were valuable.
 - d. the basis of many secret Christian rituals during the Renaissance.

4. The main reason that a middle class developed in the cities was that
 - a. the nobles lost their land during the Renaissance, and it was given to their former serfs.
 - b. land ownership wasn't the only measure of a person's wealth anymore; people could sell or make things to obtain money, even if they owned no land.
 - c. new laws were passed that created three kinds of citizens: rich people, poor people, and the middle class.
 - d. people were crowded in together, so many of them were stuck in the middle of a large group.

5. The passage is mostly about
 - a. spices during the Renaissance.
 - b. why the Renaissance started in Italy.
 - c. how the middle class invented art.
 - d. why art can't exist without patrons.

6. Why do you think the author uses a map and an illustration in this passage?

7. What were the economic classes of people in feudalism?

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

There was more interest in art and mathematics _____ a strong middle class appeared.

- a. after
- b. before
- c. excluding
- d. inside

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

Merchants in Italy took long trips to the East during the Renaissance.

Who? merchants

Where? _____

(did) What? _____

When? _____

10. **Vocabulary Word:** receptive: ready to receive ideas.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: _____