**28.2 What was the Renaissance?**

The Renaissance began in Italy in the mid 1300s and spread to other parts of Europe in the 1400 and 1500s.

**Renewed Interest in the Classical World:** The Renaissance began with the rediscovery of the classical world of ancient Greece and Rome. After the fall of Rome in the fifth century, classical culture was never entirely forgotten. The Roman Catholic Church helped keep knowledge of ancient times alive by copying documents that survived from the classical period. Still, this knowledge reached relatively few people during most of the Middle Ages.

In the Late Middle Ages, merchants and crusaders brought back goods and ideas from the East, including classical learning that had been preserved in the Byzantine Empire. Europeans also read classical works that came to them by way of Muslim scholars.

This flow of ideas led to a rediscovery of Greek and Roman culture. Scholars started collecting and reading ancient manuscripts from the monasteries. Artists and architects studied classical statues and buildings. The renewed interest in classical culture led to the great flowering of art and learning that we call the Renaissance.

**Exploring the Rebirth of Classical Ideas through Art:**

Classical Art. The classical period lasted from about 500 B.C.E to 500 C.E. The classical artists of Greece and Rome created sculptures, pottery, murals,, and mosaics. The purpose of much of their art was to show the importance of people and leaders, as well as gods and goddesses. Here are the additional characteristics of classical art:

* Artists valued balance and harmony
* Figures were lifelike but often idealized
* Figures were nude or draped in togas
* Bodies looked active, and motion was believable
* Faces were calm and without emotion
* Scenes showed either heroic figures or real life people doing tasks from daily life.
* In paintings there was little background or sense of perspective.

Medieval Art: The medieval period lasted from about 500 to 1300 C.E. Medieval artists created stained glass windows, sculpture, illuminated manuscripts, paintings, and tapestries. The purpose of much medieval art was to teach religion to people who could not read or write. Here are additional characteristics:

* Most art was religious, showing Jesus, saints, people from the Bible and so on.
* Important figures in paintings were shown as larger than others around them.
* Figures looked stiff, with little sense of movement.
* Figures were fully dressed in stiff-looking clothing
* Faces were serious and showed little feeling
* Painted figures were two-dimensional, or flat
* Paint colors were bright
* Backgrounds were mostly one color, often gold.

Renaissance Art: The Renaissance lasted from the 1300s to the early 1600s. Renaissance artists created sculptures, murals, drawings, and paintings. The aim of much Renaissance art was to show the importance of people and nature, not just religion. Here are additional characteristics of Renaissance art:

* Artists showed religious and nonreligious scenes
* Art reflected a great interest in nature
* Figures were lifelike and three dimensional, reflecting an increasing knowledge of anatomy
* Bodies looked active and were shown moving
* Figures were either nude or clothed
* Scenes showed people doing everyday tasks
* Faces expressed what people were thinking
* Colors were showing responding to light
* Paintings were often symmetrical
* Full backgrounds showed perspectives.

**29.4 Advances in Painting**

Wealthy patrons made renaissance Florence a thriving center of art. The Medicis spent huge sums of money on fine palaces, paintings, and statues. The Palazzo Medici was filled with works of art that were commissioned by the family.

Patrons like the Medicis created opportunities for talented painters, who made a number of advances in style and technique. Renaissance painters were influenced by the renewed interest in classical culture and the spread of humanism. They wanted to depict real people who were posed in lifelike ways and who showed feelings. They also wanted to include realistic backgrounds. The result was a very different style from the more flat, rigid, paintings of the Middle Ages.

One key advance made by Renaissance painters was the discovery of perspective. Painters use perspective to create the appearance of depth on a flat surface. Renaissance artists used several techniques to indicate depth. One was the size of objects. The smaller a painted object, the farther away it appears to be. The larger an object, the closer it appears to be. Painters also learned that a feeling of depth could be created by lines that came closer together as they receded into the distance. They discovered that careful shading could make figures and objects look three-dimensional. Adoration of Magi, a famous painting by Sandro Botticelli, shows some of these techniques.

Science and mathematics helped artists make other advances. The Florentine artist Masaccio used geometry to figure out how to divide the space in a painting to make scenes appear more as they would in real life. Leonardo da Vinci and others studied anatomy. They observed bodies and how they moved. Their studies helped them to portray the human body more realistically.

Renaissance science also gave painters new materials, such as oil-based paints, to work with. Oil paint was made by mixing powdered pigments and linseed oil. This type of paint was thicker and dried more slowly than the older, egg based paint. Oil paint also allowed artists to paint over previous work and to show details and texture in new ways.

**29.6 Advances in Sculpture**

Like painters, sculptors were influenced by the humanist interest in realism. They were also inspired by ancient Roman statues dug up from the ruins. Sculptors began carving figures that looked like real people and showed emotions.

For the first time since the days of ancient Greece and Rome, sculptors made freestanding statues that could be viewed in the round. This was very different from the relief sculptures of medieval times. The new statues caused quite a sensation. They seemed to symbolize the humanist ideals independence and individuality.

Donatello, a Florentine, was one of the first sculptors to use a new, more lifelike style. His work expressed personality and mood. A good example is his statue of David, a young warrior in the bible story of David and Goliath. In the 1500s, Giorgio Vasari, an architect and painter, wrote of Donatello’s David is “so natural… it is almost impossible to believe it was not molded on the living form”. This statue is thought to be the first life size nude statue since classical times.

Donatello’s work influenced Florence’s other great sculptor, Michelangelo. This famous artist is renowned both for his painting and his sculpture. He was also a talented sculpture and architect. Of all these arts, he preferred sculpture because it seemed to bring his subjects to life.

Michelangelo created his own majestic stature of David. It may be the world’s most widely admired statue. Carved in white marble, Michelangelo’s David stands about 17 feet tall. It is famed as an ideal of male beauty, yet it reflects humanist views. David’s expression shows the concentration and tension of a real youth on the verge of battle.

Michelangelo’s David was installed in the Piazza Della Signoria, the plaza in front of the Palazzo Vecchio. It became the prized expression of Renaissance genius in Florence.

Michelangelo had an enormous influence on other artists. Giorgio Vasari was one of his followers. He wrote, “What a happy age we live in! And how fortunate are our craftsmen, who have been given light and vision by Michelangelo”.

**29.7 Advances in Science and Mathematics**

The Renaissance was not just a time of progress in the arts. Scholars and others also made great advances in science in mathematics.

Before the Renaissance, most of what people believed about the natural world was based on ideas in ancient Greek and Roman texts. As the humanist spirit took hold, people started questioning old ideas. They began carefully observing the world around them. Instead of relying on old books and theories, scientists began to perform experiments. They analyzed the results using mathematics and logic. This approach to research changed the study of science.

One of the most creative Renaissance thinkers was Leonardo Da Vinci. Leonardo was an artist, a scientist, and an inventor. He studied under art masters in Florence and did his early work there. It is said that he was often to be found thinking and sketching his favorite church, Orsanmichele.

Leonardo was endlessly curious. He did not accept anything as true until he proved it himself. In his notebooks, he sketched and wrote about an amazing variety of topics. He wrote about geometry, engineering, sound, motion, and architecture. He studied anatomy, including the circulation of blood and the workings of the eye. He learned about the effects of the mood on Earth’s tides. He was the first person to draw maps from a bird’s eye view. As an inventor, he designed bridges, weapons, and many other machines. Among his many farsighted ideas was an underwater diving suit.

Other Italian scientists and mathematicians made breakthroughs as well. Girolamo Cardano solved complex equations in algebra. Cardano, who was interested in gambling, also did pioneering work in probability. Galileo Galilei did important experiments concerning gravity. He proved that a heavier object and a lighter object fall at the same rate. If the two objects are dropped from the same height, they reach the ground at the same time. Galileo also built the first telescope that could be used to look into space. He used his telescope to discover sunspots and the moons of Jupiter. By emphasizing observation and experiment, Galileo and other Renaissance thinkers paved the way for modern science.

**29.8 Florentine Politics**

The local government of Florence was housed in the Palazzo Vecchio. Like other Italian city-states, Florence was ruled by a governing board. These boards were often controlled by rich families. The powerful Medici family controlled Florence for nearly three centuries.

The Medici’s maintained their power in a number of ways. They built palaces and kept a strong military. They were involved in all aspects of life in the city. They were great supporters of artists, writers, and musicians. The Medicis also defeated enemies who plotted against the family or even to murder some of its members.

One of the most powerful members of the Medicis was Lorenzo the Magnificent. A leading patron of art and scholarship, Lorenzo ruled Florence for more than 20 years, from 1469 until his death in 1492. Two years later, a revolution forced the Medicis into temporary exile. In 1512, the family regained power.

A Florentine statesman and historian, Niccolo Machiavelli, watched these struggles for power. During the Medicis’ exile, he reorganized the city’s defenses. He also served as a diplomat and spent time observing the actions of other Italian rulers.

Machiavelli drew on his experiences in a famous book called *The Prince*. The book was a frank account of how politics and government really worked. Machiavelli advised rulers to make their states strong by doing what worked best, rather than by being good or moral. He said that they should even lie it helped them to rule. In his view, the end, or purpose, justified the means (the actions taken to achieve a certain purpose). Rulers he wrote should be feared rather than loved.

*The Prince* seemed to contradict humanist ideals about people’s goodness. Its cold realism shocked many readers. Yet in other ways the book shows the influence of humanist ideals. It was the product of one individual’s careful observation and thinking. It was concerned with how things really worked in the world. It also separated ideas about government from religion. In the respect, The Prince was a very modern work.

**29.8 Florentine Commerce and Trade**

One reason that Florence became a cultural center was the wealth that trade and commerce brought to the city.

The economy of Florence was unusually flexible. Its first great industry was woolen-cloth making, but people often worked in several kinds of business. The owner of a cloth factory might also deal in banking and real estate. A grain dealer might also be a lawyer. People often belonged to several of Florence’s guilds at once.

The shift to a money economy during the Renaissance helped create a thriving banking industry in Florence. The Medicis, for example, started out as merchants and moneylenders. Over time, Florence became Europe’s banking hub. The Medicis became one of the wealthiest families in Italy, and Florence became richer than the largest kingdoms in Europe. Popes and kings borrowed money from its 80 banks.

There were two market centers in the city. At the Mercato Vecchio (old Market), people bought everyday items like vegetables, fruits, bread, fish, meat, medicine, and shoes. The Mercato Vecchio was crowded, noisy, and smelly. Still, people from all over Europe came there to buy and sell goods.

The Mercato Nuove (New Market) was built in the mid 1500s as a center for the cloth and banking industries. City officials banned food and weapons from this new market. They wanted it to be clean and orderly as a sign that commerce was highly regarded in Florence.

The Mercato Nuovo became one of the largest financial marketplaces in Europe. People traveled from far and wide to get loans or to convert their money into florins, which would be used anywhere in Europe.