**The Renaissance Began In Italy**

The Renaissance (late 1300s-1500) was a period of rebirth and time of great artistic achievement in Europe’s history. Europe had just survived the Black Death and began to recover in its economy and culture. The Renaissance began in Italy and then spread to the rest of Europe. It began in Italy due to an earlier recovery from the Black Death, and powerful Italian merchants, competition between city states, and influence from the Ancient Romans.

The Black Death hit Italy in 1347 and had ended in Italy by the early 1350s. It continued to strike other areas in Europe long after the Italians had already recovered. When countries were dealing with the Black Death, they did not have the time, energy, or money to grow culturally. Italy was able to rebuild its population and economy earlier than other countries, allowing it to experience the cultural rebirth of the Renaissance earlier than other countries.

Powerful Italian merchants supported the Renaissance in Italy. Italy’s location on the Mediterranean Sea allowed it to develop a strong economy based on trade. Merchants became the rulers of many cities in Italy because their wealth gave them great power. They were rich enough that they were able to focus on other things besides survival, including education and art. Many families, like the famous Medici family of Florence, wanted to support artists to show off their wealth and power. They became patrons, or financial supporters, of many famous artists. These artists would create paintings or sculptures for the rich families to display in their homes, government buildings, or churches.

Being divided into several city-states also helped lead to the Renaissance in Italy. A city state is a city that acts like its own country with its own laws, government, and military. During the Renaissance, Italy was made up of many of these small city-states. The merchants ruling each city-state wanted to impress the others by showing off its wealth. The merchants became patrons of local artists to show the power of their city-states. Because each city-state was separated, each was able to develop its own unique style of art.

The last reason that the Renaissance began in Italy was that Italians were inspired by the legacy of the Ancient Romans around them. Over 1000 years earlier, Italy had been home to the Roman Empire, which had developed advanced art, architecture, literature, and philosophy. Italians in the 1300s were surrounded by buildings, statues, and artifacts from Ancient Rome in their daily lives. Many Italians wanted to recreated the accomplishments of the Ancient Romans that they saw all around them, and tried to create artwork, architecture, and writing in the style of the Romans.

Early recovery from the Black Death allowed Italian merchants to grow rich, which in turn led them to support the arts. Because of the competition between city-states, patronage by rich merchants and inspirations from the ancient Romans, some of the world’s most famous art was created in the time period. The Renaissance eventually spread to other parts of Europe, and has had a huge effect on our art and culture today.

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| **Johannes Gutenberg by Sharon Fabian** |

**Drama in the Renaissance by Sharon Fabian**

Do you like to watch plays acted out on stage? Many people do. This combination of literature and entertainment has been popular off and on for hundreds of years.

The ancient Greeks are often given credit for starting the tradition of presenting plays for an audience to enjoy. In the 5th century BC, Greeks in their togas and sandals enjoyed evenings in an outdoor theatre. There they could sit in a semicircle around an open-air stage and watch the performance. The performances would include a chorus that sang or chanted and perhaps three actors who took on all of the speaking parts.

Ancient Romans had a dramatic tradition of their own. In the first century AD, Seneca, the Roman philosopher, wrote dramas full of action, revenge, and heroics. These dramas were meant to be read, rather than performed on stage, and were known as closet dramas.

The time of the ancient Greeks and Romans later became known as the classic era. It was a time of great progress and creativity. It was also the time before the art of theatre was nearly lost during the Middle Ages.

With the Renaissance in Europe, people once again became interested in classical drama. Manuscripts of classic plays were rediscovered. Plots and characters from the classics were borrowed and updated into new dramas of the Renaissance. Dramatic styles including comedy and tragedy were rediscovered. Renaissance drama included classical elements like the use of a chorus. Stage ghosts like those in Seneca's scary plays reappeared, too. Stock characters like the mischievous servant made a second appearance.

Renaissance drama, similar to the drama of classic times, was very poetic. The language was very expressive since the plays relied on the spoken language to express emotions and to present images. The plays included more long speeches and less action than dramas of today.

The Globe Theatre and the Rose Theatre were two places in England where people went to enjoy a play during the Renaissance. On one of these large stages, they might see a performance by the Admiral's Men. Or they might catch a play by the Chamberlain's Men, the company that William Shakespeare wrote for.

Some of the theatergoers would be seated in the tiers of seats that partly surrounded the stage. Others who hadn't spent the money for expensive seats would stand on the lower level in front of the stage. These theatre fans were known as groundlings, and there were many of them. In London, as many as 15,000 people might attend the theatre in a week.

Shakespeare wasn't the only playwright that people came to see. Christopher Marlowe was another favorite. And there were many others. Today, we no longer hear the names of many of them, but in their time they were popular entertainers. When they wrote plays, they always kept their audience in mind. They knew that the audiences liked to see bad guys as well as heroes. They knew that their audiences liked to laugh. Sometimes their audiences even liked to be scared. The plays that these playwrights offered to the public during the Renaissance often combined comedy and tragedy. They were all about human nature. Audiences never got tired of that topic - not in classical times and not during the Renaissance. In fact, Renaissance plays like *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet* are still popular today.

Name:

**Part 1: The Beginning of the Renaissance** (Use the article “The Renaissance Began in Italy”)

1. What does the word “Renaissance” mean?
2. Why did the Renaissance begin in Italy? Name the four main reasons.
3. What is a patron?

**Part 2: Renaissance Art** (Use class notes and information from RenaissanceConnection.org)

1. What are two new techniques used by artists in the Renaissance?
2. How is Renaissance Art different from Medieval art?
3. Draw a picture of train tracks using perspective:
4. What is humanism?
5. What time period came before the Renaissance?