

## General Introduction

**Class:** *General*

**Theme(s):**

*Quest for Knowledge*

*Arts & Architecture*

*Patrons & Lifestyle*

*Everyday Life*

*Trade & Exploration*

*Science & Technology*

Before beginning any study of the Renaissance, introduce students to the general characteristics of the Renaissance period in Europe's history. The French word *renaissance*, meaning rebirth, is used to describe a period of Western European history between the 15th and 17th centuries.

Before the Renaissance, Europeans lived in a period we call the Middle Ages. During the Middle Ages, Europeans were concerned with the church and religion, and everyone's activities centered around getting to heaven rather than life here on earth. The Black Death, a plague that killed one third of Europe's people, made daily European life scary and dangerous. To escape the danger, at least in their minds, people turned to God and the church.

Europe emerged from the Middle Ages and experienced financial, artistic, social, scientific and political growth. The Renaissance was a rebirth that occurred throughout most of Europe but the changes that we associate with the Renaissance first occurred in the Italian city of Florence. Locate Florence on a map for students.

Much of the financial growth that occurred during the Renaissance was used to support the creation of art and architecture. New materials, subjects and techniques established during the Renaissance remain with us today. New trade routes across the Atlantic Ocean aided by innovations in navigation and cartography led explorers to sources of exotic foods, spices, silks, gold and silver. Significant inventions and advancements were made in mathematics, machinery, medicine, astronomy and physics.

The Humanism lesson included in the *Renaissance Connection*, Social Studies section, serves as an introduction to the cultural views that flourished during the Renaissance and could prepare students to study the Renaissance in any other discipline. Together, all the lessons make up a unit of study on the Renaissance for middle or high school students. Individual lessons and activities can be used to focus on the visual arts, social studies, language arts, science or math. Have fun adapting the lessons to suit your needs and teaching about this innovative period in Europe's history.