

The Geography of the Renaissance

Class: *Social Studies*

Theme(s): *Science & Technology*

BACKGROUND

Renaissance Florence

The artistic, economic and social changes that are associated with the Renaissance first began in the Italian city of Florence. In 1425, Florence was a self-governed, independent city-state with a population of 60,000. Surrounded by land, the city had no sea trade, but artist guilds and banking made Florence a money-making success. Many of Florence's families also built their fortunes on banking. The gold coin of Florence, called the florin, was so consistently pure that it became the standard currency of Europe.



Medallion with a portrait of Cosimo de Medici

The construction of a dome on top of Florence's cathedral, called the church of Santa Maria del Fiore, marks the beginning of Renaissance architecture. Filippo Brunelleschi received a commission to build the first dome in Florence on a cathedral built in the Gothic style over one hundred years earlier. Brunelleschi went to Rome to study ancient Greek designs and proportions, and he borrowed ideas from what he saw there to create a new architectural marvel - the dome. Brunelleschi's achievement in Florence became a symbol of the Renaissance; blending old Greek designs with modern engineering and artistic ideas to create a new Renaissance style.

The Medici family, originally farmers, made their fortune in banking, in Florence, in the beginning of the 15th century. Cosimo de Medici (1389-1464), Florence's wealthiest and most influential citizen, delighted in discussing humanist issues and was extremely generous in his support of

scholars and artists such as Brunelleschi. He founded the famous Medici Library and organized the Plato Academy, where intellectuals would gather to discuss ideas concerning the Greek classics. The academy continued even after Cosimo's death.

Florence's wealth and success, guided by rich patrons like the Medicis and the artists they supported, became a new model for society in Europe. The Middle Ages, where cities and states were ruled by kings, emperors and dukes, gradually gave way to governments led by wealthy merchants and bankers. The Renaissance values that grew from the ideas they supported, spread from Florence to other Italian cities and north to the Netherlands.

Renaissance Venice

In the early 16th century Venice was the third largest city in the world, following the largest city, Constantinople and the second largest, the Aztec city of Technochtitlan. The ruler of Venice, called the Doge, was elected from the aristocracy. There were 134 families with 2700 members of the Venetian aristocracy in

THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE RENAISSANCE: BACKGROUND (continued)

1500. Members of this class were recorded in the Libro D'Oro - The Golden Book. Only those men whose names were inscribed in the book were eligible to be elected Doge.

Beneath the aristocracy in Venice were the Cittadini Originarii. This class of people who were full citizens of the Republic and its territories but were not able to vote to elect the Doge. It was also possible for the Cittadini Originarii to climb into the elevated position of aristocracy by donating 100,000 Ducats (a denomination of currency) to the State and buying themselves a place in the Libro D'Oro. The common people of Venice lived in houses on unpaved roads away from the center of the city. As the lowest level of Venetian society they had all the rights of a citizen but they could not vote and positions that were open to them in governing Venice were very limited.

By 1529, the Ottoman Empire extended to the east of Italy and along the southern Mediterranean to Morocco. To the north, the Hapsburg Empire controlled Germany and the Netherlands. To the northwest, France was ruled by Francis I. Venice steered a course between these three great powers and managed to remain an independent city-state. In the years between 1575 and 1577, Venice was gripped by a plague, which not only filled the hospitals but also several old ships were towed out into the lagoon as hospitals. When it was over, more than 50,000 Venetians had died and by 1581, its population had been reduced from almost 190,000 to a little over 124,000.



*Bridge of Sights
Venice, Italy*

Venice was the first Italian city to put the moveable type printing press to use and became the center of the European book trade. Venice was also located next to the University of Padua, where the study of science, medicine and the law produced doctors and lawyers. Galileo taught mathematics at the University for 18 years. Despite its publishing fame and its contributions to the math and science of the Renaissance, Venice was never able to promote Renaissance values as well as Florence. The price the city paid for independence, and perhaps in plague victims, placed it second to Florence in Renaissance innovations in art and architecture.

The Netherlands Renaissance

The Renaissance Netherlands was an area including what is now Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Luxembourg and northern France. By 1500 the rule of these areas had been in the Hapsburg family for generations and was handed down from father to son. The Hapsburg lands continued to expand over Europe during the Renaissance, both through military conquest and carefully chosen marriage alliances.

The Netherlands was an important center of cloth production and was famous for its tapestries, exported all over Europe. The Netherlands also attracted and inspired some of the most talented artists of the Renaissance. Artists of the Netherlands were particularly interested in recording the reality of the visible world. Jan van Eyck, a Belgian painter, is credited with being the first to fully understand the potential of oil paint to reproduce reality. His techniques with oil paint were copied all over Europe. Perhaps this interest in reality explains the reason portraits were so popular during the Renaissance in this region. Northern patrons, from Hapsburg royalty to merchants and craftspeople, had their likenesses captured in portraits during this period.

The Reformation began in 1517 when Martin Luther, a German monk, protested the sale of indulgences by the Roman Catholic Church. Buying indulgences allowed wealthy Catholics to be pardoned from some of the penalty for sins. Catholics who had the money, could literally buy their way into heaven. The Reformation

THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE RENAISSANCE: BACKGROUND (continued)

expressed a different view of Christian practice and led to the creation of the Protestant (meaning protest) church. The Roman Catholic Church mounted the Counter-Reformation, denouncing the Protestants. In Italy and Spain, the Counter-Reformation had an immense impact on the arts and religious images increased; while in the Netherlands where Protestants remained popular, religious art continued to decline and interest in the real world grew and flourished.

Student Study Questions

1. What was Florence exporting to the rest of Europe during the Renaissance? What did Venice export during the Renaissance? What product was exported from the Netherlands?
2. What kind of leaders ruled the city of Florence during the Renaissance? How was the Doge of Venice chosen? Were the rulers of the Netherlands different from the leaders of Florence? How?
3. How did the Reformation affect art of the Italian Renaissance? How did it affect art of the Netherlands?

THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE RENAISSANCE (continued)

CLASSROOM TIME

Three or four 40 minute periods

OBJECTIVES

The students will:

- Work independently to complete a portfolio of research about the geography of the Renaissance, including:
- Locate three key Renaissance cities on historic and contemporary maps of Europe.
- Demonstrate understanding of citizenship and exports of three Renaissance cities.
- Identify main modes of transportation for three Renaissance cities.
- Identify climates for three Renaissance cities.
- Identify customs and traditions for three Renaissance cities.
- Work as a group identify regions of Europe that produced art in the *Renaissance Connection*
- Apply geographic concepts to understanding the art of the *Renaissance Connection*

PENNSYLVANIA ACADEMIC STANDARDS

Arts and Humanities

9.2.8 B. Relate works in the arts chronologically to historical events.

9.3.8 C. Identify and classify styles, forms, types, and genres within art forms.

Social Studies

7.1.6 B. Describe and locate places and regions.

7.3.6 A. Describe the human characteristics of places and regions by their population characteristics.

- Spatial distribution, size, density and demographics characteristics of population at the county and state level.
- Causes of human movement, mobility.

MATERIALS

- The "Background" section of this lesson with study questions, reproduced as a student handout.
- Historic map of Renaissance Europe worksheet, one per student
- Contemporary map of Europe worksheet, one per student
- Portfolio checklist, one per student
- Small (postcard size or smaller) prints of the works of art in the *Renaissance Connection*
- Access to library materials for research, for example, encyclopedias and books on geography, global climates and the Renaissance.
- Pencils, pens and paper

OPTIONAL RESOURCES

Computer stations to access the Internet for research

GEOGRAPHY LESSON

1. Setting the Stage

Geography can be defined as the study of the location and distribution of features of the Earth's surface. Most

THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE RENAISSANCE: MATERIALS (continued)

people are familiar with the "location" part of geography and think about geography as the study of maps. But geography also means the study of the cultural features of the people who inhabit Earth. That is why we place geography into the larger field of social studies in middle school.

During the Renaissance, journeys of geographical exploration were undertaken by a variety of European interests. Most of these voyages were financed because European rulers believed that explorers would find resources that could be turned into money. Christopher Columbus completed four voyages across the Atlantic (1492-93, 1493-96, 1498-1500, and 1502-04) and as a result opened the way for European exploration, exploitation and colonization of the Americas. These voyages also provided an opportunity for scientific investigation and discovery. In 1492 Martin Behaim created a round globe depicting the Earth in its true three-dimensional form. Prior to Behaim's invention it was commonly believed that the Earth was flat. Behaim's globe helped to encourage explorers like Christopher Columbus, who were eager to prove or disprove Behaim's theory.

In this set of activities, students will examine the geography of the Renaissance and see how it might have affected the art that was made at that time.

2. The Renaissance Connection

Handout student materials for portfolio development, including the "Background" section of this lesson with review questions, historic map of Renaissance Europe worksheet, contemporary map of Europe worksheet and portfolio checklist.

Instruct students to follow the portfolio checklist to complete a portfolio about the physical and cultural geography of the Renaissance. Students should locate and mark the cities of Florence, Venice and the Netherlands on both the historic map of Europe and the current European map. Instruct students to read the "Background" section of this lesson and complete the review questions.

Instruct students to describe the climate of Florence, Venice and the Netherlands. Place each city or area into its climate zone: hot and humid (tropical rain forests), dry (deserts) short, mild winters and long summers (temperate), long, severe winters and short, chilly summers (treeless tundra) or glacial regions (polar). Include information about average temperatures for each season (fall, winter, summer, spring) average rainfall and landforms such as mountains that may affect climate.

Instruct students to describe the major modes of transportation for Renaissance Florence, Venice and the Netherlands. Students may include pictures of modes of transportation as part of their descriptions as well as a written sentence about how different modes of transportation may have affected life in each Renaissance city.

Instruct students to describe an annual festival or city-wide celebration in Renaissance Florence and Venice and the Netherlands. If different cities celebrated the same holidays or festivals, do different cities have special customs surrounding the festival? Instruct students to choose one aspect of the festival they have identified to demonstrate for you or for the class. Music, food or costumes are good choices for demonstrations.

Make certain that students understand that all the materials they collect for their portfolio must be kept together with the checklist for assessment.

3. Summary

When students have completed their individual portfolios, ask the class to work as a group and place art reproductions from the Renaissance Connection in three categories using information from the web site:

THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE RENAISSANCE: GEOGRAPHY LESSON (continued)

Florence, Venice and the Netherlands (including Germany). The map feature of the "Art Explorer" section of the Renaissance Connection will help with this task.

Discuss with students how their understanding of the geography of each of the three areas might explain the similarities and differences among the works of art from Florence, Venice and the Netherlands. Can the geographical characteristics of these three places be seen in any of the works of art? Is there any evidence of communication between Florence, Venice and the Netherlands in the works of art?

4. Assessment

Did the student complete a portfolio (checklist) of Renaissance geographic features? A scoring system may be determined for each portion of the portfolio. Make certain that the students understand the scoring system before they begin work on their portfolios.

Study Questions Answers:

1. What was Florence exporting to the rest of Europe during the Renaissance? What did Venice export during the Renaissance? What product was exported from the Netherlands?
Florence had no sea trade but its industries were artist's guilds and banking. Venice was the center of the book trade. The Netherlands exported cloth and tapestries.
2. What kind of leaders ruled the city of Florence during the Renaissance? How was the Doge of Venice chosen? Were the rulers of the Netherlands different from the leaders of Florence? How?
Florence was self-governed by its most influential families. Members of the aristocracy, whose names appeared in the Golden Book, elected the Doge of Venice. The rulers in the Netherlands were not elected; they belonged to the Hapsburg family and inherited their power from their fathers.
3. How did the Reformation affect art of the Italian Renaissance? How did it affect art of the Netherlands?
In Italy, religious images in art increased as a result of the Counter Reformation. In the Netherlands, religious art decreased and the focus shifted to the real world.

Table of Climate Descriptions for Florence, Venice and the Netherlands:

Location	Climate Zone	Fall Temp	Winter Temp	Spring Temp	Summer Temp	Average Rainfall	Landforms
Florence	Temperate	69° F	51° F	66° F	85° F	36 inches	River through the center of the city
Venice	Temperate	63° F	44° F	61° F	79° F	31 inches	Waterways, prone to flooding
Netherlands	Temperate	67° F	51° F	68° F	83° F	32 inches	Coastal lowland

Transportation:

By the 17th century, most people in Europe used horse-drawn wagons to haul goods locally, but on long hauls they usually traveled by foot because the poor condition of the roads was too hard on wagons. Until the mid-19th century, horse-drawn boats and barges were the chief means of long-distance inland transport. The animals trudged along the banks of rivers and canals and pulled the vessels with ropes. In Venice, the abundant waterways provided the primary source of transportation.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE RENAISSANCE: GEOGRAPHY LESSON (continued)

Following are examples of famous festivals:

Florence -- The Explosion of the Carriage

Each year, on Easter morning, a procession of 150 costumed figures of soldiers, musicians, and flag-throwers accompany a carriage piled with fireworks from Il Prato up to the Cathedral in Florence. At 11 a.m., as the mass sings Gloria, the fuse on a mechanical dove is lit, shoots along a wire to the carriage and ignites the fireworks and Catherine-wheels, which have been arranged on the carriage, signifying the sacred fire of the city. This ancient celebration always attracts a huge crowd of tourists and citizens, as well as numerous peasants from the surrounding countryside who drew auspices of good harvest from the successful unobstructed "flight" of the dove along the wire.

Venice -- Carnival

The Carnival in Venice is said to have originated from an important victory of the "Repubblica della Serenissima" in the war against Ulrico, Patriarch of Aquileia, in the year 1162. To celebrate this victory, dances and reunions started to take place each February in San Marco Square and continue to this day. "Oriental Express: Masked Journey on the Silk Road" is the theme chosen for the 2004 celebration paying tribute to Marco Polo and his legendary pilgrimage to countries of the East and Far East.

Netherlands -- St. Nicholas's Eve

On December 5, St. Nicholas's Eve, the Dutch exchange gifts instead of on Christmas Day as celebrated in the North America. The legend of St. Nicholas originated in the Netherlands, and over the years was combined with Christian traditions to create the American "Santa Claus." During the Renaissance, St. Nicholas was the most popular saint in Europe. Even after the Reformation discouraged the worship of saints, St. Nicholas maintained a popular presence, especially in Holland. Dutch children believe that Saint Nicholas visits their homes with presents for good boys and girls. A man dressed in red, like a bishop, represents Saint Nicholas and rides through the streets on a white horse. In Amsterdam, he arrives by ship and is greeted by ringing bells and cheering crowds.

Was the student able to apply the study of Renaissance geography to a discussion about the works of art in the *Renaissance Connection*?

5. Related Activity

Students may create and decorate a folio or folder to contain all the elements of their portfolio. The creation and/or decoration of the container may be added to the checklist as another element for assessment.

Students may research the life of one of the artists represented in the *Renaissance Connection* and add this information to their portfolios to exemplify how physical and cultural geography impacts an individual life in a specific region.

VOCABULARY

aristocracy: A class of people that hold rank, privilege or hereditary nobility.

artist's guild: an association of artists in the European Middle Ages, formed to give help to its members and to regulate standards for a particular art form (altarpieces, sculpture, etc.)

Christian: relating to a belief in Jesus Christ as the son of God and acceptance of his teachings.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE RENAISSANCE: GEOGRAPHY LESSON (continued)

Counter-Reformation: A movement begun by the Catholic Church to counter the Protestants in Europe, who gained strength as a result of the Reformation.

ducats: currency used in Renaissance Venice, Italy. Ducats were gold coins, equal in value to 10 Bolognini.

florin: currency used in Renaissance Florence, Italy. Florins could be either gold or silver coins.

Hapsburg Empire: Also called Habsburg, a German family of rulers of the Holy Roman Empire, Spain and Austris-Hungary.

humanist: A scholar of the Renaissance who pursued the study and understanding of the ancient Greek and Roman empires. A person with a strong concern for human interests, values, and dignity.

oil paint: Paint that is created by mixing oil with colored pigments that are ground into powder.

Ottoman Empire: a Turkish empire that included parts of Asia and the Middle East.

patron: someone who orders a commission or otherwise financially supports an artist.

portrait: a painting, drawing, bust, photograph, or other representation of a real person, living or dead, especially of the face.

Protestant: A person who adheres to the beliefs of Protestantism - a Christian religion that denounced the Roman Catholic Church in the 16th century.

Reformation: a European movement in the 16th century that sought to reform corrupt practices of the Catholic Church and resulted in the development of Protestantism.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE RENAISSANCE (continued)

RENAISSANCE GEOGRAPHY PORTFOLIO CHECKLIST

Student		Teacher
	Locate Florence, Venice and the Netherlands on historic map of Europe.	
	Locate Florence, Venice and the Netherlands on current map of Europe.	
	Read the "Background" section of <i>The Geography of the Renaissance</i> lesson.	
	Answer all study questions about "Background" section of <i>The Geography of the Renaissance</i> lesson.	
	Identify main modes of transportation for Florence, Venice and the Netherlands (pictures are o.k.).	
	Place Florence, Venice and the Netherlands into a climate zone.	
	Identify average seasonal temperatures for Florence, Venice and the Netherlands.	
	Identify average seasonal rainfall for Florence, Venice and the Netherlands.	
	Identify landforms in Florence, Venice and the Netherlands that may affect climate.	
	Identify a festival or city-wide celebration of Renaissance Florence, Venice and the Netherlands.	
	Demonstrate one example of a custom from the identified festival (music, costume, food, etc.)	