



THE RENAISSANCE SPREADS NORTH AND WEST



A Procession of Characters from Shakespeare's Plays

Unit Overview

As the fame of the Italian Renaissance artists grew, scholars and art students from Western Europe visited Italy to view their work and to study their techniques. Albrecht Durer and others applied what they learned and added their own touches to create their own style. Authors began to write for a generation of Europeans who had absorbed the ideals of the Renaissance. At the same time, developments in the printing industry increased the availability and the affordability of books. Let's see how it all happened.

Albrecht Durer: The German Leonardo

The Renaissance resulted in an interest in classical culture, a belief in man's ability to solve problems and a curiosity about everything. These ideals drew scholars and artists from northern and western Europe to Italian cities. **Albrecht Durer**, a German art student, was one of those who came to study the painting techniques of the Italian masters. When he returned home, Durer used these methods to produce a form of art known as **engraving**. The artist etched a design with acid on a metal plate. Then, he used this plate to make prints. This process enabled Durer to sell thousands of copies of his work. Like Leonardo da Vinci, he had a wide range of interests. Because he was a writer as well as an artist, Durer spread the ideas of the Renaissance throughout his German homeland and earned the nickname the German Leonardo. He was instrumental in enabling the Renaissance to gain a foothold outside of Italy.

Small Horse
Engraving by Albrecht Durer



Self-portrait
Oil by Albrecht Durer



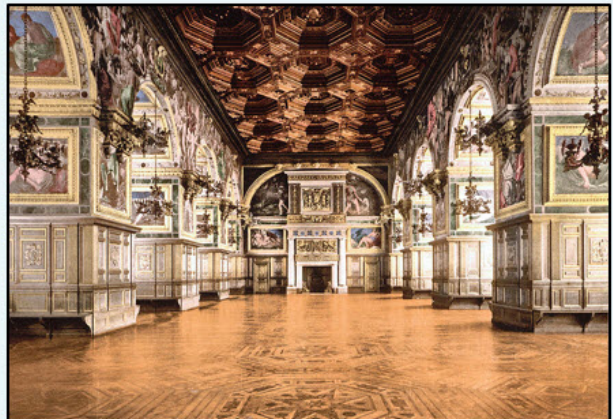
The Renaissance Took Root in Flanders

During the Renaissance, northern France, Belgium and the Netherlands made up a region of Europe known as **Flanders**. Kings and royal courts in this area encouraged artists to try new styles and to develop new materials. They also brought examples of Italian Renaissance art to Western Europe. For example, **Francis I**, king of France, invited Leonardo da Vinci to retire in his kingdom, purchased numerous Italian paintings and hired Italian architects to build his castle at **Fontainebleau**. At the same time, the population in Flanders included several wealthy merchant families that formed the base of a thriving middle class. In addition to having money to spend, they appreciated the Renaissance emphasis on individual success and worldly pleasures. This made them excellent candidates for patrons of the arts.

The Courtyard of Chateau Fontainebleau



The Ball Room of the Chateau Fontainebleau



Flanders produced a number of successful painters. They experimented with oil-based paints, and this led to a greater variety of colors. Flemish painters used these colors to improve perspective and to make their pictures appear more three-dimensional than those of the Italian masters. They used intense colors for figures or objects closer to the viewer and lighter, hazy colors for things farther away. Their attention to small details also helped to make their paintings more realistic. While the artists of the Italian Renaissance pictured religious or classical subjects in their works, Flemish artists were inspired by different themes. Works of art began to depict everyday activities, such as the celebration of weddings or the gathering of the harvest.



Games for Children by Flemish Artist Pieter Bruegel

Writers Appealed to a New Audience

The Renaissance continued to change the way people thought, and this changed what they were interested in reading. In Italy, poetry written by Greek and Roman authors made a comeback. Literature that gave advice to the ambitious middle class on how to accomplish their goals also became popular. **Niccolo Machiavelli** combined his political experience in Florence and his study of ancient Roman government to write a handbook for leaders. *The Prince*, published in 1513, explained how to gain and maintain political power.

And here comes in the question whether it is better to be loved rather than feared, or feared rather than loved. It might perhaps be answered that we should wish to be both; but since love and fear can hardly exist together, if we must choose between them, it is far safer to be feared than loved.

The Prince: Niccolo Machiavelli

Although Renaissance scholars continued to write mostly in Latin, the growing middle class demanded that new works be written in the **vernacular** or native languages. Authors soon began to use French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and English to convey their thoughts. Adventurous audiences wanted novels that entertained them and plays that made them laugh. William Shakespeare and Miguel de Cervantes proved to be masters of this craft.

- **Shakespeare:** William Shakespeare, English poet and playwright, was the literary giant of his age. From 1590 to 1613, he wrote thirty-seven plays that are still performed today. His comedies, like *Much Ado about Nothing* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, told stories of funny mix-ups and light-hearted romance. Shakespeare explored the range of human emotions through *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet* and other tragedies. His history dramas, including *Richard the Third* and *Henry the Fifth*, presented the power struggles experienced by English kings. Reflecting the Renaissance theme of humanism, Shakespeare's productions emphasized the impact of human nature and emotions on major and minor decisions. At the same time, he was a master of English and experimented with using old words in new ways. Shakespeare was credited with adding over 1700 words to the language, including heartsick, courtship and sneak.
- **Cervantes:** The Renaissance inspired a number of artistic and literary works in Spain. One of the best known is the novel *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. It entertained readers by recounting the adventures of Don Quixote, an elderly knight, and Sancho Panza, his faithful companion. Consistent with Renaissance thinking, the book made fun of medieval chivalry by describing the exploits of the idealistic but foolish warrior. He mistook a flock of sheep for an advancing army and fought windmills that he believed were giants. You can read part of this story in the graphic below. Today's theater audiences continue to enjoy the tales of Don Quixote in the theatrical production *Man of La Mancha*.

"Destiny guides our fortunes more favorably than we could have expected. Look there, Sancho Panza, my friend, and see those thirty or so wild giants, with whom I intend to do battle and kill each and all of them, so with their stolen booty we can begin to enrich ourselves. This is noble, righteous warfare, for it is wonderfully useful to God to have such an evil race wiped from the face of the earth."

"What giants?" Asked Sancho Panza.

"The ones you can see over there," answered his master, "with the huge arms, some of which are very nearly two leagues long."

"Now look, your grace," said Sancho, "what you see over there aren't giants, but windmills, and what seems to be arms are just their sails that go around in the wind and turn the millstone."

"Obviously," replied Don Quixote, "you don't know much about adventures."

Don Quixote: Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra

The Arrival of the Printing Press

The renewed interest in learning inspired by the Renaissance increased the demand for affordable books. During the Middle Ages, reading materials were copied by hand or printed one page at a time from carved wooden blocks. Both processes were time consuming and expensive. **Johann Gutenberg** combined several technologies already available and his own ideas to make the forerunner of the modern printing press. The German printer produced a complete copy of the Bible in 1456. With the addition of moveable type and better paper-making techniques, European presses turned out 20 million books within the next fifty years.



Page from a Bible printed on the Gutenberg Press

The impact of the printing press was enormous. Books were cheaper and more accessible. This encouraged more people to learn to read. Europeans had access to a wide range of knowledge, and this led to a broader view of the world. It also changed the way in which they viewed their religious faith. Christians read the Bible on their own and began to question the Church's interpretation of it. This helped to bring about a series of events known as the Protestant Reformation. To learn more about the printing press and the changes that resulted from its development, watch the video clip below.



What Happened Next?

The Renaissance brought a burst of creativity and a renewed interest in learning to Italy and Western Europe. In the long term, it established the importance of the individual person and played a key role in the development of modern democratic ideas. In the short term, it led European Christians to question the Church's interpretation of the Bible and brought about the Protestant Reformation. Before exploring this topic in the next unit, review the names and terms found in Unit 21; then, answer Questions 23 through 30.