



The Renaissance
History – Junior Cert
Quick Notes

The Renaissance

Renaissance means ‘rebirth’ and refers to the revived interest in learning and art in Europe between 1350 and 1650. It began in Italy which was politically strong at the time. Italy had richer and larger towns than the rest of Europe. There was more interest in art and learning in the towns than in the countryside. In 1400, the most important city states were Florence, Venice, Milan and Rome. Princes or merchants were in charge of these cities. They sponsored great works of architecture, art and painting. They earned the name ‘patron’ because they patronised or supported the arts. Florence and the De Medici family were the first family to sponsor the arts in Florence. From the beginning of the 15th century, the city of Rome was ruled by the papacy (the popes). From 1450 onwards, most popes were great patrons. Government and politics in Italy were often violent and cruel. People would plot, assassinate and poison to gain positions of power.

During the Renaissance people began to write in the vernacular, that is in their own languages. Many scholars began to search for and study the writings of ancient Greece and Rome. They were called humanists as they were interested in human nature. The two best known humanist writers were Francesco Petrarch and Giovanni Boccaccio. Painting changed radically during the Renaissance with new techniques, new material, new paints and new ideas being used. Leonardo Da Vinci was one of these Renaissance painters, his greatest paintings including The Virgin on the rocks, the Last Supper and the Mona Lisa.

Michelangelo was another great renaissance sculptor whose work includes the Pieta and the Statue of David. He also painted the Last Judgement. Renaissance architecture sought to recreate the splendor of classical Greek and Roman buildings. There were two main renaissance architects – Filippo Brunelleschi and Andrea Palladio. Before the Renaissance all books were written by hand and were known as manuscripts. Printing was developed using a fixed block which was engraved with the page to be printed. This block was covered with ink, pressed to the paper and the engraving was copied in a slow and expensive process. Johannes Gutenberg developed a printing system of moveable letters leading to quicker, cheaper and easier printing. The following scientists were involved in the revival of science and medicine during the Renaissance – Nicolas Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, Andreas Vesalius and William Harvey. Painters and sculptors from northern Europe travelled to Italy

to gain knowledge of the developments in their areas e.g. people such as Peter Paul Rubens from Belgium and William Shakespeare from England.

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