

Directions

Read this article. Then answer questions 1 through 13.

A Time of Discovery and Rediscovery

by Nancy Day, Calliope

- 1 Italy had awakened from a thousand-year slumber, or so it seemed to fifteenth-century Italians. They felt that the fifth-century sacking of Rome by invading tribes was the bitter pill that had put the world to sleep. They began to call the centuries that followed the Dark Ages. The time period in which they lived was the Renaissance, or “rebirth.” Was their comparison fair? Historians disagree. What is clear is that the Renaissance was a remarkable time of discovery and rediscovery that changed the world.
- 2 In 1347, a merchant ship sailed from Crimea on the Black Sea to Sicily. Onboard were rats infested with fleas that carried a disease called the plague.¹ Soon after, the plague swept through Italy and the rest of Europe. It killed more than one-third of the population. Cities shrank, production slowed, and prices dropped. Rather than give in to low grain prices, Italians switched to more profitable products such as wine, oil, and cheese. As wool exports fell, they turned to silk. Gradually, Italy began to specialize in luxuries such as artistic metalwork, fine leather, and beautiful furniture.
- 3 The northern Italian city-states, including Venice, Milan, and Florence, prospered. So did the Papal States of central Italy and the kingdoms of Naples and Sicily to the south. Money bought education for the privileged few. Learning had previously focused on religious studies. It expanded to include grammar, rhetoric,² history, poetry, and moral philosophy. Wealthy Italians thought that these subjects would lead to a greater understanding of human nature and give them an advantage in business.
- 4 Renaissance Italians turned to ancient Rome as the model for a great civilization. Lawyers studied Roman law. Others discovered the joy of reading classical books. They became interested in poetry, history, and philosophy. Before long, scholars were rediscovering Greek and Roman art, science, and literature.
- 5 In the Middle Ages, the Church had taught people to think about the afterlife. During the Renaissance, people wanted to enjoy life on earth. Enthusiasm for games, sports, and entertainment blossomed. Music flourished.

¹ **plague:** a disease

² **rhetoric:** the study of how to use language to persuade people



Renaissance Italy

- 6 Individual expression and accomplishment became important. The fourteenth-century Italian poet and scholar Petrarch spent countless hours studying ancient texts. He left a detailed record of his thoughts and activities. The ideal was to be well-rounded. A “Renaissance man” was supposed to be skilled in all the arts and sciences. A perfect example was Leonardo da Vinci. He was a painter, sculptor, architect, musician, engineer, and scientist.
- 7 Interest in humanity brought realism to art. The great sculptor Donatello, while working on a particularly lifelike work, was heard saying to the stone, “Speak then! Why will you not speak!” Painters drew everyday people in natural settings and faces that showed each individual’s personality and emotions.
- 8 Art stimulated interest in anatomy, mathematics, and even physics. Leonardo’s famous flying machine, for example, was designed to make a decorative angel flap its wings when pulled through the streets during Carnival. Leonardo also studied anatomy by dissecting human bodies. This enabled him to draw detailed studies of human figures.
- 9 The Renaissance achievement that had the greatest effect on the modern world was the printing press. It was invented by a German craftsman named Johannes Gutenberg around 1455. The press revolutionized education and standardized language. Before the printing press, books were reproduced by hand. As a result, few were readily available, and they were very expensive. With the invention of printing, the number of books in circulation increased. The cost of a book decreased. As more and more people bought books, the ideas of the Renaissance spread quickly.

- 10 Italy was located in the heart of the greatest trading area of the time. It became the center not only of trade but also of art, culture, and ideas. By the end of the fifteenth century, the Renaissance had spread to Germany. From there it spread to France, England, and Spain.
- 11 Not everyone experienced a Renaissance. Most women had few liberties.³ A fourteenth-century merchant expressed the common attitude toward the female gender: “If you have women in your house, keep them shut up as much as possible and return home very often and keep them in fear and trembling.” Laborers, servants, tradesmen, and apprentices also had little say in the rules that controlled their lives. In addition, they were poor and illiterate.⁴
- 12 As the decades passed, the artistic, cultural, scientific, and intellectual achievements of the period between 1350 and 1550 gradually affected all levels of society. For scholars, philosophers, and artists of the time, the Renaissance led Western civilization from the Middle Ages to modern times.

³ **liberties:** rights

⁴ **illiterate:** not able to read or write

1 Which sentence **best** expresses a main idea of the article?

- A** The plague nearly destroyed Italy’s economy.
- B** Renaissance women had less freedom than men.
- C** Both arts and sciences flourished during the Renaissance.
- D** Italy prospered when it began selling different products.

2 Which detail would be **most** important to include in a summary of the article?

- A** The plague killed more than one third of the population.
- B** The Kingdoms of Naples and Sicily were in the southern part of Italy.
- C** The poet and scholar Petrarch spent hours studying ancient texts.
- D** Leonardo da Vinci studied the anatomy of human bodies.

3

According to paragraph 2, why is a 1347 Crimean ship historically important? Use **two** details from the article to support your response.

4

Which conclusion is supported by paragraph 3?

- A** The Renaissance led to widespread education throughout Italy.
- B** Education was limited to the city-states in northern Italy.
- C** Religious studies were a primary focus of the Renaissance.
- D** Wealthy Italians placed great value on education.

5

Read these sentences from paragraph 4.

Renaissance Italians turned to ancient Rome as the model for a great civilization. . . . Before long, scholars were rediscovering Greek and Roman art, science, and literature.

Based on these sentences, what can you infer about the Renaissance?

- A** The Renaissance made Italians wish they had lived in a different time.
- B** The Renaissance helped the Italian people become civil and cultured.
- C** The Renaissance in Italy introduced new and old ideas from the Greeks and Romans.
- D** The Renaissance in Italy was influenced by ancient Greek and Roman ideas.

6

What were the effects of Gutenberg inventing the printing press? Use **two** details from the article to support your response.

7

According to the article, why was Leonardo da Vinci a perfect example of a “Renaissance man”? Use **two** details from the article to support your response.

8

Which statement **best** describes the main idea of paragraph 5?

- A** Some of the new inventions of the Renaissance included music, sports, and games.
- B** The Church taught a different message during the Renaissance than it did during the Middle Ages.
- C** In the Renaissance, people were no longer interested in the Church’s teachings about the afterlife.
- D** Changing values led Renaissance people to seek out various ways to entertain themselves.

- 9** What does “realism” mean based on paragraph 7?
- A** colors that are intensely bright
 - B** images of what things look like in life
 - C** a focus on the process of creating
 - D** stylized, simplified images
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- 10** Which paragraph **best** explains the effects of the Renaissance on women, tradesmen, and servants?
- A** paragraph 2
 - B** paragraph 3
 - C** paragraph 11
 - D** paragraph 12

- 11** How do paragraphs 4 through 10 support a main idea of the article?
- A** by describing how the arts and sciences flourished under the Renaissance
 - B** by describing the achievements of Renaissance man Leonardo da Vinci
 - C** by explaining how people in Renaissance Italy spent their free time
 - D** by explaining how important Johannes Gutenberg was to the Renaissance

- 12** In paragraph 10, what does the phrase “in the heart” suggest about Italy? Use **two** details from the article to support your response.
