

## 2 The Northern Renaissance

### TERMS & NAMES

- Utopia
- printing press
- Gutenberg Bible

#### MAIN IDEA

In the 1400s, northern Europeans began to adapt the ideas of the Renaissance.

#### WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Renaissance ideas such as the importance of the individual are a strong part of modern thought.

#### Background

Flanders was a region in northern Europe. It included part of France and part of the Netherlands. The people of Flanders are the Flemish.

**SETTING THE STAGE** The work of such artists as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Raphael showed the Renaissance spirit. All three artists demonstrated an interest in classical culture, a curiosity about the world, and a belief in human potential. These ideas impressed scholars and students who visited Italy. Merchants also carried these ideas when they traveled out of Italy. By the late 1400s, Renaissance ideas had spread to northern Europe—especially England, France, Germany, and Flanders.

### The Northern Renaissance Begins

By 1450 the population of northern Europe, which had been shattered by the bubonic plague, was beginning to recover. In addition, the destructive Hundred Years' War between France and England ended in 1453. Many cities grew rapidly. Urban merchants became wealthy enough to sponsor artists. This happened first in Flanders, which was rich from long-distance trade and the cloth industry. Then it happened in other countries.

As Section 1 explained, Italy was divided into city-states. In contrast, England and France were unified under strong monarchs. These rulers often sponsored the arts. For example, Francis I of France purchased Renaissance paintings. He also invited Leonardo da Vinci to retire in France, and hired Italian artists and architects to rebuild his castle at Fontainebleau (FAHN·tih·BLOH). When completed, Fontainebleau became a showcase of the French Renaissance. Because of monarchs like Francis, royal courts played a major role in introducing Renaissance styles to northern Europe.

As Renaissance ideas spread out of Italy, they mingled with northern traditions. As a result, the northern Renaissance developed its own character. Many humanists there were more interested in religious ideas than in the secular themes popular in Italy. The Renaissance ideal of human dignity inspired some northern humanists to develop plans for social reform based on Christian values.

### Artistic Ideas Spread

In 1494, a French king claimed the throne of Naples in southern Italy and launched an invasion through northern Italy. As the war dragged on, many Italian artists and writers left for a safer life in northern Europe. With them, they brought the styles and techniques of the Renaissance. In addition, artists who studied in Italy also carried Renaissance ideas north.

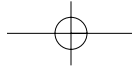
#### THINK THROUGH HISTORY

##### A. Analyzing

**Causes** How did the war in Italy spread the Renaissance?

Albrecht Dürer painted *Adoration of the Trinity* after returning from studying in Italy.





**German Painters** Perhaps the most famous person to do this was the German artist Albrecht Dürer (DYUR-uh-ur). The son of a goldsmith, Dürer decided to become a painter. After serving an apprenticeship, he traveled to Italy to study in 1494.

After returning to Germany, Dürer produced woodcuts and engravings that became influential. Many of his prints portray religious subjects such as the one on page 423. Others portray classical myths. He also painted realistic landscapes and a self-portrait in which he portrayed himself as a Renaissance man. The popularity of Dürer's work helped to spread Renaissance styles. His work inspired other German artists.

## Daily Life

### Flemish Peasant Life

The Flemish painter Pieter Bruegel often portrayed peasants. Many of his paintings provide information about peasant life in the 1500s.

*Peasant Wedding* (1568), shown below, portrays a wedding feast in a rough but clean barn. The bride sits under the paper crown hanging on a piece of green cloth. Two young men who may be her brothers are pouring drinks and passing out plates.

Who, then, is the groom?

Possibly the man sitting across the table from the bride and leaning back on a three-legged stool.

Children and at least one dog have come to the party. The couple to the right of the bride and the man on the far right with a sword are dressed more elegantly than the other guests. They may be wealthy townfolk related to the groom.

Dürer's emphasis upon realism influenced the work of another German artist, Hans Holbein (HOHL-by-n) the Younger. Holbein specialized in painting portraits that are almost photographic in detail. He enjoyed great success in England, where he painted portraits of King Henry VIII and other members of the royal family.

**Flemish Painters** As in Italy, wealthy merchant families in Flanders were attracted to the Renaissance emphasis on individualism and worldly pleasures. Their patronage helped to make Flanders the artistic center of northern Europe.

As in Italy, the Renaissance in Flanders was marked by an interest in realism. The first great Flemish Renaissance painter was Jan van Eyck (yahn van YK). Van Eyck lived from sometime in the late 1300s to 1441 and worked at the height of the Italian Renaissance.

Oil-based paints had recently been developed. Van Eyck used them to develop techniques that painters still use. Because oil paint does not dry quickly, it can be blended more easily than other paints. By applying layer upon layer of paint, van Eyck was able to create a variety of subtle colors in clothing and jewels. Oil painting became popular and spread to Italy.

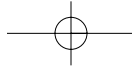
### THINK THROUGH HISTORY

#### B. Contrasting

How was the development and spread of oil painting different from many other Renaissance developments?







In addition to new techniques, van Eyck's paintings display unusually realistic details and reveal the personality of their subjects. His work influenced later artists in northern Europe.

Flemish painting reached its peak after 1550 with the work of Pieter Bruegel (BROY-guhl) the Elder. Like van Eyck, Bruegel was interested in realistic details and individual people. He captured scenes from everyday peasant life such as weddings, dances, harvests, and the changing seasons. Bruegel also produced paintings that illustrated proverbs or taught a moral. Some of his paintings protested harsh Spanish rule over his country.

In all his work, Bruegel's rich colors, vivid details, and balanced use of space give a sense of life and feeling. He was also very skillful in portraying large numbers of people. Not only did Bruegel produce a large number of paintings, he inspired two sons and three grandsons to also become painters.

## Northern Writers Try to Reform Society

Just as Italian art influenced northern European painters, so did Renaissance ideas influence the writers and philosophers of northern Europe. These writers adopted the ideal of humanism. However, some gave it a more religious slant. Because of this, some northern humanists are also called Christian humanists.

**Christian Humanists** The best known of the Christian humanists were Desiderius Erasmus (DEHZ-ih-DEER-ee-uhs ih-RAZ-muhs) of Holland and Thomas More of England. The two were close friends.

Born in Rotterdam, Erasmus received honors from princes, kings, and cardinals for his brilliant writings. In 1509, while he was a guest in More's house, Erasmus wrote his most famous work, *The Praise of Folly*. This book poked fun at greedy merchants, heartsick lovers, quarrelsome scholars, and pompous priests. Although some of Erasmus's most stinging barbs were aimed at the clergy, his work is strongly Christian. Erasmus believed in a Christianity of the heart, not one of ceremonies or rules. He thought that in order to improve society, all people should study the Bible.

Also concerned with society's flaws, Thomas More tried to show a better model. In 1516, he wrote the book *Utopia* about an imaginary land inhabited by a peace-loving people. In Greek, **Utopia** means "no place," but in English it has come to mean an ideal place because of More's book. In *Utopia*, greed, corruption, war, and crime had been weeded out. Because the Utopians weren't greedy, they had little use for money:

### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

Gold and silver, of which money is made, are so treated . . . that no one values them more highly than their true nature deserves. Who does not see that they are far inferior to iron in usefulness since without iron mortals cannot live any more than without fire and water?

THOMAS MORE, *Utopia*

The French humanist François Rabelais (RAB-eh-LAY) provided a contrast to Erasmus and More in several ways. They wrote in Latin, while Rabelais wrote his comic adventure *Gargantua and Pantagruel* in vernacular French. More secular than either Erasmus or More, Rabelais believed that human beings were basically good. They should live by their instincts rather than religious rules. As he told of the wild adventures of the giants Gargantua and Pantagruel, he poked fun at his society. Rabelais's humor was uproarious and earthy, although he made many serious points about the nature of humanity, education, and government.

**William Shakespeare** William Shakespeare wrote in Renaissance England. Many people regard him as the greatest playwright of all time. Shakespeare was born in

The Christian humanist Thomas More wrote about a nearly perfect society called Utopia. He did this to show his own society how to improve.



### THINK THROUGH HISTORY

**C. Making Inferences** What point do you think More was making about his own society?



## CONNECT to TODAY

### William Shakespeare

Shakespeare's plays were very popular in London in the 1600s. They are popular today as well, but they appear in many places besides London. Shakespearean festivals are regularly held in such places as Stratford-upon-Avon, England; Stratford, Ontario, Canada; and Austin, Texas.

Even though he has been dead for almost 400 years, Shakespeare is one of Hollywood's favorite writers. In the 1990s, two film versions of *Hamlet* hit the theaters, as did a version of *Romeo and Juliet*. The poster below is from the 1990 version of *Hamlet*, starring Mel Gibson and Glenn Close.



1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon, a small town about 90 miles northwest of London. By 1592 he was living in London and writing poems and plays.

His works display a masterful command of the English language and a deep understanding of human beings. He revealed the souls of men and women through scenes of dramatic conflict. His most famous plays include the tragedies *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and the comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Many of these plays frankly examine human flaws. However, Shakespeare also had one of his characters deliver a speech that expresses the Renaissance's high view of human nature:

### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving, how express and admirable in action, how like an angel in apprehension [understanding], how like a god! the beauty of the world; the paragon of animals.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Hamlet*

Like many Renaissance writers, Shakespeare revered the classics and drew on them for inspiration and plots. One of his great tragedies, for example, tells the story of the assassination of Julius Caesar—the Roman general and statesman.

**The Elizabethan Age** The Renaissance in England is also called the Elizabethan Age, for Queen Elizabeth I. She reigned from 1558 to 1603. Elizabeth was well-educated and knew French, Italian, Latin, and Greek. In addition to running a kingdom (see page 432), she also wrote poetry. As queen, she patronized artists and writers. Poet Edmund Spenser dedicated his long poem *The Faerie Queene* (1590) to her with these words: “To the most high, mighty, and magnificent Empress, renowned for piety, virtue, and all gracious government, Elizabeth.”

## Printing Spreads Renaissance Ideas

One thing that helped spread Renaissance ideas throughout Europe was a new invention that adapted Chinese technology. The Chinese had invented block printing, in which a printer carved a word or letter on a wooden block, inked the block, and then used it to print on paper. Around 1045, Bi Sheng invented movable type,

or a separate piece of type for each character in the language. However, since the Chinese writing system contained thousands of different characters, most Chinese printers found movable type impractical.

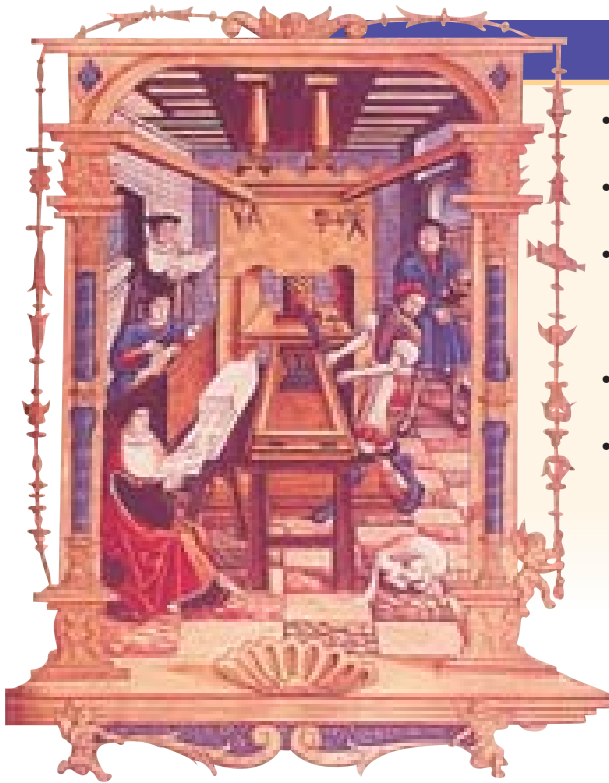
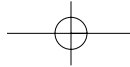
**Gutenberg Invents the Printing Press** During the 13th century, block-printed items reached Europe from China. European printers began to use block printing to create whole pages to bind into books. However, this process was too slow to satisfy the Renaissance demand for knowledge and books. Johann Gutenberg, a craftsman from Mainz, Germany, reinvented movable type around 1440. The method was practical for Europeans because their languages have a very small number of letters in their alphabets.

Gutenberg then invented the **printing press**. The printing press is a machine that presses paper against a tray full of inked movable type. Using this invention, Gutenberg printed a complete Bible, the **Gutenberg Bible**, in about 1455. It was the first full-size book printed with movable type.

### THINK THROUGH HISTORY

#### D. Summarizing

State at least two ways in which Shakespeare's work showed Renaissance influences.



## History of Book Making

- 2700 B.C., Egyptians write books on papyrus scrolls.
- 1000 B.C., Chinese make books by writing on strips of bamboo.
- A.D. 300, Romans write on sheets of parchment (treated animal skin). These are sewn together into books.
- 800, Irish monks hand-write and hand-illustrate *The Book of Kells*.
- About 1455, Gutenberg prints the first complete book on a printing press—similar to the one shown at left.



Only 46 copies of the Gutenberg Bible still exist in the world. Because of this, each copy is considered priceless. A part of a page is shown above.

**Printing Spreads Learning** The printing press had a revolutionary impact on European society. It enabled a printer to produce hundreds of copies, all exactly alike, of a single work. For the first time, books were cheap enough that many people could buy them. Printing

spread quickly to other cities in Europe. By 1500, presses in about 250 cities had printed between 9 and 10 million books.

New ideas spread more quickly than ever before. At first printers produced many religious works. Soon they began to provide books on other subjects such as travel guides and medical manuals. The availability of books encouraged people to learn to read and so caused a rise in literacy.

Writing in vernacular languages also increased because even people who could not afford a classical education could now buy books. Printers produced the Bible in the vernacular, which allowed more people to read it. People began to interpret the Bible for themselves and to become more critical of priests and their behavior. This eventually led to demands for religious reform.

**The End of the Renaissance** In both Italy and northern Europe, the Renaissance had stirred a burst of creative activity. Artists in both regions studied classical culture, praised individual achievement, and produced works using new techniques. During the 1600s, new ideas and artistic styles appeared. Nonetheless, Renaissance ideals continued to influence European thought. For example, the Renaissance belief in the dignity of the individual played a key role in the gradual rise of democratic ideas.

### THINK THROUGH HISTORY

**E. Recognizing Effects** What were the major effects of the invention of the printing press?

## Section 2 Assessment

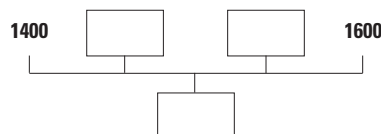
### 1. TERMS & NAMES

Identify

- Utopia
- printing press
- Gutenberg Bible

### 2. TAKING NOTES

On a time line like the one below, show important events in the Northern Renaissance.



Which of the events do you think was most important? Explain.

### 3. RECOGNIZING EFFECTS

Choose one Northern Renaissance figure. Explain how he or she was influenced by Renaissance ideas.

#### THINK ABOUT

- the influence of humanism
- the use of new techniques
- the concept of the Renaissance man or woman

### 4. THEME ACTIVITY

**Cultural Interaction** Working in a small team, reproduce a map of Europe in 1500. On the map, use arrows, pictures, and captions to show the spread of Renaissance ideas and developments. Include not only the spread of ideas north from Italy, but also innovations that spread southward from northern Europe.