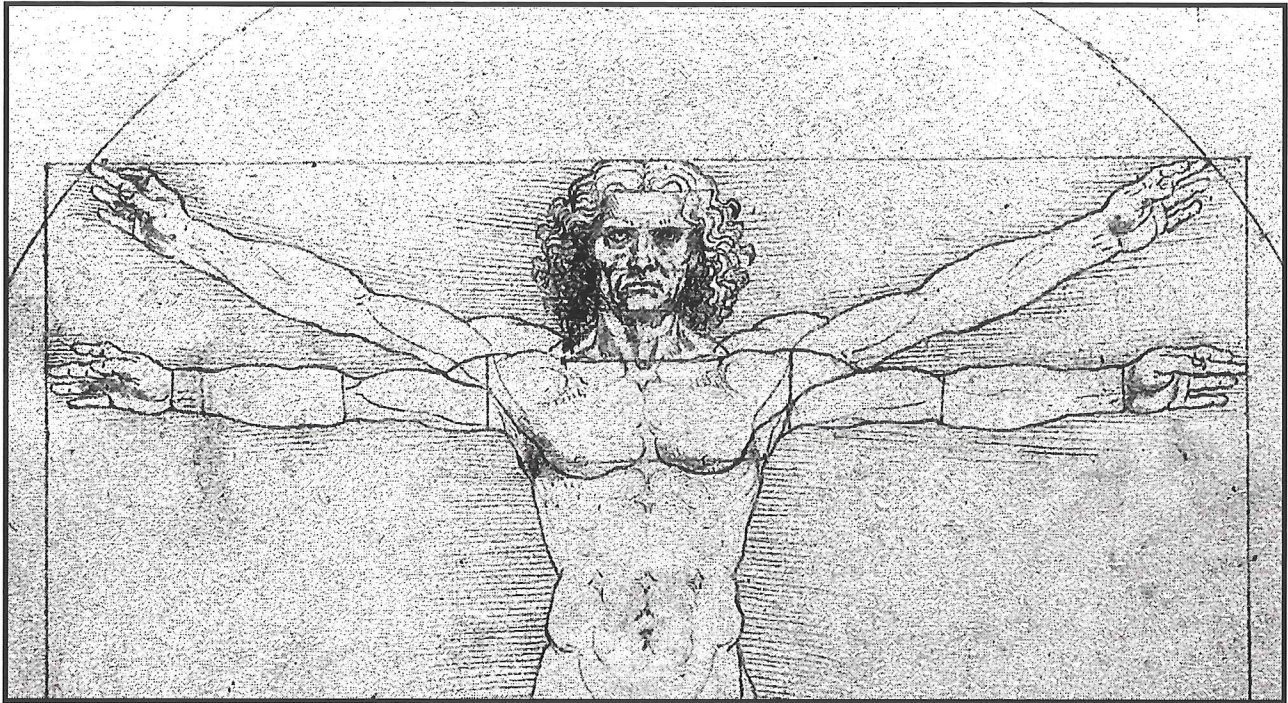

How Did the Renaissance Change Man's View of the World?



CV

Overview: The word “renaissance” means “rebirth” or “revival.” In world history, the Renaissance is used to describe a period in Europe that began around the year 1350 and lasted until about 1700. Thanks in large part to the scientific and cultural advances made during this time, people saw themselves in a new way. The impact of the Renaissance was powerful and has endured for centuries. This Mini-Q asks you to explore how this exciting and important era changed how man understood his world.

The Documents:

Document A: The *Madonna* and the *Mona Lisa*

Document B: *Everyman* and Shakespeare

Document C: Ptolemy and Copernicus

Document D: Zodiac Man and Vesalius

A Mini Document Based Question (Mini-Q)

Hook Exercise: Should We Be “Renaissance” People?

Directions: Historians often describe Leonardo Da Vinci (1452-1519) as the best example we have of a true “Renaissance man.” A Renaissance person is an individual who has interests and skills in a wide range of activities. Da Vinci did it all. He painted the masterpieces *Mona Lisa* and *The Last Supper*; he designed buildings; he engineered everything from water pumps to helicopters; he studied geology, optics, and anatomy. He may have been the most multi-talented person ever to have lived.

American education today does not produce many Renaissance people, and often it does not try. You don’t go to college to study the humanities; you go to become an accountant or a computer whiz. You don’t go to medical school to be a general practitioner; you go to become a heart surgeon or a dermatologist. You can see this same trend in our school sports programs. The three-sport athlete is practically extinct. Now kids specialize in tennis or basketball or gymnastics or whatever, often to the exclusion of all other activities.

Is all this specialization a good thing? With a partner, take a few minutes to make two lists – one arguing in favor of a Renaissance education and one supporting a specialized education. Be ready to discuss your answers.

Arguments in favor of a Renaissance education:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Arguments in favor of a specialized education:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Personal opinion: Do you feel that your education has been too specialized or not specialized enough? Explain.

How Did the Renaissance Change Man's View of the World?

The Renaissance was a period of big change in European history. It was a time of intellectual excitement, when art and literature blossomed and groundbreaking scientific advances were made. Over the course of about 300 years, the Renaissance spread from its home base in Italy to western and northern Europe. The effect was like a sunrise making its way across the land.

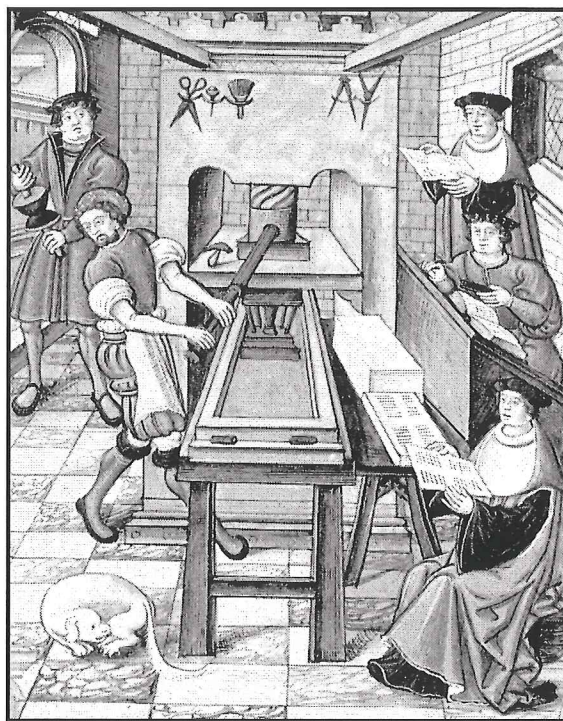
To understand the changes the Renaissance produced, it helps to review what European society was like before it arrived. The time period before the Renaissance is usually called the **Middle Ages**, which stretched from the fall of the Roman Empire around 500 CE to about 1350. During the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church and the Pope were the primary players in Europe. The custodians of culture – that is, the people who owned most of the books and made handwritten copies of the Bible – were priests who often lived a closed existence inside the walls of **monasteries**. Schools were few. **Illiteracy** was widespread. Most of the population, more than 85 percent, was peasant farmers called **serfs** who worked for a lord and his estate. Serfs were little more than slaves. Both serfs and their masters looked to the Catholic Church and the Bible to explain the world. The art and literature that existed focused on Jesus Christ and the sins of mankind.

In the 1300s, important changes began to happen. Improved farming methods helped

peasants become more self-sufficient. More and more serfs gained their freedom and no longer depended on lords. Some freed serfs migrated to towns, where they took up trades. The number of merchants and bankers increased. Since these people needed to have an education to effectively carry on their work, literacy spread. Eventually, educated people began to question the teachings of the Church. A movement called **humanism** developed, which praised the beauty and intelligence of the individual.

As more people became educated, humanism worked its way into the arts, literature, the sciences, and medicine. This early Renaissance movement was especially vigorous in the city-states of Italy – places like Rome, Venice, Florence, and Milan. The invention of the printing press in the mid-1400s gave the Renaissance and humanism even more momentum. Primarily, the Renaissance was an upper-middle class movement, but thanks to the mechanization of printing, shopkeepers and street sweepers were able to afford books and articles that discussed the new ideas spreading across Europe. As a result, people started to look at themselves and their world in a new way.

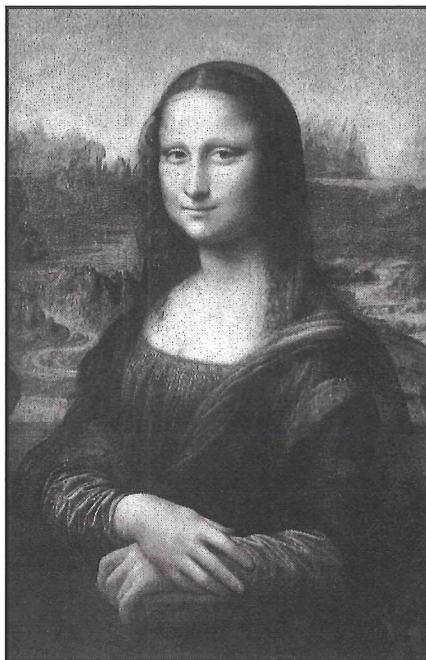
But what, exactly, was this new way? Examine the documents that follow and answer the question: *How did the Renaissance change man's view of the world?*



Document A

Sources: Images: *Madonna Enthroned Between Two Angels* by Duccio di Buoninsegna, late 13th century; *Mona Lisa* by Leonardo da Vinci, early 16th century.
Text: Theodore Rabb, *The Last Days of the Renaissance & The March to Modernity*, Basic Books, 2006.

Note: Duccio Di Bouninsegna's painting shows The Mother Mary on a throne with the baby Jesus on her lap. Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* is believed to be a portrait of Lisa Gherardini, the wife of a wealthy Florentine merchant.



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The [clearest] evidence of the break with medieval culture comes from the visual arts. [It] was the essence of the Renaissance.... One begins to know the names of the artists ... feel stronger emotions in the subjects ... see well-defined landscapes, natural folds in drapery, and three-dimensional figures; and one begins to notice the emphasis on symbolic representation giving way to depictions of recognizable scenes ... the new artistic styles would echo the broader movements and interests of the new age.... Neither the techniques nor the forms of artistic expression were to be the same again.

Document B

Source: Excerpt from an English play called *Everyman*, written by an unknown author in 1485.

Note: Though written in 1485, which was during the Renaissance period, these lines carry a message right out of the Middle Ages.

*“Ye [man] think sin in the beginning full sweet,
Which in the end causeth thy soul to weep,
When the body lieth in clay.
Here shall you see how fellowship and jollity,
Both strength, pleasure, and beauty,
Will fade from thee as flower in May.
For ye shall hear, how our Heaven-King
Calleth Everyman to a general reckoning: *
Give audience, and hear what he doth say.”*

*Judgement Day

Source: Excerpt from Act II, Scene II of *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare, 1601.

*“What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason!
How infinite in faculty! in form and moving how
express and admirable! in action how like an angel!
in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the
world! the paragon* of animals!”*

*perfect model

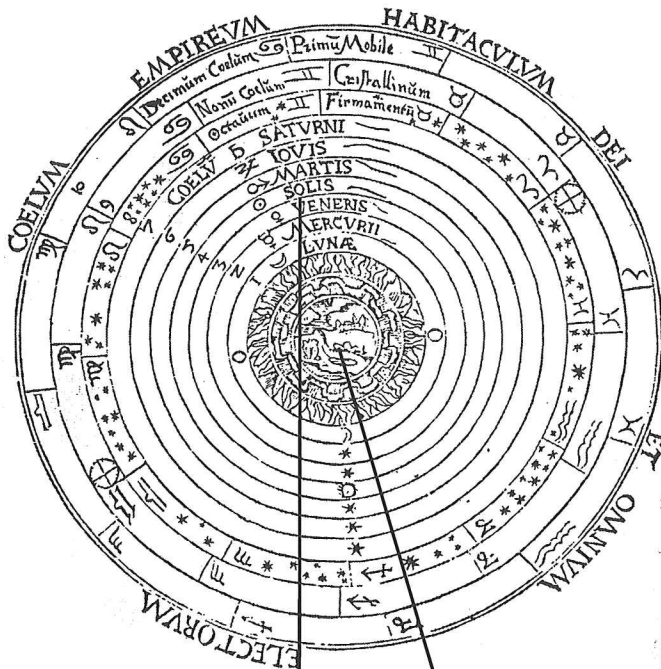
Document C

Source: Drawings of the universe by Claudius Ptolemy (circa 100 CE) and Nicolaus Copernicus (circa 1500).

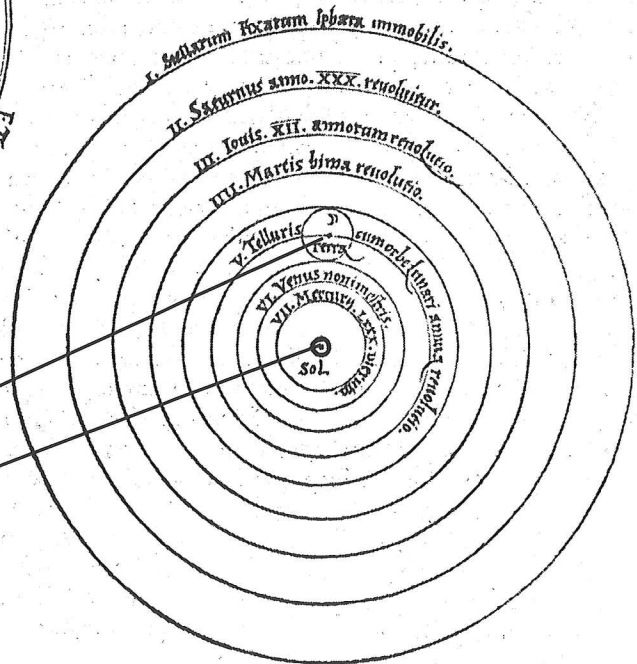
Note: Ptolemy (tol-eh-mee) was a Roman astronomer who lived in Alexandria, Egypt, shortly after the time of Jesus. He developed a theory of the universe that was adopted by most scholars during the Middle Ages. The Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus lived from 1473 to 1543. Relying mostly on mathematics and observation, he developed a different understanding of the universe. Geocentric means “earth-centered” and heliocentric means “sun-centered.”

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The Geocentric Universe of Ptolemy



The Heliocentric Universe of Copernicus



Note: The Latin in the outer sphere can be translated “The Empire of Heaven and the Home of God and the Elect.”

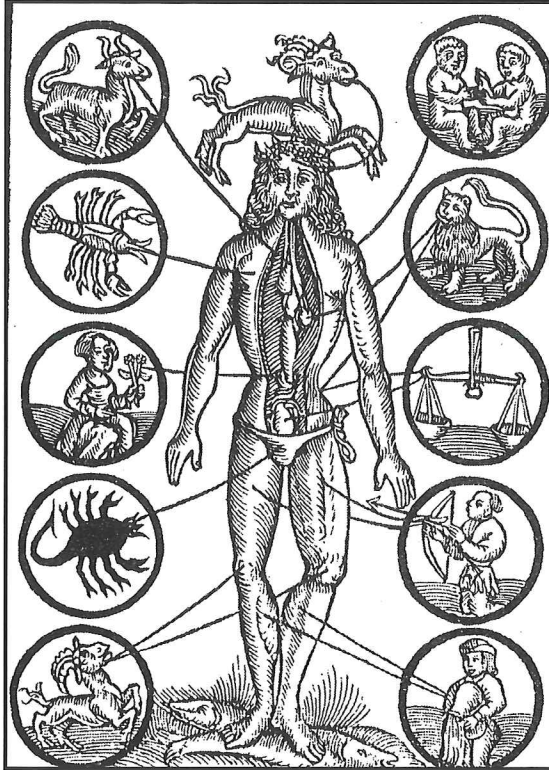
EARTH
SUN

Document D

Source: A woodcut called "Zodiac Man" from a book by German astronomer Johann Regiomontanus, 1512, and a woodcut from the anatomy book *On the Makeup of the Human Body* by Belgian physician Andreas Vesalius, 1543.

Note: The image on the left reflects the Middle Ages belief that each sign of the zodiac* governed a certain part of the body. For example, the constellation of stars called Aries the Ram controlled the head. The illustration on the right was based on the research done by Andreas Vesalius, who dissected human corpses to better explain the human body.

*The zodiac is a band of 12 constellations (stars) that stretch across the sky.



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