

Introduction to the Renaissance

This handout comes from <http://year7historygr.edublogs.org/the-middle-ages/renaissance-renascimento-rebirth/>

During the Renaissance, people began to rethink and reconsider all the beliefs that had been accepted and assumed for centuries. There were new ideas in art, science, literature and other fields of human endeavour. Of course, in those days, ideas and movements did not spread with lightning speed as they do now in our intensely connected world. The ideas and the achievements of the Renaissance developed over centuries, beginning in Italy and spreading from there all over Europe. The word “Renaissance” is a French word meaning “**rebirth**”. The Italian word is “**Renascimento**”.

Albrecht Dürer – *Hare*, 1502 – Google Art Project

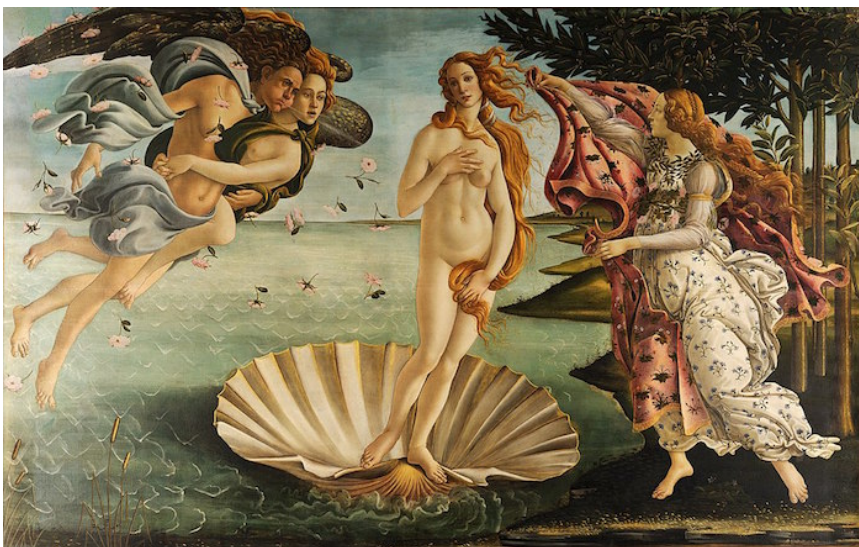
An example of the growing interest in the natural world that developed during the Renaissance



Over a period of more than two centuries, artists gradually became more and more intrigued by the nature of human beings, human and natural beauty, anatomy and the natural world. They created art with several themes that artists would not have considered earlier: portraits of wealthy people (often clutching books to show their intelligence and education); detailed prints and paintings of plants, animals and landscapes; scenes and buildings in which careful attention to the rules of **perspective** is evident. Later, artists began to paint ordinary people involved in everyday pursuits, such as children playing games or peasants at a wedding. There were still many religious paintings, but other central ideas became evident.

Many fields of human endeavour were affected by these new trends. **Sculpture** and **architecture** changed and developed dramatically as well. Writers began to employ their mother tongue, rather than Latin, and tell stories that revealed the lives of ordinary people. Scientists and astronomers started to question the long-accepted ideas of the Church and to base new theories on experimentation rather than on “deduction from fundamental principles”. The **scientific method** as we now know it was born.

The Birth of Venus by Botticelli • **Wikipedia**



Look at the two works of art on this page. Which artistic interests are represented in them?

This was certainly a time when creativity flourished, yet there was also a reaction against new ideas. Alongside those who embrace change in any historical period, there are also others who fear the effects of change on their belief systems and way of life. The leaders of the Catholic Church, for example, were deeply suspicious of many Renaissance ideas, did not allow **dissection** and accused scientists of **heresy**.

For fear of punishment, Copernicus did not publish his theory about a sun-centred universe until late in his life. Galileo was also accused of being a **heretic** after supporting this view of the universe and placed under house arrest for the last few years of his life. Botticelli, the artist who gave us “The Birth of Venus” (above), actually burned some of his paintings because of his fear that they were sinful and wrong. Even within a single human being, there was sometimes a conflict between the desire for change and the fears that change brought.

All in all, this period was an absorbing and ground-breaking time. Some people pushed forward into the future; others yearned for the old ways.

Heading: Introduction to the Renaissance

These questions are in the order of the text. Write or type your answers in sentences.

a Describe three fields of human endeavour that changed and developed during the Renaissance.

b Give three examples of how artistic themes and interests changed during the Renaissance.

c Some people looked forward, while others were afraid of new ideas. Give an example of each tendency from the text above.

d Write or type the correct word in bold from the text in each space below:

• A belief or opinion that was contrary to orthodox Christian beliefs was called .

A person accused of this was called a .

• The Church was against the of bodies after death, which made it difficult to learn about anatomy.

• The word “Renaissance” means and refers to new ideas as well as a renewed interest in the culture of the ancient world, especially ancient Greece and Rome.

• During the Renaissance, artists learned to represent the three-dimensional world on a two-dimensional plane. They worked out the rules of .

• Scientists and astronomers also began to carry out experiments and test hypotheses. In other words, they began to apply the .

• Artists who carve something in three dimensions are creating .

• The art of designing buildings is called .