The Renaissance

The Disintegration of the Medieval World
- Bubonic plague strikes Europe, wiping out towns and leading to labor shortages
- Crop failures and famine as well as dissatisfaction cause peasant revolts in France and England and demonstrate growing fragility of the feudal system
- Gun powder, used in the Hundred Years war between France and England (1337-1453), eventually renders hand-to-hand combat and the chivalric code obsolete

The Black Death
- Bubonic plague kills 1/3 to 1/2 of the population of Europe
- Four waves from 1345-1375 C.E.
- Death is seen as the equalizer for he takes all, peasant and lord alike
- Depictions of the dance of death act or danse macabre

Constitutional Monarchy in England
- In 1215 C.E. English barons force King John to sign the Magna Carta, giving them legal rights and freedom from undue taxation
- Council of Parliament, a representative form of government for English lords, is established 50 years later with the imprisonment of King Henry III

The Avignon Papacy and the Great Schism
- Papacy moves from Rome to Avignon, France (1309-1377) where the papal court becomes luxurious and powerful due to the selling of indulgences, increased taxation and the practice of simony
- When the Papacy returns to Rome, factions within the College of Cardinals vote for two, rival popes, creating the schism

Boccacio’s *Decameron* 1351 and Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* ca. 1390
- Boccacio’s narrative frame depicts ten young people who retreat to a Florentine villa to escape the plague
- Chaucer’s *Tales* portrays characters from all parts of English society going on a pilgrimage
- Each of the people tells a story or two to pass the time
- In comparison to Medieval characters, the characters are realistic and worldly individuals
- Sense of humor (sometimes bawdy) prevails
- Both satirize the decadence of the church
Christine de Pisan
- Writes *Book of the City of Ladies* in 1405, in which she criticizes the anti-female bias of her time and provides a different representation of women.

Giotto 1266-1337
- Uses chiaroscuro shading (modeling that involves gradations of light and shade)
- Expressions on figures more lifelike and show range of emotions
- Figures appear more weighty and the picture space less flat than altarpieces and icons

Machaut’s *Mass of Our Lady* ca. 1350
- Unifies Mass into one whole rather than being separated into five distinct compositions
- Machaut is leading proponent of ars nova (new art) music, which features isorhythmic compositions, the repetition of identical rhythmic patterns in different parts of the composition
- Uses richer sounding harmonies
- Adds a sixth movement, *Ite misa est*, which concludes the Mass

Italian City-States
- Cities trade with west Asia and maintain contacts with Byzantium
- Fourteenth and fifteenth-century Florence flourishes due to soundness of the currency (the florin) and the power of its bankers, merchants, and artisans
- Ancient Greeks and Romans looked to as models for the new, materialistic society
- The Medici, a wealthy banking family, dominate Florentine politics and cultural life

Medieval Spiritual & Renaissance Humanist World Views contrasted
- Christian belief system orders life
- Focus on the after-life
- Community and anonymity
- Faith and creed
- The glory of God
- Revival in interest in Greco-Roman culture
- Focus on this world
- Individualism and self-aggrandizement
- Rational thinking and empiricism
- The achievements of humanity

Petrarch and the Sonnet
- Most well-known for his sonnets, called Petrachan sonnets, which comprise the *Canzoniere* (ca. 1350)
- Sonnets, fourteen-line lyric poems
- Sonnets record his struggle between his spirit and flesh
- Written to honor his love for Laura, a married woman
- Written in vernacular (Italian)
Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola
- Ficino founds the Platonic Academy in Florence with Cosimo de Medici’s support, reviving Plato’s ideas and introducing the notion that “platonic,” or spiritual love, is inspired by physical beauty
- Pico’s *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486) argues that man has free-will which he can use to choose the degree of perfection he will achieve

Castiglione: *The Book of the Courtier* (1518)
- Handbook of Renaissance etiquette
- Advances the idea of the Renaissance gentleman who masters skills of the mind and body
- Ladies are expected to entertain and have knowledge of arts, literature, and music but maintain their “softness”
- Due to the invention of the printing press, over one thousand copies of the 1527 edition are sold

Machiavelli’s *The Prince* (1513)
- A political treatise that considers how a strong prince may unify Italy and maintain his power
- Argues that the strong state is the highest good and that the use of power should be pragmatic
- Subordinates moral concerns to the good of the state
- Demonstrates that the prince should be as sly as the fox and as brutal as the lion

Brunelleschi (1377-1446): The Dome and the Pazzi Chapel
- Florence’s ‘Duomo’ has largest dome since Pantheon
- Uses two octagonal shells with each made up of 8 curved panels joined by ribs
- Pazzi Chapel shows classical principles of symmetry and proportion

Alberti (1446-1451): Rucellai Palace
- *Ten Books on Architecture* (modeled on Vitruvius’ text)
- Palazzo for wealthy family
- Each of the three stories uses a different classical order
- Alternates arches and pilasters (flattened engaged columns)

Masaccio: *The Tribute Money* ca. 1425
- Uses one-point linear perspective to create three dimensionality
- Diagonal lines (orthogonals) merge at the vanishing point on the horizon just behind Jesus’ head
- Models figures using chiaroscuro shading
- Three scenes are depicted
- Uses aerial perspective, further away objects appear more fuzzy and less bright in color
**Botticelli’s Birth of Venus ca. 1482**
- Idealized vision of womankind
- Expresses neoplatonic notion that physical beauty leads one to spiritual beauty
- Figures appear weightless and ethereal
- Uses pastel colors and images of fertility

**Donatello’s David 1432**
- Modeled on Greco-Roman statues
- Uses contrapposto and correct anatomical proportions
- Biblical hero
- Appears at rest- after the killing of Goliath
- Youthful and sensuous
- Celebrates physical beauty
- Nude not seen as sinful

**Ghiberti’s “Gates of Paradise” 1452**
- East portal of the Florentine Baptistry
- Depicts ten Old Testament scenes
- Made out of gilt-bronze
- Sculpted in low relief
- Uses one-point perspective for each scene

**Verrocchio’s Equestrian Statue of Bartolommeo Colleoni (ca. 1481-1496)**
- Life-sized bronze statue
- Harkens back to Marcus Aurelius
- Body’s twisting shape and the face’s snarling expression exemplify terribilità
- Musculature of the horse creates realism

**Palladio’s Villa Rotonda near Vincenza**
- Designed around a domed rotunda, with outer square structure and four post and lintel style entry ways entered by stairs
- Symmetrical, harmonious, dignified, and proportionate

**Leonardo da Vinci: the Ultimate Renaissance Man (1452-1519)**
- Was a painter, scientist, inventor, composer and mathematician
- Painted what may be the world’s most famous painting, the Mona Lisa
- Examined life and wrote down his observations, invention ideas and drawings in his notebooks
Da Vinci continued

- *The Last Supper* ca 1495-1498
- Fresco painted on the refectory walls
- Vanishing point, where orthogonals converge, is above the head of Jesus, and the pediment creates a halo
- Drama created by the varying responses of the disciples

Raphael’s *The School of Athens* (1509-1511)

- Uses da Vinci’s face for Plato’s
- Plato points towards heaven (the forms) while Aristotle gestures towards the earth
- Creates an arch shaped picture frame
- Exemplifies Grand Style: spatial clarity, balance, unity of design, symmetry of line and color, dignity of subject matter

Michelangelo’s *David* 1501-1504

- David’s proportions are deliberately off, with his head and hands being larger than natural
- Unlike Donatello’s *David*, he is depicted before the killing of Goliath and has a more heroic stance
- Intent facial expression resembles portrait of Alexander the Great

Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel Ceiling 1508-1512

- Illustrates Old Testament scenes intermixed with pagan sibyls
- This section shows the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden

Titan’s *Venus of Urbino* 1538-39

- Uses rich colors and golden light to create sensuous atmosphere
- Oil on canvas. Builds up paint on the canvas, called painterly
- Domestic scene of a bride, her dog, and the maids rummaging through her trousseau

Josquin de Prez (ca. 1440-1521)

- Flemish composer
- Unifies polyphonic Mass around single theme
- Creates complex, yet symmetrical distributions of melody and harmony
- Groups voices into pairs and balances high voices with lower voices
- First to use word painting, in which the music matches the lyrics of the text
The Madrigal
- A popular renaissance vernacular song which uses three to six voices
- Uses word painting and imitation (where one melody in the first voice is overlapped by repetitions from the second, third, and fourth voices at different pitches)
- Often lyrics come from romantic poetry, like Petrarch’s sonnets

Instrumental Music
- Solo music becomes popular
- Composers write music for clavichord and the harpsichord
- Instrumental music develops out of dance songs and becomes independent of dance
- Suites are modeled on groups of dances arranged for contrasting rhythms

Renaissance Dance
- Court performers are not professionals
- Dancers create allegorical figures when seen from above
- Guglielmo Ebreo, a famous dancing master from Italy, writes treatise on the art of dancing for aristocrats
- Ballet comes from the Italian ballare (to dance)
- Three forms of dance:
  1. basse (means low), solemn dance
  2. Saltarello, vigorous dance with leaps
  3. Piva- rapid tempo with double steps

Renaissance Dance continued
- Catherine de Medici brings ballet to France when she marries the Duke of Orleans
- Ballet Comique de la Reine, commissioned by Catherine and choreographed by Balthasar de Beaujoyeulx in 1581, is known as the first ballet

Discussion Questions
1. Why did the Catholic church become less influential during the Renaissance?
2. What makes a person a true gentleman, according to Castiglione?
3. How relevant is Machiavelli’s The Prince to today’s world?
4. What does the use of nudity in Renaissance sculptures and paintings tell you about the artists’ values?
5. Why do you think da Vinci’s Mona Lisa is such a famous painting?