**Renaissance Humanism**

* *To what extent did the Renaissance represent a shift from the medieval to the modern world?*

**Characteristics of Humanism**

1. Revival, study, and celebration of antiquity (Greece and Rome) in philosophy, literature and art

* Not the first time (800’s, 1100’s), but the most successful
* Most Humanists remained deeply Christian
* Sought to reconcile pagan writings with Christian thought
* Not abandon God, just work to understand him better

**To understand God, you must study Man**

2. Strong belief in individualism and the great potential of human beings

* Contrast to the Middle Ages where humans were seen as small, wicked and inconsequential and should focus solely on earning salvation
* Believed the key to a good life was a belief in Reason and an understanding of Nature

3. Focused first on studying ancient languages:

* Initially, Latin of ancient Rome was the main focus.
* After the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453, Greek came to be studied rigorously as well
* By 1500, virtually all of the significant ancient Roman and Greek texts that have been rediscovered, were translated and printed

4. Largely rejected Aristotelian views and medieval scholasticism in favor of:

* Roman authors such as Cicero, Livy, Virgil, and Quintilian
* Greek writings, especially those of Plato
* Early Christian writers, especially the New Testament

5. Believed in a liberal arts educational program that included grammar, rhetoric (debate), poetry, history, politics and moral philosophy

* Humanists worked as teachers, diplomats, speechwriters, etc.
* Civic Humanism: idea that education should prepare leaders who would be active in civic affairs
  + Some of the most important humanists also were important political leaders.

**The Renaissance Man**

* + Needed to constantly be searching out new info, improving himself
  + Needed to be skilled in multiple areas (politics, athletics, poetry, engineering, military, etc)
  + ***Virtú: “the quality of being a man”; idea of excelling in all of one’s pursuits; taking action***

**Petrarch (1304-1374)—the “father of humanism”**

1. Considered the first modern writer

* In his writings, literature was no longer subordinate to religion

2. Claimed that the Middle Ages (the period between the fall of the Roman Empire and the emergence of the Renaissance) were the **“Dark Ages”**

3. He was perhaps the first to use critical textual analysis to ancient texts (go to the source)

4. Wrote his famous poetry in the Italian vernacular (as did Dante earlier in his *Divine Comedy).*

**Boccaccio (1313-1375)**

1. Compiled an encyclopedia of Greek and Roman mythology

2. ***Decameron is his most famous work***

a. Consisted of 100 earthy tales that comprise a social commentary of 14th century Italy

b. Aimed to impart wisdom of human character and behavior (especially sexual and economic misbehavior).

**Leonardo Bruni (1370-1444)**

1. First to use the term “humanism”

2. Served as a chancellor in Florence

3. Wrote a history of Florence, perhaps the first modern history, and wrote a narrative using primary source documents and the division of historical periods

**Lorenzo Valla (1407-1457)**

1. Foremost expert on the Latin language: ***Elegances of the Latin Language (1444)***

2. ***On the False Donation of Constantine (1444)***

a. Exposed the Donation of Constantine as an 8th century fraud, using textual criticism

b. The Church had claimed it was granted vast territories by the 4th-century Roman emperor Constantine

3. Valla also pointed out errors in the **Latin Vulgate (the authorized version of the Bible for the Catholic Church)**

4. Ironically, Valla’s work gave challengers of Church authority ammunition, even though he remained a devoted Catholic and even served as a secretary under Pope Nicholas V.

**Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499)**

1. Founded the Florentine Platonic Academy at the behest of Cosimo de’ Medici in the 1460s

* served to spread the works and philosophy of Plato throughout much of Europe
* Translated Plato’s works into Latin, giving modern Europeans access to these works for the first time.

**Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494)**

1. Member of the Platonic Academy

***Oration on the Dignity of Man (1486)***

a. Perhaps the most famous Renaissance work on the nature of humankind.

b. Humans were created by God and therefore given tremendous potential for greatness, and even union with God if they desired it.

c. However, humans could, through neglect, also choose a negative course. Thus, humans had free will to be great or fail

**Baldassare Castiglione (1478-1529)**

***The Book of the Courtier (1528)***

1. Perhaps most important work on Renaissance education

2. Specified qualities necessary to be a true gentleman including physical and intellectual abilities and leading an active life

* Rejected crude contemporary social habits (e.g. spitting on the floor, eating without utensils, wiping one’s nose with one’s sleeve, etc.)

3. Described the ideal of a “Renaissance man” who was well-versed in the Greek and Roman classics, an accomplished warrior, could play music, dance, and had a modest but confident personal demeanor.

a. This contrasted with the medieval view of being a master in only one area.

* H. Machiavelli (see p. 3 above for *The Prince)*
* 1. His views were decidedly secular and his emphasis on individualism reflected humanist philosophy
* 2. He studied classical history thoroughly in order to get a more realistic portrait of politics