The Renaissance
Florence During the Renaissance

Florence\(^1\), in the North of Italy, was the center of the Renaissance. Florence was a city-state.\(^2\) Even though it was a city, its government was like the government of a small country. Italy was divided into five of these city-states. Each city-state ruled the land around it. Each was independent from the others. Even so, they competed with each other for power, prestige\(^3\), and glory.

One way city-states tried to outdo each other was through the arts. They competed for glory through literature, painting, and architecture.\(^4\) During the Renaissance, people thought it was very important to bring art, beauty, and learning into daily life. One very rich and powerful family in Florence, the de Medici family, supported this rebirth of beauty in Italy.

Cosimo de Medici, the leader of the family, appreciated the value of beautiful things. Cosimo set up schools for artists. He built the Plato Academy in Florence to bring back Greek and Roman ideas about art. The Academy was even named after a Greek philosopher—Plato.\(^5\) Cosimo supported many artists. Some artists he and his son sponsored were Michelangelo and Boticelli. One of Boticelli’s most famous paintings is titled The Birth of Venus. Venus was the Roman goddess of love.

Cosimo also loved books. He had a huge library. Many of his books came from Constantinople after the fall of the Byzantine Empire. People brought the books to Italy so they would not be destroyed. Soon, Cosimo’s library had more books than any other library in Europe.

For years, the de Medici family ruled Florence. They were not like kings who inherited their wealth and power. Most of Cosimo de Medici’s money and power came from banking. Banks were not popular until the Renaissance. People, especially merchants and traders, needed a place to keep their money. Florence was the banking center of Italy and Europe. The de Medici family was the most powerful force in banking and art.

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\(^1\) Florence-the Italian city-state that was the center of art and banking during the Renaissance
\(^2\) city-state- a city in Italy during the Renaissance whose government was independent
\(^3\) prestige- recognition for doing something grand
\(^4\) architecture- the activity of designing structures like churches and houses
\(^5\) Plato- a wise ancient Greek philosopher
1. All of the following describe a city-state except:
   a. very large.
   b. very independent.
   c. very far away from anything and anyone.
   d. ruled like a small country.

2. What was a sign of prestige to Italy’s city-states?
   a. spices
   b. beauty
   c. schools
   d. trade

3. The subject of Boticelli’s painting demonstrates
   a. how Renaissance painters looked back to Ancient Greece and Rome for ideas for their paintings.
   b. that Boticelli was in love when he painted.
   c. that Florence had the most beautiful paintings in the Renaissance.
   d. that Boticelli did not take this world very seriously.

4. Based on the passage, the word *academy* means
   a. painting.
   b. student.
   c. school.
   d. library.

5. Which adjective best describes the relationship among city-states?
   a. competitive
   b. friendly
   c. violent
   d. isolated
6. As a leading Renaissance city, Florence was very different than the rest of Europe during the Middle Ages. Can you look back to the passage and find three reasons why?

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

7. Do you think the de Medici family could have been as powerful if they hadn’t been successful in banking?

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Renaissance artists were greatly influenced _______ ancient Greek and Roman ideas of beauty and thought.

a. on
b. by
c. with
d. because

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

Cosimo de Medici had the largest library in all of Europe during the Renaissance.

Who?  Cosimo de Medici
(had) What? __________________________________________________________
Where? _______________________________________________________________
When? ________________________________________________________________

10. **Vocabulary Word**: sponsor: provide funds for a project or activity done by someone.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: _____________________________________

Answers: The Renaissance – Florence During the Renaissance

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 690

Featured Text Structure: Descriptive – the writer explains, defines or illustrates a concept or topic

Passage Summary: This passage describes the city of Florence during the Renaissance. Because of the influence of the de Medici family in particular, art and beauty flourished in the city during this time.

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6. As a leading Renaissance city, Florence was very different than the rest of Europe during the Middle Ages. Can you look back to the passage and find three reasons why?

**Suggested answer:** Florence was very different because it had an independent government, not a feudal system. It also encouraged the appreciation of art and beauty, rather than appreciating only the works of God as the Catholic Church had done during the Middle ages. Lastly, the city earned its own wealth rather than simply passing on money and power.

7. Do you think the de Medici family could have been as powerful if they hadn't been successful in banking?

**Suggested answer:** No, because they had to use a lot of money to help sponsor artists. Artists such as Michelangelo and Botticelli were paid by the de Medicis, which allowed them to create important works of art.

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Renaissance artists were greatly influenced ___ ancient Greek and Roman ideas of beauty and thought.

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b. by  
c. with  
d. because

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

Cosimo de Medici had the largest library in all of Europe during the Renaissance.

Who? Cosimo de Medici  
What? **had the largest library**  
Where? **in all of Europe**  
When? **during the Renaissance**

10. **Vocabulary Word:** sponsor: provide funds for a project or activity done by someone.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: answers may vary.