A LEVEL
Delivery Guide

H505

HISTORY A

Theme: The Renaissance

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Accredited

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CONTENTS

Introduction

Delivery guides are designed to represent a body of knowledge about teaching a particular topic and contain:

- Content: A clear outline of the content covered by the delivery guide;
- Thinking Conceptually: Expert guidance on the key concepts involved, common difficulties students may have, approaches to teaching that can help students understand these concepts and how this topic links conceptually to other areas of the subject;
- Thinking Contextually: A range of suggested teaching activities using a variety of themes so that different activities can be selected which best suit particular classes, learning styles or teaching approaches.

If you have any feedback on this Delivery Guide or suggestions for other resources you would like OCR to develop, please email resourcesfeedback@ocr.org.uk.

KEY

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AS Level only   AS Level content only

Curriculum Content

This Theme focuses on the similarities, differences and extent of artistic, cultural, intellectual and technological developments in Italy and Europe during the later Middle Ages and early modern period. 'The Renaissance' as a labelled historical period or movement is in itself a conceptual and controversial topic with extensive historical interpretations relating to boundaries of scope in terms of time and place. A broad awareness of these historical debates and an overview of the period 1300-1600 will enable learners to assess the key themes and main focus of initial studies of the Renaissance concentrating on the defining events of the 15th and early 16th centuries. This is not a course in art history, nor one in literature and philosophy, although these aspects are inevitably central to this Theme. It is very much a history course centred on the economic, political, religious and social foundations or circumstances of the early and High Renaissance. Although linked to the period, the Protestant and Catholic Reformations do not require specific study as they are extensive topics and themes in their own right. Religious belief and practice, together with the role of the Church as an institution, are studied within the context of their influence on artistic and cultural development.

- The causes of development and the spread of the Renaissance: economic, political, religious, social and cultural reasons which affected Florence, Venice, Rome, the Italian communes and principalities, Flanders and Burgundy, Germany, France, Spain, England and other states such as Hungary, Poland and Russia.
- The nature of the Renaissance: the varied subject matter, style, genre and influences on artistic, literary, philosophical, scientific and technological developments together with an understanding of the skill, techniques and materials required as well as the extent of innovation or continuity with the medieval world.
- The impact of key features such as religion, humanism and printing in terms of causing and shaping the characteristics of the Renaissance.
- The role of individuals: the comparative influence and contribution of key artists, writers, patrons and rulers within Italy and beyond.
- The impact of war and rivalry on Renaissance ideals: the effect of war and conflict on social, religious and political values held by the elite and popular classes, developments in diplomacy, warfare, political science, etiquette and court culture, the changing emphasis and focus of 16th century developments.

Additionally, learners must develop the ability to analyse and evaluate the ways in which specific events, individuals or aspects of the Renaissance have been interpreted in debates by historians. These debates are likely to reflect different emphases and approaches by historians, some of whom have written in widely different periods or have followed general historical viewpoints within the 'Renaissance debate'. Learners will not be expected to refer to specific interpretations or historians within Thematic essays, however a general understanding of common debates will be needed to enable clear focus and understanding of specific Depth studies. Learners will be expected to show that they can discriminate between different interpretations to reach a supported judgement on the specific issue which is the focus of the enquiry.

The following references provide useful introductions to the 'Renaissance debate' and historiography:

Open University A general introduction to the problems of defining the Renaissance
http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/renaissance2/defining.htm

BBC History An introductory article by J.Brotton on the Myth of the Renaissance in Europe.
http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/tudors/renaissance_europe_01.shtml

Boise State University A detailed overview of the Renaissance debate by Dr.Knox.
http://europeanhistory.boisestate.edu/latemiddleages/renaissance/historyren.shtml

In terms of building the Depth studies into schemes of work, the Interpretations could come either at the beginning or the end (as a summary). However, it is recommended that both the general 'Renaissance debate' as well as a variety of Depth study interpretations are integrated into the teaching of the Thematic course.

The precise content of this topic, including the three depth studies (The Venetian Renaissance, Savonarola, The French Renaissance) can be found in the specification - http://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/170128-specification-accredited-a-level-gce-history-a-h505.pdf

The Themes unit seeks to develop an understanding of connections between different features of the period and for learners to apply their knowledge and understanding to issues centred on a common theme. The topics cover a period of more than one hundred years with an emphasis on continuity, development and change appropriate to the topic. There will be a focus on progression and stagnation with learners being required to identify where these areas lie and to formulate clear links and comparisons across the period. A broad overview will be necessary to test hypotheses and reach judgements on themes topics. However, the specified Interpretations depth studies will require a fuller exploration of events.

With the Renaissance, it is strongly recommended that the topic is approached chronologically first through a study of the Italian Renaissance while Themes topics are introduced gradually within a more defined focus. The nature of such a conceptual topic and transitional period of history is such that students will find it challenging to engage with the real issues, ideals and practices they encounter unless they gain a solid background in 15th century Italy and hone in on the early Florentine Renaissance. The themes contained within the Renaissance are in themselves assessing a period of development in which the centre of activity shifts within Italy and then beyond. The topic naturally leads to a comparative study of the Italian states first before considering other European states in the 16th century when the emphasis is on the spread of the Renaissance. Learners should be reassured, however, that they are not expected to have a detailed historical knowledge of each European state or country identified in the specification content. A key element is to understand the process and nature of Renaissance developments within their localised context but the social, political and religious ideals of the Italians who helped to shape and define them, must be appreciated first.

Some common problems learners will encounter are:
The Renaissance An historical term for the period which was coined in the 19th century may well present a significant moment of change, but it is impossible to define when it began and ended. Some historians regard the 14th century as a starting point due to the growing awareness and influence of the work of Petrarch, Dante and Giotto. However, the 15th century is generally regarded as the stage when a hive of cultural activity occurred. The Italians themselves believed they were living through a time of 'rebirth' and their aspirations, motives and interests shaped events. Some historians use the term to refer to a 'movement' but this should be set in context and not confused with modern definitions.

Problems of definition in terms of concept, scope and time frame are at the heart of the 'Renaissance debate' and historical interpretations.

Thinking Conceptually

Venetian Renaissance The label generally applied by art historians to identify the period of development and focal point of the Renaissance in Venice during the early 16th century.

renascences a modern term arising due to the 'Renaissance debate' which is applied to any cultural revival and centres of activity over a wide chronological period and area.

Renaissance art a term which encompasses a variety of artistic forms such as painting, sculpture, drawings, book illuminations, woodcuts and prints, architectural designs, decorative arts and home furnishings such as tapestries, ceramics and majolica, jewellery and medals.

Humanism an academic discipline which focussed on the study of classical antiquity (studia humanitatis) as a means of extending knowledge, enquiry and learning. 'Civic humanism' grew in early 15th century Florence through its encouragement of 'active' involvement in republican politics alongside contemplative learning. 'Christian humanism' refers to the discipline developed in northern Europe where classical techniques and knowledge were applied to religious rather than secular debates.

humanists a term which only applies to scholars who actively contributed to literary works or specific centres of learning (not artists or patrons unless they were also scholars or authors).

Renaissance literature a term which encompasses a variety of new or developing written forms, styles and subjects whether inspired or influenced by new humanist or traditional scholastic disciplines. This might include translations, commentaries, histories, memoirs, biographies, debates and letters, printed sermons, carnival songs, ballads, novellas, plays and poetry.

Renaissance ideals a term which encompasses the sociological foundation or reaction to artistic and cultural developments by reference to religious, political, social, economic and aesthetic values or aspirations of all sectors of society. In a general sense, this might refer to the 'spirit of the age' or the dominant 'mentality' or 'world view' of people of the time which shaped their thoughts and actions.

Thinking Conceptually

In addition, learners will need to have a sound understanding of the following terms relating to both the preceding late medieval period as well as that which is defined as the Renaissance:

Republicanism

Oligarchy

Campanilismo

Capitalism

Mercantilism

Patriciate

Despotism

Feudalism

Conciliarism

Guelph

Ghibelline

Simony

Pluralism

Heresy

Orthodoxy

Mendicant

Scholasticism

Empiricism

Aristotelianism

Neo-Platonism

A variety of useful glossaries in terms of art and philosophy can be found at the following:

Web Gallery of Art
http://www.wga.hu/database/glossary/glossary.html

Art Institute of Chicago
http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/exhibitions/Renaissance/glossary#ren

The National Gallery
http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/glossary/

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy
http://www.iep.utm.edu/renaissa/

Thinking Contextually

ACTIVITIES

The following activities provide a method to stretch students' abilities to highlight and prioritise key aspects of Renaissance development according to the common themes running through the period. In order to gain confidence in writing a thematic essay, students will need to have a firm grounding in the concepts, practices and beliefs which shape and define the Renaissance within Italy and elsewhere according to individual regions or states. Additionally, this needs to be set against a clear chronological overview of the period so that turning-points and key moments of transition (time and space) can be recognised.

Thematic Charts help to consolidate knowledge by offering a defined or comparative focus, which enables students to progress to a full analysis of individual historical themes across the period.

Virtual Debates provide a method to stretch independent learning and skills of enquiry, whilst also challenging students to explain, argue and compromise when making a judgement on the importance of key aspects throughout the Renaissance. The activities can also be adapted to focus on Interpretations.

Interpretations Activities enable understanding of the 'Renaissance debate' and the foundation from which to approach viewpoints on specific Depth Studies.

Activity 1 - Thematic Charts

These activities can be used at various stages throughout schemes of work but they are based on the premise that sound chronological and contextual knowledge should be reached progressively by focussing on individual Italian city-states first before turning to other European states. The nature of the Renaissance is such that this will naturally follow developments chronologically to a significant degree. Therefore, Florence and Italy are identified as initial examples. The idea is to simplify the process for students, making the breadth and depth of the aspects studied more manageable. Students' conceptual understanding of the Renaissance must be achieved first to enable confidence in the selection of supporting details. A firm synoptic analysis of Italy will lead to competence with extending comparisons elsewhere.

There are two styles of Thematic Chart:

- Focussed: concludes depth studies on specific locations and periods
- Comparative: consolidates previous focussed summaries according to one theme/period

Thinking Contextually

Activities	Resources
Stage 1- Preparation • Give students a set of Concept Cards or a list identifying factors, aspects, and key individuals important to the 15th century Florentine Renaissance. • Students separate cards into the three groups. Ensure they understand the difference between factors (why) and aspects (how). Debate is likely to ensue with factors/individuals. Can any of them be said to have 'caused' or 'encouraged' the Renaissance or did 'factors' push them? Explain the difference between the focus of the three themes (e.g. the role of individuals focuses on comparative contribution to the Renaissance as a whole). • Keeping cards in 3 groups, separate them into early and late 15th century. This will lead to discussion of similarities and continuity between the two periods. Differentiate between the 'start' and 'continuation' of the Renaissance. • Note down the key arguments for each theme and consider examples which would support them.	
Stage 2 • Complete 2 copies of Activity Sheet 1.1 for early and late 15th century Florence. Focus solely on the three previous themes. (It is advisable that 'war' is dealt with thematically at the end of the course once various regions have been studied and 'Renaissance ideals' are fully grasped.) • Ensure bullet point notes are specific, highlight the arguments contained within the theme and add examples or dates where appropriate. Students should use their notes and be selective to avoid generalisation. It is essential that they identify a sufficient range of examples in order to avoid repetition or inability to recognise relevance in relation to individual themes. • After discussion of focussed summaries and analysis of key trends, students should be in a position to write a thematic essay (e.g. Causation: How important was the Church to the development of the 15th century Florentine Renaissance?).	

Thinking Contextually

Activities	Resources
Stage 3 • Once the Italian Renaissance has been studied fully, students will be able to review their 'focussed' thematic charts for the various states. Provided students are able to differentiate between the early and High Renaissance or the differing nature of regional developments, they should feel confident completing a brief summary of key issues (Activity Sheet 1.2). • Notice the changing centres of Renaissance activity, common factors or aspects providing continuity, and key differences in style or approach indicating innovation or the impact of alternative factors. • Set an essay or hypothesis which falls within either of the two major themes on Activity Sheet 1.2 (e.g. Nature of the Renaissance: How far was the Italian Renaissance truly innovative?). • Practise essays on each of the themes in relation to Italy. Then proceed to a focussed study of Renaissance ideals and the impact of war. Complete relevant sections of 'focussed' thematic charts.	
Stage 4 • Following the same pattern above, study Renaissance developments in other European states and complete 'focussed' thematic charts where appropriate (Activity Sheet 1.1). It should be immediately apparent that less depth is required due to later development occurring in the 16th century in many states. Only complete summaries for the early or late 15th century where they are truly relevant (e.g. Flanders). Remind students that the focus is on 'significant development' and review the meaning of 'Renaissance'. Also, analyse the role of Italy in shaping and causing developments elsewhere. • Taking one theme at a time before attempting essays, complete Activity Sheet 1.3 and use previous summaries to transfer relevant information. If there is little development in a region in any given period, then a section of the chart will remain blank or fairly empty. This will help students to see comparative developments and characteristics, thus highlighting turning-points or significance.	

Thinking Contextually

Activity 2 - Virtual Debate

The following activities are based on the Theme of the Role of Individuals.

Activities	Resources
Stage 1 –Assessing Importance • Challenge students' knowledge by asking for a list of important individuals during the Renaissance. This raises problems with defining 'importance' and the desire to mention numerous artists rather than truly grasping significance. This could be linked to historical arguments about 'whether or not there was a Renaissance' and Burckhardt's interpretation of the role of the individual. Teachers may need to push students to consider humanists and patrons to ensure full coverage. • Pose the questions: Which artists, scholars and patrons most define the Renaissance? Why is that? Consider whether this is on the basis merely of what they produced and the skill displayed or whether it is due to the influence they had on further developments. This is the crux of the argument. In which way might they be regarded as important - as a product of the Renaissance in terms of innovation or as a key influence? • Independent research on a significant individual.	
Stage 2 – Explaining Importance • Complete Activity Sheet 2.1. Write the name of their individual in each 'label' box to ensure focus. The 'work of the individual' in terms of their actions, involvement and attitude can be summarised in the middle box. Details should be specific (e.g. a notable work of art or literature, particular style). In the left-hand box, identify who or what influenced their behaviour and eventual contribution to the Renaissance. In the right-hand box identify who or what they influence during and beyond their lifetime. Both of these latter sections should provide specific details of a particular patron, event, individual or circumstance. • Students may need to research further to ensure they detail direct influences and not generalised ones. • When ready, take it in turns to 'hot seat' to promote and defend their individual.	

Thinking Contextually

Activities	Resources
Stage 3 - Developing Argument • To develop analysis further and the ability to support an argument, set up a 'virtual' debate with a panel of 6 individuals. Deliberately choose a range of individuals across the full time period and from different states but ensure at least two are connected in some way to provoke initial argument. Give them time to revise their points while the 'audience' compile general questions to challenge them. • Taking it in turns, each individual starts by briefly stating why they believe they contributed most to the Renaissance. Everyone can have a moment to prepare themselves before questions can be fired from the floor or the panel. This will generally lead to a lively debate as they get into the swing of it. Encourage accusation and criticism to push panel members to defend their position. • This should help students recall knowledge and develop comparative, supported analysis.	
Stage 4 • Further debating skills: set groups of students against each other to defend their position either as groups of patrons, artists or scholars. Which group will emerge as more important? • Alternatively, create groups of individuals from specific Italian states and develop a 'virtual' debate with all the hallmarks of Renaissance 'campanilismo' and competition. Groups of Italians could also defend their case against northern Europeans. • Diplomacy: a variant on the activity above is to split students into 'national' or 'regional' groups and tell them to prepare their views on the following scenario. Collectively (but bringing their own perspective), they must reach a decision about which individuals and their contributions will be the subject of a museum exhibition celebrating the Renaissance. They must choose 6 individuals including non-Italians and cover the full chronological period. The aim is to convince other delegates to agree to choose their 'national treasures'.	

Thinking Contextually

Activity 3 - Interpretations Activities

The following activities can be used at various stages in a teaching course, whether as an introduction to the Renaissance itself and its historiography or as a method of consolidating knowledge and encouraging analysis of specific interpretations. They can be used for whole-class discussion or 'jigsaw' activities to promote debate of differing Renaissance interpretations. Categorisation exercises identified within the 'Introduction' can be repeated regularly as new interpretations are introduced. An interesting approach might be to record students' prior impressions as well as final views once the teaching course has been completed. How would they define the Renaissance?

Books containing useful overviews of the 'Renaissance debate' are:

A.Brown, The Renaissance (1999) – Chapter 1 and 2

M.King, The Renaissance in Europe (2003) – Introduction

J.Brotton, Renaissance Bazaar (OUP 2002) – Introduction

P.Burke, The Renaissance (Studies in European History 1987)

K.Dannenfeldt (ed.), The Renaissance: Medieval or Modern? (1959)

Thinking Contextually

Activities	Resources
Introduction – Defining the Renaissance • Compare several medieval and Renaissance maps such as: early 14th century Vesconte map , early 15th century Borgia map, later 15th century Laon globe . Discuss what this suggests about the claims made by the authors of the primary extracts on Resource Sheet 2. Is Burckhardt's view understandable? • Use terminology (Resource Sheet 2) as prompts or make cards. Students divide them into three categories: classical antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance. Alternatively, remove the 'classical' terms and divide into medieval or Renaissance only, using Activity Sheet 3.1. This should raise discussion on the nature of continuity with the medieval period, the parameters of the Renaissance and problems of definition – how does this affect their view of Burckhardt? • Read Resource Sheet 3. Do these historians agree (partially or wholly) with Burckhardt? • Watch the first 8 mins of Weber's Western Tradition (Episode 25). What is his view? **Internet references:** Henry Davis – range of medieval and Renaissance maps http://www.henry-davis.com/MAPS/LMwebpages/LML.html Annenberg Learner – links to Eugene Weber's Western Tradition series (Episode 25 and 26) as well as Renaissance 'Interactive' overviews http://www.learner.org/resources/series58.html?pop=yes&pid=843#	

Thinking Contextually

Activities	Resources
Development – Comparing Interpretations • Students compare definitions of the Renaissance offered by historians and art historians. Suggested resources: W. Gilbert and 'art' resources such as Artcyclopedia, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Victoria and Albert Museum . In which period do they each place artists such as Giotto, Duccio and Pisano? What is the Proto-Renaissance? Is Mannerism beyond the Renaissance? • Complete Activity Sheet 3.2 using Resource Sheet 3 and general reading on Renaissance historiography from J. Brotton, A. Brown and M. King. Students should identify the viewpoints of the historians who have written the articles as well as the interpretations they discuss. • Once students are confident recognising and discussing general arguments within the 'Renaissance debate', they can apply them to their analysis of specific Depth studies interpretations. For example, how far does Burckhardt's view of the 'role of the individual' support or contradict specific interpretations of individuals such as Lorenzo the Magnificent? **Internet references:** Metropolitan Museum of Art Contains the Heilbrunn Timeline of Art, essays and visual resources http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hi/te_index.asp?i=16 Artcyclopedia Defines periods of art history and individual artists http://www.artcyclopedia.com/history/ Victoria and Albert Museum Various articles and visual resources arranged by theme http://www.vam.ac.uk/page/r/renaissance/ W.Gilbert, Renaissance and Reformation (Chap 1 and 8) published on CARRIE (European University Institute) http://vlib.iue.it/carrie/texts/carrie_books/gilbert/index.html	

Concept Cards – The Renaissance

Politics Renaissance	Wealth Renaissance
Trade Renaissance	Patronage Renaissance
The Church Renaissance	Religion Renaissance
Humanism Renaissance	Council of Florence Renaissance
Classical Inspiration Renaissance	Fall of Constantinople Renaissance

Leonardo Bruni

Renaissance

The Medici

Renaissance

Innovation

Renaissance

Materials and Methods

Renaissance

Style and Technique

Renaissance

Self-image

Renaissance

Marsilio Ficino

Renaissance

Botticelli

Renaissance

Brunelleschi

Renaissance

Masaccio

Renaissance

Activity Sheet 1.1 Focussed Themes Chart

Region/city-state/country: _____ Date/Period:_____

|	
Causes of Renaissance Development: (Why did the Renaissance start or spread here?)	**Nature of the Renaissance:** (What are the key characteristics of cultural, religious and political developments here? Do they represent continuity or change?)
Role of Individuals: (Who had an impact on developments here and how? Which individuals from this state influenced developments elsewhere?)	**Impact of War:** (Which wars had a direct impact on political and social attitudes, values and practices in this state? Explain how.)

Note: bullet points with specific details and arguments should be provided; focus purely on the state, region or country being studied

Activity Sheet 1.2 Concepts and Key Issues
Causes of Renaissance
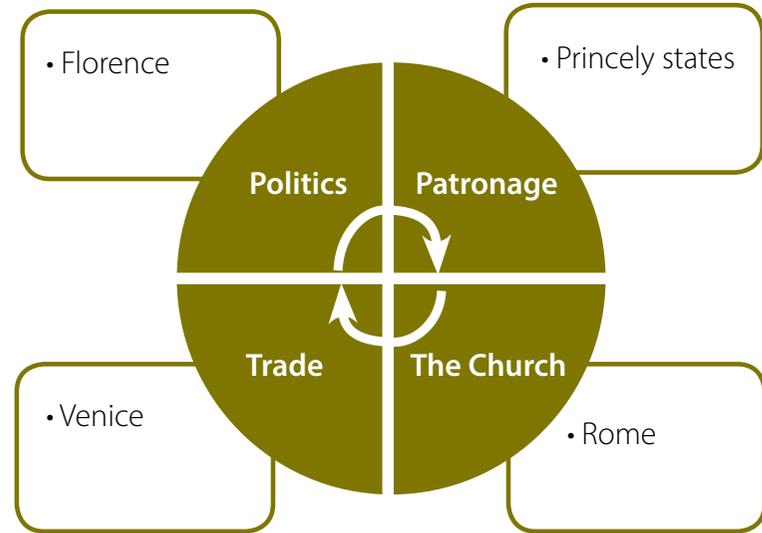
Early 15th century Italy: *list the centres of Renaissance development together with relevant enabling factors*	• Florence Politics Patronage Trade The Church • Princely states • Venice • Rome
Late 15th century Italy: *list the centres of Renaissance development together with relevant enabling factors*	**Early 16th century Italy:** *list the centres of Renaissance development together with relevant enabling factors*

Activity Sheet 1.2 Concepts and Key Issues
Nature of the Renaissance
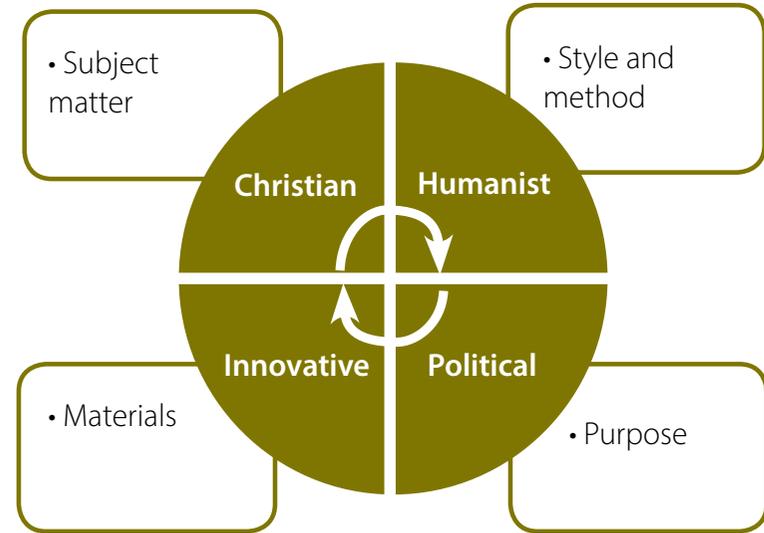
Early 15th century Italy: *list the centres of Renaissance development together with their relevant characteristics*	• Subject matter • Style and method **Christian** **Humanist** **Innovative** **Political** • Materials • Purpose
Late 15th century Italy: *list the centres of Renaissance development together with their relevant characteristics*	**Early 16th century Italy:** *list the centres of Renaissance development together with their relevant characteristics*

Activity Sheet 1.3 Comparative Summary Chart

Theme:_____

Period	Italian states	Other European states
Early 15th century:		
Late 15th century:		
Early 16th century		

Note: This chart is representative only - students are likely to need additional space, so the format would need to be reconfigured accordingly.

Activity Sheet 2.1 Virtual Debate

Influences on

Characteristics of

Effect of
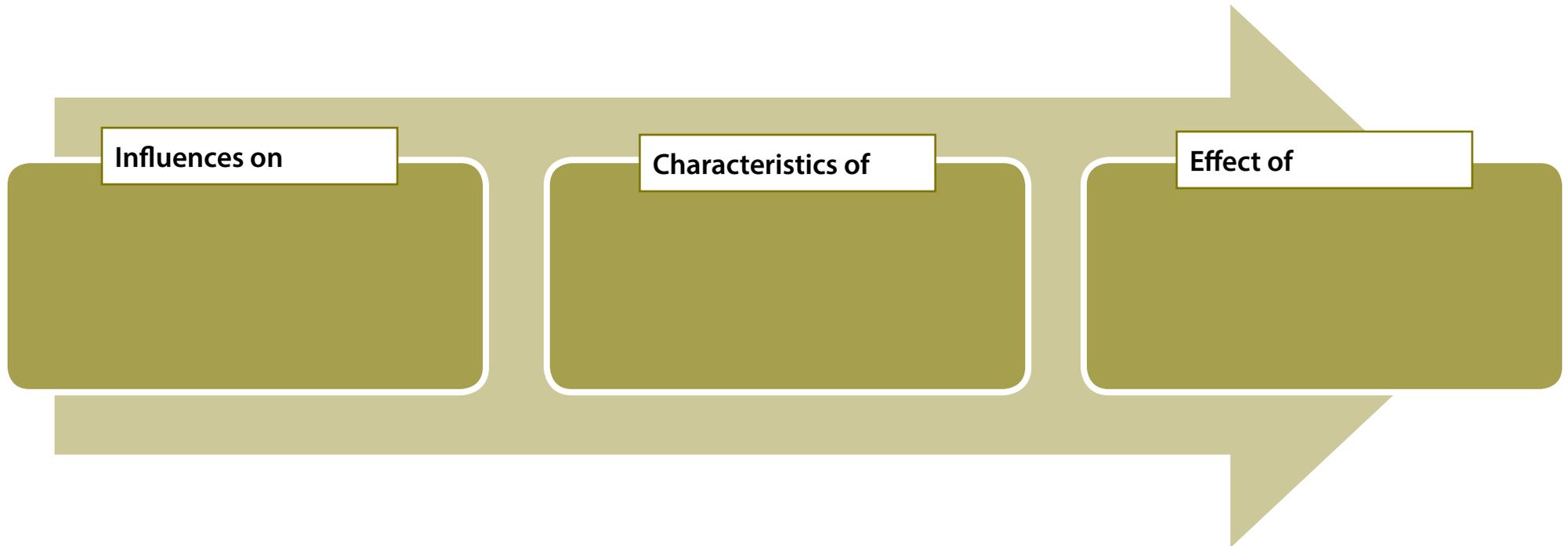
Resource Sheet 2 – Interpretations: The Concept of a 'Renaissance'

In which period of history do the following originate or occur?

Benedictine monasticism

Machiavelli : The Prince

Cicero

Barbarian invasions: Goths and Vandals

republican and imperial rule

Hundred Years War

Carolingian Renaissance (Charlemagne)

Italian communes and the 'contado'

the Medici

scholasticism

the First Crusade

Castiglione's 'Book of the Courtier'

Virgil, Ovid, Livy

Giotto and Duccio

Petrarch

Franciscans and Dominicans

Brunelleschi, Masaccio and Donatello

Constantine's conversion

the Black Death

Dante and Boccaccio

Michelangelo, Leonardo, Bramante

Gothic art and architecture

growth of universities, towns, trade guilds

Augustus

Devotio Moderna

humanism

chivalry

Great Schism and the Avignon papacy

12th century renaissance

the Reformation

Romanesque architecture

Mannerism

Fall of Constantinople

Primary Sources

"By virtue of the fact that he {Giotto} brought back to light an art {of painting} which had been buried for centuries beneath the blunders of those who, in their paintings, aimed to bring visual delight to the ignorant rather than intellectual satisfaction to the wise, his work may justly be regarded as a shining monument to the glory of Florence." Boccaccio, Decameron, VI 5

"…anyone of intelligence should thank God for being born in these times, in which we enjoy a more splendid flowering of the arts than at any other time in the last thousand years." Matteo Palmieri, Vita Civile

"…if we are to call any age golden, it must certainly be our age which has produced such a wealth of golden intellects. Evidence of this is provided by the inventions of this age. For this century, like a golden age, has restored to light the liberal arts that were almost extinct: grammar, poetry, oratory, painting, sculpture, architecture, music, the ancient singing of songs to the Orphic lyre, and all this in Florence." Marsilio Ficino, Opera Omnia

Burckhardt's View

In the character of these states, whether republics or despotisms, lies, not the only, but the chief reason for the early development of the Italian. To this it is due that he was the first-born among the sons of modern Europe. In the Middle Ages both sides of human consciousness – that which was turned within as that which was turned without - lay dreaming or half-awake beneath a common veil. The veil was woven of faith, illusion, and childish prepossession, through which the world and history were seen clad in strange hues. Man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family or corporation – only through some general category. In Italy this veil first melted into air; an objective treatment and consideration of the State and of the things of this world became possible. The subjective side at the same time asserted itself with corresponding emphasis; man became a spiritual individual, and recognised himself as such. In the same way that the Greek had once distinguished himself from the barbarian, and the Arabian had felt himself individual at a time when other Asiatics knew themselves only as members of a race. It will not be difficult to show that this result was due above all to the political circumstances of Italy.

J. Burckhardt, The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy (1860)

Resource Sheet 3 – The Renaissance Debate

The 'problem of the Renaissance' is largely a pseudo-problem. A complex historical period with a great variety of cross-currents, in which each European country and each field of interest underwent its own particular development, can hardly be interpreted in terms of a brief definition which would at the same time distinguish it from all other periods of history. Such definitions are apt to be too narrow or too broad. The discussion has been further complicated by the tendency of many scholars to take the Renaissance as an imaginary battleground on which to fight out contemporary political, social and ideological conflicts, or as a test case for the solution of such metahistorical questions as the possibility and the causes of historical change. On the other hand, there seems no doubt about the distinctive physiognomy of the Renaissance, and the claim that the very existence of 'the Renaissance' has to be proved by a satisfactory definition of it, must be rejected. With the same right, we might as well conclude there was no 18th century since we are unable to describe its distinctive characteristics in a brief definition. The best procedure would be rather to start with a tentative conception of the Renaissance, and to take this idea as a guiding principle when investigating the actual facts and sources of the period under consideration.

P.O. Kristeller, *The Place of Classical Humanism in Renaissance Thought* (1943)

When Burckhardt coined the famous phrase that the Italian of the Renaissance was the 'first-born among the sons of modern Europe', he certainly was prompted by what we must call today an overestimate of the direct impact of the Italian Renaissance on the rise of the modern world. He underrated the continuity of the medieval conditions in thought, in politics, and in many spheres of life. On the other hand, by the phrase 'first-born son of modern Europe' he did not mean simply that the ideas and institutions of the modern world must be traced largely to 14th and 15th century Italy as their historical source. If the words are taken literally, the meaning is that 15th-century Italy saw the coming of the first member of a family that subsequently spread throughout the western world – the first specimen of a new species. Burckhardt was thinking of a pattern of society, education, and thought kindred in its sociological and cultural structure to the life of the later West, and therefore potentially stimulating to all subsequent generations – the prototype far more than the origin of the modern world.

H.Baron, *'Towards a more positive evaluation of the 15th century Renaissance'* (1943)

Resource Sheet 3 – The Renaissance Debate

The increasing laicisation of education and of learning, literature, art and music was accompanied, almost inevitably, by an expansion of their secular content, and frequently by the introduction of a more secular tone. By this I do not mean to imply that the men of the Renaissance were, in general, less religious than those of the Middle Ages. There has been enough nonsense written about the pagan spirit of the Renaissance without my adding to it. On the other hand, it seems to me equally nonsensical to seize upon every evidence of religious feeling or belief in the Renaissance as proof that its culture was still basically medieval. Christianity was not a medieval invention. The Christian tradition certainly continued from the Middle Ages through the Renaissance – and beyond – but it did not continue unaltered, nor did it in the same degree dominate the culture of the age. In the first place, the greatly increased participation of laymen introduced into learning, literature and art whole areas of secular knowledge and subjects of general human interest which, if not wholly lacking in the Middle Ages, were yet inadequately represented. In the second place, the writer or artists, who worked for a predominantly lay audience or for lay patrons, had to meet the demands and satisfy the taste of men no trained in theology nor bound by classical traditions. Even the religious art of the Renaissance gives frequent evidence of consideration for the taste of lay patrons. Finally, religion itself was in some degree laicised. This is evident, in the 14th and 15th centuries, in the growth of anti-clerical sentiment and in revolts against the hierarchical authority of the church and the sacramental-sacerdotal aspects of medieval religion. The Wycliffite and Hussite heresies are extreme cases. But even within the bounds of orthodoxy, such movements of popular mysticism as the Devotio Moderna in the Netherlands show a tendency toward the development of a peculiarly lay piety. The religious writing of the Christian humanists offers further examples of an increasingly independent participation of laymen in the shaping of religious thought.

W.K. Ferguson, *The Interpretation of the Renaissance: Suggestions for a Synthesis'* (1951)

According to the celebrated Swiss historian, the quest of personal glory was the characteristic attribute of the men of the Renaissance. The Middle Ages proper, according to him, knew honour and glory only in collective forms, as the honour due to groups and orders of society, the honour of rank, of class, of profession. It was in Italy, he thinks, under the influence of antique models that the craving for individual glory originated. Here, as elsewhere, Burckhardt has exaggerated the distance separating Italy from the Western countries and the Renaissance from the Middle Ages. The thirst for honour and glory proper to the men of the Renaissance is essentially the same as the chivalrous ambition of earlier times, and of French origin. Only it has shaken off the feudal garb. The passionate desire to find himself praised by contemporaries or by posterity was the source of virtue with the courtly knight of the 12th century and the rude captain of the 14th, no less than with the beaux-esprits of the quattrocento….The transition from the spirit of the declining Middle Ages to humanism was far less simple than we are inclined to imagine it. Accustomed to oppose humanism to the Middle Ages, we would gladly believe that it was necessary to give up the one in order to embrace the other. We find it difficult to fancy the mind cultivating the ancient forms of medieval thought and expression while aspiring at the same time to antique wisdom and beauty. Yet this is just what we have to picture to ourselves. Classicism did not come as a sudden revelation, it grew up among the luxuriant vegetation of medieval thought. Humanism was a form before it was an inspiration. On the other hand, the characteristic modes of thought of the Middle Ages did not die out till long after the Renaissance. .In Italy the problem of humanism presents itself in a most simple form, because there men's minds had ever been predisposed to the reception of antique culture. The Italian spirit had never lost touch with classic harmony and simplicity. It could expand freely and naturally in the restored forms of classic expression. The quattrocento with its serenity makes the impression of a renewed culture, which has shaken off the fetters of medieval thought, until Savonarola reminds us that below the surface the Middle Ages still subsist. The history of French civilisation of the 15th century, on the contrary, does not permit us to forget the Middle Ages.

**Adapted from J.Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (1948)**

Activity Sheet 3.1 Interpretations: The Renaissance as an historical period

The Middle Ages

The Renaissance
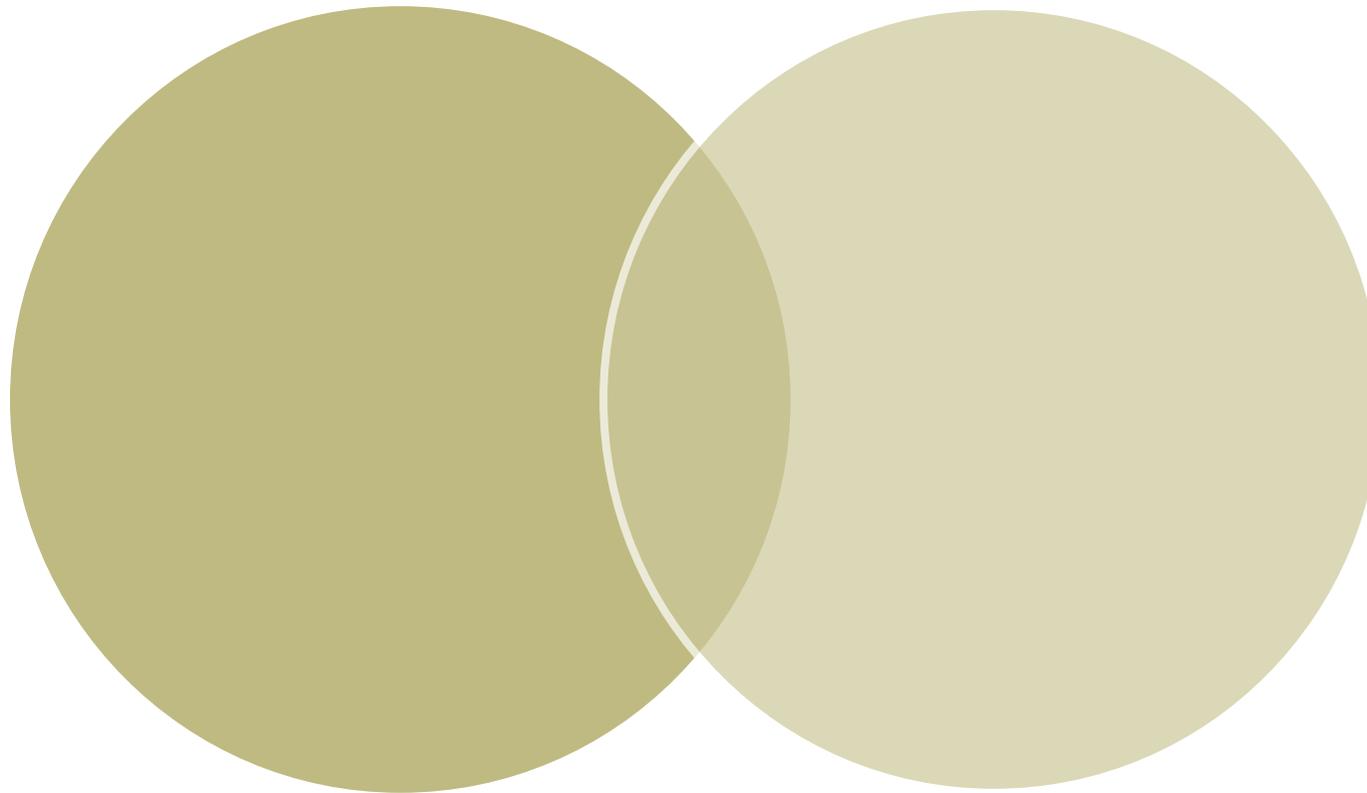
Learner resource 9

Activity Sheet 3.2 Interpretations: Overview of Historiography

Historians	Periodisation & scope (time scale & locations)	Key arguments (e.g. causes, nature of the Renaissance and its definition, individuals)	Supporting evidence (facts and cross-reference to other historians)
J. Michelet			
J. Burckhardt			
H.Baron			
J.Huizinga			
C.Haskins			
W.K.Ferguson			
P.O. Kristeller			
E.Gombrich			
P. Burke			

This chart can be reconfigured to provide space or adapted accordingly. Use as a model for inclusion of modern/current historians.

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