

Learning About Humanism

Humanism defined The Renaissance and continues to impact us today from education to politics to civic discourse to athletics and the arts. This lesson allows students to use different sources and images to analyze aspects of Humanism. You could have them answer the questions after each one individually or working with a partner. This could also be done virtually using Google Drive or a different learning platform. Another idea would be to use the documents to then write a DBQ essay.

Essay Prompt: Using the provided documents, analyze how and in what ways Humanism impacted people living during the Renaissance, and how this movement continues to impact us in today's world.

Definition of Humanism from *The Humanist Magazine*

Humanism is a rational philosophy informed by science, inspired by art, and motivated by compassion. Affirming the dignity of each human being, it supports the maximization of individual liberty and opportunity consonant with social and planetary responsibility. It advocates the extension of participatory democracy and the expansion of the open society, standing for human rights and social justice. Free of supernaturalism, it recognizes human beings as a part of nature and holds that values—be they religious, ethical, social, or political—have their source in human experience and culture. Humanism thus derives the goals of life from human need and interest rather than from theological or ideological abstractions, and asserts that humanity must take responsibility for its own destiny.

Excerpts from Petrarch, *Familiar Letters*, The Young Humanist of Ravenna to Boccaccio, 1365.

A year after your departure I had the good fortune to secure the services of a fine, generous, young lad, whom I am sorry you do not know. He knows you well, for he has often seen you, at Venice, in your house, where I am now living, and also at the home of our friend Donato, and on such occasions has observed you very carefully, as is natural at his age. I want you to know him, too, so far as that is possible at such long range, and to see him with the mind's eye, when you read my letters, and so I will tell you a little about him. He was born on the coast of the Adriatic, at about the time, if I am not mistaken, when you were living there, with the former lord of that region, the grandfather of him who now holds sway. The lad's own family and fortune are humble. He has a force of character and a power of self-control that would be praiseworthy even in old age; and a mind that is keen and flexible; and a memory that is rapacious, and capacious, and, best of all, tenacious.

The lad has a decided leaning toward poetry; and if he perseveres in his efforts, till in due time he learns to think clearly and vigorously, he will compel your wonder and your congratulations. But so far he is vague and uncertain, because of the feebleness of youth, and does not always know what he wants to say. What he does want to, however, he says very nobly and beautifully. So it frequently happens that there falls from him some poem that is not only pleasing to the ear but dignified and graceful and well-considered, the sort of work that you would ascribe, if you were ignorant of the author, to some writer of long experience. I am confident that he will develop vigour of thought and expression, and work out, as the result of his experiments, a style of his own, and learn to avoid imitation, or, better, to conceal it, so as to give the impression not of copying but rather of bringing to Italy from the writers of old something new.

How does Petrarch describe this young humanist?

What elements or examples of humanism can be found in the excerpt?

Excerpts from “Leonardo daVinci” in *Lives of the Artists* by Giorgio Vasari, 1550.

But the greatest of all Andrea's (Andrea Del Verrocchio) pupils was Leonardo da Vinci, in whom, besides a beauty of person never sufficiently admired and a wonderful grace in all his actions, there was such a power of intellect that whatever he turned his mind to he made himself master of with ease.

Marvellous and divine, indeed, was Leonardo the son of Ser Piero da Vinci. In erudition and letters he would have distinguished himself, if he had not been variable and unstable. For he set himself to learn many things, and when he had begun them gave them up. In arithmetic, during the few months that he applied himself to it, he made such progress that he often perplexed his master by the doubts and difficulties that he propounded. He gave some time to the study of music, and learnt to play on the lute, improvising songs most divinely. But though he applied himself to such various subjects, he never laid aside drawing and modelling in relief, to which his fancy inclined him more than to anything else; which Ser Piero perceiving, he took some of his drawings one day and carried them to Andrea del Verrocchio, with whom he was in close friendship, and prayed him to say whether he thought, if Leonardo gave himself up to drawing, he would succeed. Andrea was astounded at the great beginning Leonardo had made, and urged Ser Piero to make him apply himself to it. So he arranged with Leonardo that he was to go to Andrea's workshop, which Leonardo did very willingly, and set himself to practice every art in which design has a part. For he had such a marvellous mind

that, besides being a good geometrician, he worked at modelling (making while a boy some laughing women's heads, and some heads of children which seem to have come from a master's hand), and also made many designs for architecture; and he was the first, while he was still quite young, to discuss the question of making a channel for the river Arno from Pisa to Florence. He made models of mills and presses, and machines to be worked by water, and designs for tunnelling through mountains, and levers and cranes for raising great weights, so that it seemed that his brain never ceased inventing; and many of these drawings are still scattered about.

He also painted in Milan for the friars of S. Domenic, at S. Maria delle Grazie, a Last Supper, a thing most beautiful and marvellous. He gave to the heads of the apostles great majesty and beauty, but left that of Christ imperfect, not thinking it possible to give that celestial divinity which is required for the representation of Christ. The work, finished after this sort, has always been held by the Milanese in the greatest veneration, and by strangers also, because Leonardo imagined, and has succeeded in expressing, the desire that has entered the minds of the apostles to know who is betraying their Master. So in the face of each one may be seen love, fear, indignation, or grief at not being able to understand the meaning of Christ; and this excites no less astonishment than the obstinate hatred and treachery to be seen in Judas. Besides this, every lesser part of the work shows an incredible diligence; even in the tablecloth the weaver's work is imitated in a way that could not be better in the thing itself.

Leonardo undertook to paint for Francesco del Giocondo a portrait of Mona Lisa his wife, but having spent four years upon it, left it unfinished. This work now belongs to King Francis of France, and whoever wishes to see how art can imitate nature may learn from this head. Mona Lisa being most beautiful, he used, while he was painting her, to have men to sing and play to her and buffoons to amuse her, to take away that look of melancholy which is so often seen in portraits; and in this of Leonardo's there is a peaceful smile more divine than human. By the excellence of the works of this most divine of artists his fame was grown so great that all who delighted in art, and in fact the whole city [of Milan], desired to have some memorial of it.

In what ways was Leonardo daVinci a “Renaissance man?”

How does Leonardo daVinci embody humanism in his interests and works?

The Gonzaga Family of Mantua, Lombardy region, Italy, c. 1470.



How and in what ways does the painting of the Gonzaga Family show elements of humanism?

Excerpts from *The Prince* by Niccolo Machiavelli, 1513.

Concerning Cruelty and Clemency, and Whether it is Better to be Loved than Feared

Upon this a question arises: whether it is better to be loved than feared or feared than loved? It may be answered that one should wish to be both, but, because it is difficult to unite them in one person, it is much safer to be feared than loved, when, of the two, either must be dispensed with. Because this is to be asserted in general of men, that they are ungrateful, fickle, false, cowardly, covetous, and as long as you succeed they are yours entirely; they will offer you their blood, property, life, and children, as is said above, when the need is far distant; but when it approaches they turn against you. And that prince who, relying entirely on their promises, has neglected other precautions, is ruined; because friendships that are obtained by payments, and not by nobility or greatness of mind, may indeed be earned, but they are not secured, and

in time of need cannot be relied upon; and men have less scruple in offending one who is beloved than one who is feared, for love is preserved by the link of obligation which, owing to the baseness of men, is broken at every opportunity for their advantage; but fear preserved you by a dread of punishment which never fails.

Nevertheless a prince ought to inspire fear in such a way that, if he does not win love, he avoids hatred; because he can endure very well being feared whilst he is not hated, which will always be as long as he abstains from the property of his citizens and subjects and from their women.

Can a prince be a humanist? Should they pursue humanism in their work and leadership?

How does Machiavelli describe men? Is this an accurate description of people today?

Jaska Kainulainen, *Virtue and Civic Values in Early Modern Jesuit Education*, 2018.

The purpose of the Jesuit ministry of education was to save souls, but it also provided students with skills and knowledge that the Renaissance humanists deemed necessary constituents of *vita civile* [civic life]. To a large extent, the Jesuit teachers appropriated the curricula used at humanist schools and thus employed a host of pagan authors “for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine.” That the Jesuits taught Cicero and Sallust in a manner that advanced “Christian life,” that is, in a manner that underlined such moral notions, which were compatible with Christian virtues, does not mean that the Jesuit teachers would have—even if they would have wanted to—purified or censored the essentially civic message promoted by these authors.

While the main emphasis of the grammar classes was on learning Latin and, when possible, Greek, the aim of the humanities class was to provide the students with a well-rounded learning in poetry, history, and moral philosophy. This was achieved through the study of Roman, Greek, and humanist authors.

Why did the Jesuits incorporate humanism in their teachings and education system?

Peter Paul Vergerius, Letter to Ubertinus of Padua, 1392.

“We call those studies *liberal* which are worthy of a free man; those studies by which we attain and practice virtue and wisdom; that education which call forth, trains, and develops those highest gifts of body and of mind which ennoble men, and which are rightly judged to rank next in dignity to virtue only.”

“We come now to the consideration of the various subjects which may rightly be included under the name of “Liberal Studies.” Amongst these I accord the first place to History, on grounds both of its attractiveness and of its utility, qualities which appeal equally to the scholar and to the statesman. Next in importance ranks Moral Philosophy, which indeed is, in a peculiar sense, a “Liberal Art,” in that its purpose is to teach men the secret of true freedom. History, then, gives us the concrete examples of the precepts inculcated by Philosophy. The one shows what men should do, the other what men have said and done in the past, and what practical lessons we may draw therefrom for the present day. I would indicate as the third main branch of study, Eloquence, which indeed holds a place of distinction amongst the refined arts. By philosophy we learn the essential truth of things, which by eloquence we so exhibit in orderly adornment as to bring conviction to differing minds. And history provides the light of experience--a cumulative wisdom fit to supplement the force of reason and the persuasion of eloquence. For we allow that soundness of judgment, wisdom of speech, integrity of conduct are the marks of a truly liberal temper...”

Are liberal studies a form of humanism?

Why does Vergerius believe you should study history and philosophy? How does this tie into humanism?

Excerpts from *The Courtier, by Baldassare Castiglione, 1528.**

***A Courtier was a male royal companion or advisor to the ruler. Many courtiers were nobles, but they could also include clergy, soldiers, clerks and secretaries.**

“I think that in her ways, manners, words, gestures, and bearing, a woman ought to be very unlike a man; for just as he must show a certain solid and sturdy manliness, so it is seemly for a woman to have a soft and delicate tenderness, with an air of womanly sweetness in her every movement...”

“[Again] ... many virtues of the mind are as necessary to a woman as to a man; also, gentle birth; to avoid affectation, to be naturally graceful in all her actions, to be mannerly, clever, prudent, not arrogant, not envious, not slanderous, not vain, not contentious, not inept, to know

how to gain and hold the favor of her mistress (queen or presiding lady at court) and of all others, to perform well and gracefully the exercises that are suitable for women.”

“I wish this Lady to have knowledge of letters, of music, of painting, and know how to dance and be festive, adding a discreet modesty and the giving of a good impression of herself to those other things that have been required of the Courtier. And so, in her talk, her laughter, her play, her jesting, in short in everything, she will be most graceful and will converse appropriately with every person in whose company she may happen to be, using witticisms and pleasantries that are becoming to her.”

Does Castiglione have different expectations or standards for women then men?

Can women be humanists too? Should they pursue humanism in their lives and actions?