

Why did the Renaissance start in Italy during the 15th century?

The word Renaissance means rebirth. It was a period when people rediscovered learning and looking back to the classical civilizations of Rome and Greece for their inspiration. It was an exciting time of new inventions and amazing discoveries, magnificent buildings and beautiful art. My aim in this essay, is to explain why the Renaissance started in Italy during the 15th century. In this essay I will talk about; The growing wealth of Italy, divided Italy, the classical period, humanists, trade and exploration.

The main reasons of why the Renaissance started in Italy during the 15th century were the growing wealth of Italy because the history and art of the Greeks influenced the Italians, and the classical period because the Italians started to look at the art work from the Greeks and Romans and they started to use art in a similar way. The Greeks created major works of art, including dramatic buildings and sculptures, and had a great deal of influence on the Roman Empire which took over from Greek civilisation. The Romans built impressive public buildings all over Europe, like the Colosseum in Rome. Italians started to look around them and take interest and pride in what had survived from the time of the centre of the Roman Empire. Their ideas on art and architecture were influenced by art and architecture from the classical period. Italian scholars began to take an interest in these original manuscripts and learnt Greek from the Greek scholars. Their interest was so great that they started to search for other ancient manuscripts. These works opened up whole new areas of thought and encourages people to think again about long-accepted ideas and beliefs.

Humanists were people who behaved as if all their thoughts and actions would one day be judged by God- a view of eternity. According to the Church, everyone was sinful in one way or another. The ancient ideas about beauty- of mind, body and spirit, led on to a new philosophy, known as humanism, which challenged the teachings of the medieval Church. Renaissance thinkers made human beings, and human achievements, their main concern. They cared more about life in this world, than about eternity. Most humanists did not reject altogether. But now they believed that, in some ways, humans could be perfect, and almost equal to God. The discoveries by Renaissance scholars in subjects as different as astronomy, music and maths all helped humanists. Scholars considered shapes, such as squares and circles, to be mathematically perfect. They were delighted that Roman architect Vitruvius had suggested that a perfect human body was naturally in harmony with these perfect mathematical forms. They took this harmony as evidence of a 'grand design', by which the universe had been formed. Michelangelo intended his painting to be more than just a picture: it is a statement of humanist beliefs in the power and beauty of humankind. Michelangelo believed that without God, Adam could not live. Even so, he has portrayed him as strong, relaxed and unafraid. Michelangelo's painting shows us that, for some Renaissance artists, humanity could be almost divine. Other painters and sculptors were interested in studying humanity for its own sake. They produced psychological portraits of individual men and women. These works portray the sitter's inner character as well as their outward appearance. They go deeper than the mere images of wealth and power, which were usual in earlier portraits.

The exploration affected the development of the Renaissance by people visiting new countries. Early explorers had very different views of the world. For example Christopher Columbus believed that the world was round and if you sailed westward you would reach China. King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain gave him permission to go exploring. He made four voyages between 1492 and 1503. He thought he had reached China. Many of the men who sailed on the voyages of exploration were poor. Often they owned no land in their

own countries. Some were younger sons who stood to inherit nothing from their fathers. Some could not find jobs at home. They set out in the hope of finding wealth and fame. As Europe recovered from the effects of the Black Death it grew wealthier. People began to want more luxury goods. The journeys to China were difficult and became even more so. China was controlled by the Mongols who were responsibly friendly to Europeans. The Ottoman Empire was also growing in size and strength. The people were Muslims and not friendly to Christian traders. Prince Henry was interested in exploration because of the possibilities it offered to develop trade. Many people thought that the world was flat. They believed that if you'd sail too far, you would drop off the edge. Most ideas about the world came from Roman writers and ancient Greek. Scholars from the 15th century accepted what these writers said. Pliny (the Roman writer) had said that if you sailed south of the equator you would be scorched to death. In the 14th and 15th centuries explorers were able to travel further across the seas because there were great advances in ship design. Sea captains had poor maps and navigation instruments and so rarely sailed out of sight of land. By the 14th century there were new navigation instruments to work out speed and distance. Sailors used compasses to tell which way they were sailing. Astrolabe and cross staff were also invented to help sailors navigate. Maps steadily improved. The Spanish and Portuguese were the best mapmakers because they travelled the furthest afield.

I think that the main factors which spread the Renaissance were divided Italy and the growing wealth of Italy because the history and art of the Greeks and Romans influenced the Italians, the classical period because the Italians started to look at the art and architecture from the Greeks and Romans and they started to use art in a similar way and trade because people began to want more luxury goods.