
INTRODUCTION

The Renaissance, which began in Italy in the fourteenth century, witnessed the emergence of a new faith in human effort and achievement. This age was a period of intense creativity in both the arts and the sciences. Many of the greatest artists in history, including Michelangelo Buonarrotti and Leonardo da Vinci, lived and worked during this time. Renaissance scientists greatly expanded knowledge about the natural world, and Renaissance thinkers changed the way people saw themselves and the world around them.

Renaissance society was quite different from the feudal society of the Middle Ages. The medieval world had been built around the closed system of the manor and the castle. By the time of the Renaissance, towns in southern Europe had grown tremendously in both size and influence. The wealthy people who lived there had more leisure time and money than people during the Middle Ages. This meant they could spend more time studying new ideas and had money to patronize the arts.

The medieval view of the world had been largely pessimistic: people thought of life as short and full of suffering. Most medieval art had had a religious theme. The Church had

hired artists to create paintings to teach people about their faith and to encourage them to lead good lives so they could go to heaven.

Renaissance people were tired of the art and world view of the Middle Ages. To them, the feudal period had been a dark age of **stagnation**. Instead, Renaissance people admired the classical age of the great artists and thinkers of ancient Greece and Rome.

Ancient Greek and Roman artists had tried to communicate a sense of beauty. Much ancient art, especially sculpture, had been created to celebrate the beauty of the human form. Greek thinkers had developed systems of philosophy that showed people how they could improve themselves and their society through their own efforts. On the whole, the classical view was optimistic, something Renaissance people embraced wholeheartedly. Renaissance artists and thinkers worked hard to bring the classical culture back to life, and to forge ahead.

As towns and cities prospered in northern Europe, new ideas spread there also, often through the help of the newly invented printing press. The Renaissance of the North was different in many ways from the one in Italy, but at the core of both was a deep-seated faith in human effort.

accordance: agreement

stagnation: sluggish, inactive, not progressing

DID YOU KNOW?

"Renaissance" is a French word meaning "rebirth." Because of its origin, we usually pronounce "renaissance" with the stress on the first and final syllable rather than on the second.

DID YOU KNOW?

This intense period of European history was not called the "Renaissance" until the nineteenth century.

ITALY: THE RIGHT CONDITIONS

It is the responsibility of historians, geographers, and other social scientists to ask questions about people and their activities. In answering these questions, they hope to understand why things happen the way they do. When they

study the Renaissance, they ask the following questions: "Why did the Renaissance happen first in Italy and later in places such as England and Germany? Did Italy have special features that made such major changes possible?"

Italy was different from northern Europe in many ways. First, it was the heartland of the old Roman Empire. Most of Italy still used Roman law; therefore, the problems of combining the medieval law with the Roman legal code didn't exist in Italy. Italy's clear legal code made business and trade between different regions much easier.

Also in Italy were many Roman ruins, sculptures, mosaics, and wall paintings. Some ancient works of art were brought to Italy with the fall of Constantinople. These ruins and works of art inspired many Italian artists and architects, partly because it was their ancestors who had created many of them.

Finally, one must consider geography.

centres for trade. The two largest Italian port cities were Venice on the east coast and Genoa on the west. Venice became a major centre for both trade and ideas.

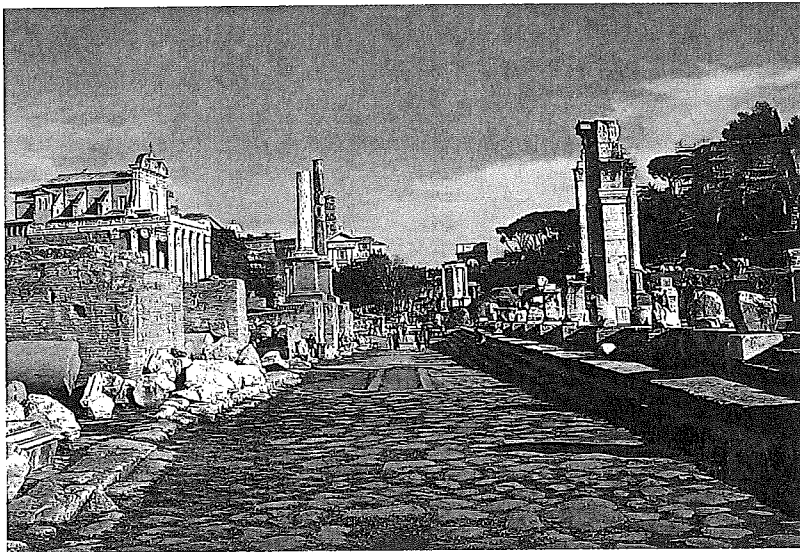
Italy is a mountainous peninsula, a fact that greatly affected Italy's development. Mountains make communication and travel difficult. Mountainous countries usually have only a few well-established trade routes, but those few tend to be very busy. Cities like Siena and Assisi, located on the old Roman roads that threaded the mountains of Italy, grew rich on the proceeds of trade.

Florence, on a plain drained by the Arno River, was located at the hub of a major trade route that ran through mountains to Rome and Naples in the south and through more mountains to Genoa and Venice in the north. Partly because of its fortunate location, Florence became for a time the peninsula's most powerful city.

The climate of Italy was milder than that of the countries north of the Alps. This meant that the winter weather did not disrupt travel, trade, and commerce as it did in Germany and northern France. The milder climate also meant that food was plentiful all year long. People probably had more free time to devote to science and the arts in a place like Italy because they could spend less time earning a living.

Italy had closer ties than the rest of Europe to the Muslim world to the south and east. Muslims had ruled Sicily for a time in the early Middle Ages. During this time Italy was introduced to science, medicine, and astronomy as well as products such as oranges, lemons, coffee, and sugar. Because Italy was near the rich port cities of northern Africa and the Middle East, trade with these lands was easier and cheaper for Italy than for any other country in Europe. With trade came wealth, which in turn allowed the arts to flourish.

Figure 7-1 The ruins of the Roman Forum, the centre of the ancient city of Rome. If you go to Italy today, you can still see some of the ruins of Roman civilization that inspired Renaissance artists to return to their classical roots.



DID YOU KNOW?

The words orange, lemon, coffee, and sugar come from the Arabic words naranj, lima, kahwa, and sukkar.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GEOGRAPHY

During the Middle Ages, Italy had developed as a collection of independent city-states. As trade increased, cities situated near or on one of Italy's few good harbours almost automatically became large and powerful because they served as

Geography in Painting

topography: surface features of a region

Renaissance painters paid far more attention than medieval painters had to the landscapes in their pictures. In the painting of Mary and Jesus on the opening page of this chapter (page 208), Giovanni Bellini used the geography of Italy as the background for his subjects. The distant blue mountains show that

Bellini understood atmospheric perspective. To put it simply, things in the distance look cooler and bluer than things close up. The rich brown earth shown in the painting is found in an area in Italy called "Umbria." Artists still paint with a pigment called umber made from the soil of this region.

Figure 7-2 Considering that all travel during the Renaissance was on foot, on horseback, by cart, or by ship, what effect did Italy's **topography** have on communications and trade? In such a mountainous region, which cities would have had the best chance of becoming wealthy?



Use Map Scales

Maps can provide us with a wealth of information about our world, but without several key tools a map would be useless. Most maps provide the following four tools to help us understand what we see. Locate each on the map in Figure 7-2.

- ◆ **A title:** to indicate the overall purpose of the map (e.g., Roman Trade Routes)
- ◆ **A direction indicator:** to provide a sense of direction (an arrow or compass rose shows due north and sometimes other points)
- ◆ **A legend:** to tell what kind of information the map provides through symbols and colouring
- ◆ **A scale:** to tell what distances are represented on the map

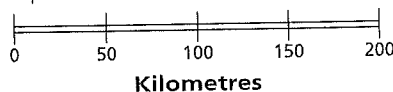
The scale lets you know if you're looking at an area the size of your neighbourhood or the size of a sub-continent—a rather important distinction. The scale also helps you determine the distance between points on a map, for example, the distance between cities, which can be crucial in planning a trip.

Scales help you figure out what distance on earth is represented by a distance you measure on a map. Most maps have at least one of the three basic

types of map scales: **statement scale**, **linear scale**, or **representative ratio**.

A statement scale tells you the distance in words. For example 1 cm = 100 m indicates that 1 centimetre on the map represents 100 metres. Therefore, if you measure 10 centimetres between two points on a map with this scale, the points are actually 1 kilometre apart (10 cm x 100 m/1 cm = 1000 m = 1 km). Simple!

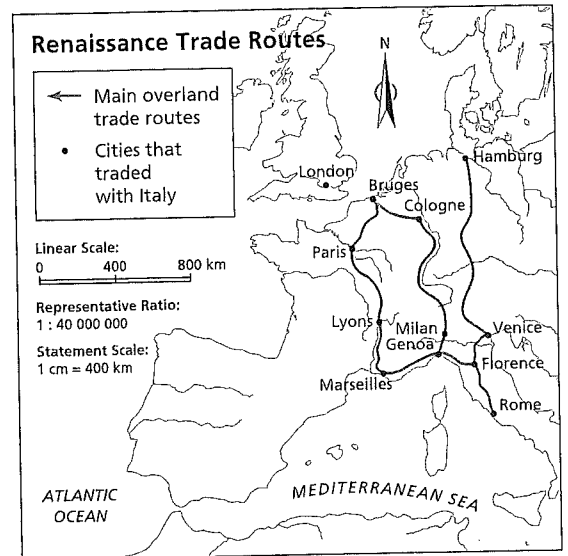
A linear, or line, scale shows distance represented on a line. By measuring the distance between two points on a map, and then laying your ruler along the numbered line, you can estimate real distance. On the scale below, place a ruler along the line to see what 1 centimetre represents in kilometres.



Even more useful is the representative ratio. The ratio indicates what one unit on the map represents in the *same* unit on the earth. If the ratio is 1:3 000 000, then 1 millimetre on the map

represents 3 000 000 millimetres on earth. It also means that 1 centimetre represents 3 000 000 centimetres. Knowing that a town is 3 000 000 centimetres away doesn't mean much, however. Fortunately, the representative ratio offers an easy way to convert metric distances to units we can readily visualize. To convert centimetres to kilometres, always follow this strategy: Begin at the right side of the ratio. Count five digits to the left and place a decimal point between the fifth and sixth digit. You've done it! 3 000 000 centimetres becomes 30.000 00 kilometres, or 30 kilometres! Another example:

- 1:11 000 000
- 1 cm : 11 000 000 cm
- 1 cm : 110.000 00 km
- 1 cm : 110 km



NOW YOU DO IT

1. For each of the following three representative ratios, figure out how many kilometres are represented by a centimetre:
1:13 000 000 1:700 000 1:5000
2. Using the map Renaissance Trade Routes, above, determine what one centimetre represents in kilometres. What is the actual distance between the cities of Florence and Bruges? Milan and

- Cologne? Venice and Marseilles? Calculate these distances in two ways: as the crow flies (along a straight line) and the route distance (the length of the route one would have to travel).
3. Determine the route distances in kilometres between Florence and Hamburg, Venice and Rome, and Genoa and Bruge.

ITALIAN CITY-STATES

The Renaissance did not occur because the Italian people had created a great empire. In fact, the opposite is true. Italy wasn't even a united country until the nineteenth century. The Renaissance flourished in city-states, some of them relatively small. A city-state consists of a city and the rural area immediately surrounding it. The surrounding area, called the **hinterland**, provides food and other necessities. Singapore is an example of a modern city-state that flourishes even without a hinterland. City-states have their own government and their own armed forces. The Italian city-states were democratic for at least part of their history.

Because some parts of Italy were occupied by the Holy Roman Empire, some by Spain, and some by the pope, politics was very complicated.

Further, war often broke out between city-states. From the time of the Middle Ages, these city-states hired companies of **mercenary soldiers** led by **condottieri**, some from as far away as England, to fight for them. Condottieri fought for the pay and had little interest in the reasons for war. Often they were careful not to have casualties, with the result that some battles were more ceremonial than real. Some of the condottieri became the rulers of city-states.

hinterland: area surrounding a city

mercenary soldiers: soldiers for hire

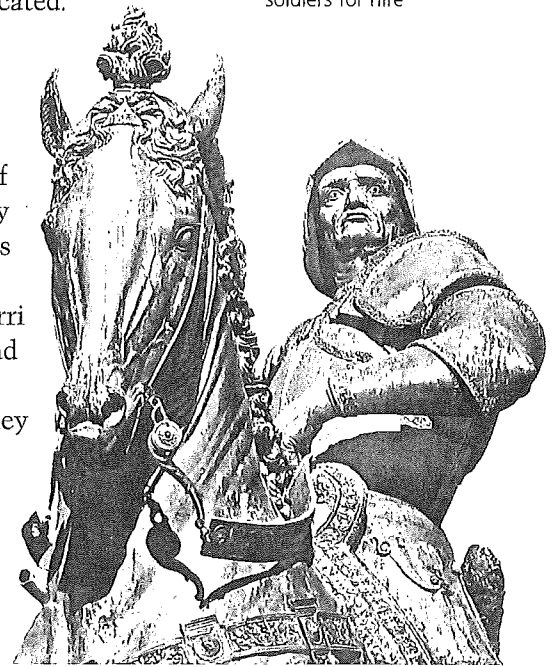


Figure 7-3 Andrea Verrocchio's statue of the Venetian condottiere Bartolomeo Colleoni. What aspects of Colleoni's character did the artist emphasize in this portrait?

Governing the City of Mantua

Like many Renaissance rulers, the Duke of Mantua was often away on military campaigns. During his absence, his wife, Isabella D'Este, governed the city. The portrait of Isabella, drawn by Leonardo da Vinci in 1500, shows Isabella when she was twenty-six. Isabella excelled in governing, in leading Italian society, and in supporting the arts. Governing the state was sometimes complicated by rumour and gossip, so Isabella often wrote to her husband to assure him that all was well. Here is an excerpt from one such letter. After reading it, describe Isabella's method of governing. What problems do you think a woman might face in the absence of her husband?

councillor: advisor

The inventors of these evil tales who have not been afraid to disturb your peace of mind when you are occupied with the defence of Italy, showed little regard for my honour, or for those of my **councillors**. Let Your Highness, I beg of you, have a peaceful mind... for I intend to govern the State... in such a manner that you will suffer no wrong, and all that is possible will be done for the good of your subjects... I not only listen to officials but allow all your subjects to speak to me whenever they choose [so] no disturbance can happen without my knowledge....

From her who loves and longs to see Your Highness,
Isabella,
with her own hand.
Mantua, June 30, 1495



oligarchy: government by a few powerful people

florin, ducat: gold coins weighing about 3.5 grams

Florence

Florence and Venice were the two most important Renaissance cities. Both became rich through the skill of their business people, and both were large enough to dominate their neighbours. Florence made its fortune in the cloth trade and controlled the kingdom of Naples. Today this city is famous for the Renaissance art that fills its galleries and other public buildings. Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci lived in this city as did many other painters, sculptors, and architects. The city is located in Tuscany in northwest Italy, on the banks of the Arno River. By 1330, Florence was already one of the largest cities in Europe, with a population of about 100 000.

Early Florence was ruled by a kind of democracy made up of representatives from the city's guilds. Later, the city was ruled by an **oligarchy** that was controlled by the wealthiest and most powerful families. Beginning in 1434, the extremely powerful Medici family ruled Florence.

In 1378, the cloth workers had revolted to protest poor living conditions. After this, the rulers of Florence tried hard to keep their citizens relatively happy. For this reason, and because they were proud of their city, Florence's rulers financed many beautiful public buildings and works of art. The Medicis were great patrons of the arts who sponsored both Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo Buonarotti.

The Business of Banking

Florence relied on the wool trade and banking for its prosperity. Florentine merchants would buy the best-quality wool from England and Spain and turn the wool into high-grade cloth that fetched high prices all over Europe. Florentine bankers began as moneychangers visiting European fairs, where they helped foreign merchants change their money to the local currency. At this time in Europe, more than 500 currencies were in use. These early moneychangers worked behind a *banc*, or bench, and so acquired the name "bankers." The Florentine gold **florin**, like the Venetian **ducat**, soon became a standard unit of currency that was accepted throughout Europe.

After becoming the pope's bankers and receiving authorization to collect taxes for him, the Florentine bankers established the wealthiest financial houses in Europe. They also introduced a



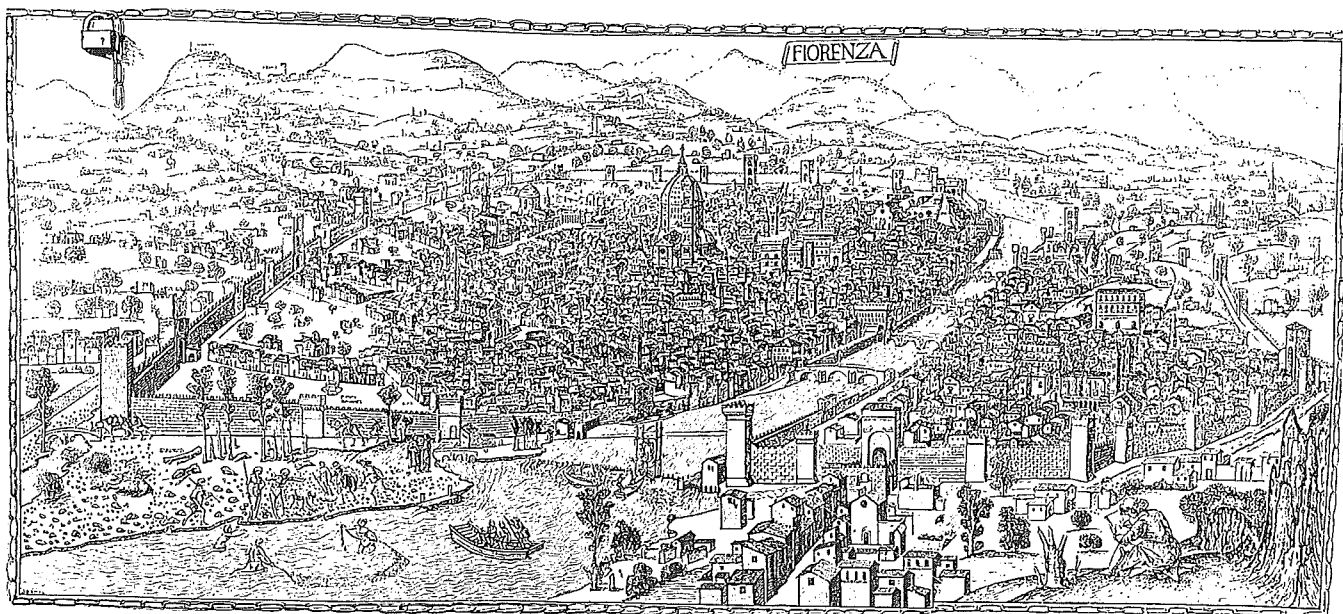
Figure 7-4 This woodcut shows the inside of a fifteenth-century Florentine bank. On the left, a banker examines a letter of credit (like a money order) that a foreign merchant has handed him. What do you think is being exchanged on the right? How would the bank make money from these transactions?

number of new banking practices. To make the flow of money easier and to keep detailed records of their transactions, they invented cheques and modern accounting methods.

Banking was often a risky business because merchants who borrowed money to buy or rent ships, purchase cargo, and hire

crews, continuously faced the threats of shipwreck, piracy, robbery, and war. Also, rulers sometimes failed to repay their loans. For instance, when Edward III of England refused to repay his loans, two of the most powerful banking families in Florence, the Perazzi and the Bardi, went out of business.

Using Art as a Primary Source



CATALOGUE CARD

What is it? A print of Florence taken from a wood engraving

Who painted it? Vincenzo Catena, an Italian Renaissance artist

When? About 1480, when Florence was at the height of its power

Many sources other than the written word are valuable tools for understanding the past. Much can be learned about a particular era, event, or person through works of art. For example, this print by Catena provides the viewer with a wealth of information about

Florence at the height of its power. Work through the following questions to analyze the print yourself.

NOW YOU DO IT

1. What evidence is there that Florence is a prosperous and growing city?
2. What buildings dominate the skyline? What does this tell you about the power of the institutions that constructed the buildings?
3. Identify and explain what natural features make this an ideal site for a city. What natural feature would benefit enemies attacking Florence?

4. Is the print made to scale? Explain.
5. Find Catena working in the hills. Why would Catena place himself in the picture?
6. Estimate the population of the city. How did you reach your estimate?
7. What are the men doing in the bottom, left-hand corner? What does this tell you about the Arno River?
8. Give two reasons why walls were built along the banks of the Arno River.

Remember, no matter what the historical primary source, one must always consider who is creating the work. This helps determine biases. For example, consider how the painting might have differed had the artist been any of the four individuals listed below. For each hypothetical painter, list possible biases.

- ◆ a proud Florentine citizen
- ◆ a foreigner being paid by a proud Florentine citizen
- ◆ a foreigner being paid by an enemy city
- ◆ an artist who loves nature, perspective, and the science of art

Which of the four descriptions do you think best matches Catena?

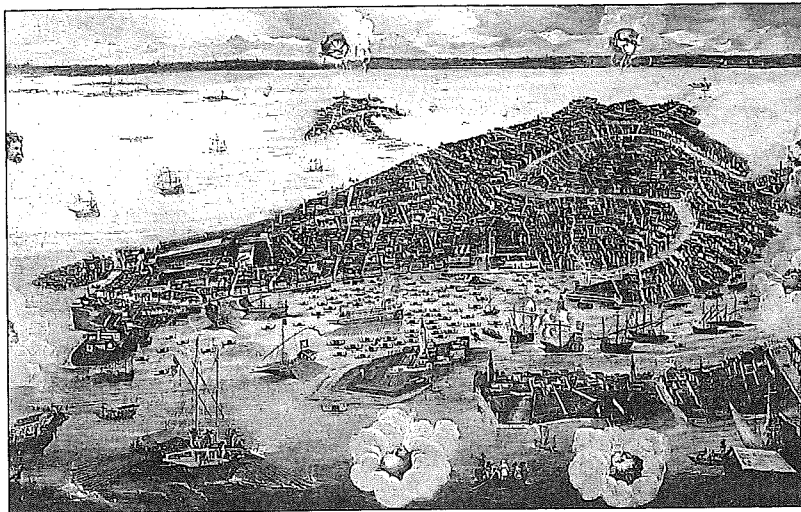


Figure 7-5 Map of Venice in the fifteenth century. With this map in mind, consider why Venice would be such a difficult city for an army to conquer. What kind of natural disaster would pose a real danger to Venice?

pile: a heavy beam driven upright into the earth to support a structure

republic: a state in which the citizens elect representatives to form a government

Venice

Venetians have always referred to their city as “the Most Serene Republic.” Venice is a one-of-a-kind city built entirely on **piles** sunk into marshy islands at the head of the Adriatic Sea. The city has hundreds of canals, which function as roads and highways.

With its hinterland, called the *veneto*, Venice was able to grow into one of the foremost cities of the Italian Renaissance. The city had a population of more than 150 000 people. It was

successful because its leaders created a powerful navy through which Venice was able to gain control of the trade routes on the Mediterranean Sea. The Venetians maintained hundreds of merchant ships and warships and thousands of sailors. The city’s navy and its watery surroundings made the city very difficult to attack successfully. Venice kept its independence from the Middle Ages until the end of the eighteenth century, when the city was conquered by Napoleon.

Although Venetians referred to their city as a **republic**, which is a form of democracy, the people of Venice in fact had little political freedom. The supreme ruler was the Doge (pronounced “dōj”), who was elected for life. The city also had a senate and a Great Council that passed laws. The Doge and the members of the government all came from wealthy families, however, so Venice in effect was an oligarchy, not a republic. All citizens were at the mercy of the most powerful arm of the government: the secret Council of Ten. This council had the power to imprison, torture, and execute any citizen of Venice—all in secret.

Figure 7-6 This photograph shows modern citizens of Venice costumed for one of the city’s festivals. This celebration has its roots in the Renaissance, when wealthy citizens wore masks to attend lavish parties and mingle with the masses. Why do you think they wore disguises?



Venice, like Florence, had many famous artists who were **patronized** by the wealthy merchants of the city. Architects built beautiful palaces and official buildings throughout the city. Titian was the most famous of the Venetian artists. He worked all his life, dying when he was ninety-nine. Many of Titian's works were massive paintings commissioned by the

Republic of Venice itself to record its glory. Titian also had a gift for painting people and was able to show emotion and personality better than many other artists. He often painted women with light red hair, a colour still known today as "Titian Red." Thanks to Titian and many other artists, Venice remains one of the most beautiful cities in the world.

to patronize: to support

ACTIVITIES

1. What does the term "renaissance" mean? What factors caused the Italian Renaissance in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries?
2. Imagine you are a prosperous Florentine wool trader writing to your cousin in Germany in 1420. Try to persuade him to abandon his woodworking business and move to Florence, where the business opportunities are better. In your letter, discuss the following:
 - ◆ the local climate
 - ◆ the advantageous location of Florence
 - ◆ the location of Italy in relation to other trading nations
 - ◆ the growing market for all types of goodsInclude a sketch map in your letter showing the location of Florence on the Arno River and its position relative to two trading centres in Italy.
3. What is a city-state? How did city-states manage to avoid becoming part of larger kingdoms or empires?
4. Why is a hinterland important to a wealthy city?
5. Construct a chart to compare Venice and Florence in regard to location, geographical advantages and disadvantages, population, source of wealth, political system, and important artists. What made these two city-states wealthy and powerful? Did they both grow rich for the same reasons?
6. a) Review the feature on early banking (see page 214). Make a list of functions performed by early banks. Then do the same for Canadian banks and credit unions.
b) In a small group, script and present the following drama. A pair of time travellers has been sent from the Bank of Canada to explain the wonders of machine banking to a group of Italian bankers in the mid-fifteenth century. The time travellers should describe the advantages of the instant teller and the bank card, while the bankers should ask questions. Will the standard bank machine have to be modified to make it useful for Renaissance bankers? In what ways?
Construct a mock bank machine for your drama.

THE FAMILY

THE ITALIAN FAMILY

The family was very important in Renaissance Italy. Even though the rate of infant deaths was higher than

today, and people died earlier, families were usually large. Mothers, fathers, and their children shared a house with their aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins. Children generally learned the trade of their parents and worked in the family business.