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DBQ 8: THE RENAISSANCE, 1300–1600

Historical Background

The idea of a Renaissance man emerged during the Renaissance era in Italy. This man symbolized the essential tenets of humanism. Humanistic philosophy placed man as the focus of the universe, boundless in his abilities for progress. Humanism lent itself to the belief that all gifted men should try to acquire as much knowledge as possible. Hence, individuals of such talent pursued proficiencies in education, physical advancement, social achievements, and artistic expression. Two such men are Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni. Leonardo da Vinci was an Italian-born writer, sculptor, scientist, inventor, and painter. He gained his highest renown with his artistic creations of the *Last Supper* and the *Mona Lisa*. Meanwhile, Michelangelo was an Italian-born architect, poet, sculptor, painter, and engineer. His fame ignited with his acclaimed creation of the frescoes on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel and the creation of the sculpture *David*. Both men have been portrayed as the most talented individuals of their time.

SECTION 1 **QUESTION: Between Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo, who was the most representative example of a Renaissance man?**

The following documents will examine whether Leonardo da Vinci or Michelangelo was the most representative example of a Renaissance man. Analyze each document carefully, and answer the question or questions that follow.

Document A

The richest gifts are occasionally seen to be showered, as by heavenly influence, on certain human beings, they sometimes supernaturally and marvelously congregate in one single person; beauty, grace, and talent being united in such a manner, that to whatever the man thus favored may turn himself, his every action is so divine as to leave all other men far behind him, and manifestly to prove that he has been especially endowed by the hand of God Himself, and has not obtained his talent by human teaching, or the power of man. This was seen and acknowledged by all men in the case of Leonardo da Vinci... who had besides so rare a gift of talent and ability, that to whatever subject he turned his attention, however difficult, he presently made himself absolute master of it.

The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects, 1550
Giorgio Vasari





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1. How does Giorgio Vasari praise Leonardo da Vinci? Use examples from the excerpt as support.

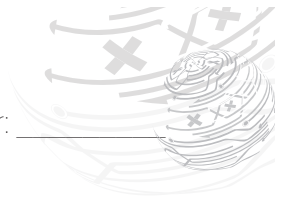
2. List three examples of modern-day Renaissance men or women and explain how each one fits this prototype.

Document B

This work has been a veritable beacon to our art, illuminating all painting and the world which had remained in darkness for so any centuries. Indeed, painters no longer care about novelties, inventions, attitudes and draperies, methods of new expression or striking subjects painted in different ways, because this work contains every perfection that can be given. Men are stupefied by the excellence of the figures, the perfection of the foreshortening, the stupendous rotundity of the contours, the grace and slenderness and the charming proportions... every age, expression and form being represented in varied attitudes, such as sitting, turning, holding festoons of oak-leaves and laurel, the device of Pope Julius, showing that his was a golden age, for Italy had yet to experience her miseries. Some in the middle hold medals with, scenes, painted like bronze or gold, the subject being taken from the Book of Kings. To show the greatness of God and the perfection of art he represents the Dividing of Light from Darkness, showing with love and art the Almighty, self-supported, with extended arms. With fine discretion and ingenuity, he then did God making the sun and moon, supported by numerous cherubs, with marvelous foreshortening of the arms and legs. The same scene contains the blessing of the earth and the Creation, God being foreshortened in the act of flying, the figure following you to whatever part of the chapel you turn. In another part he did God dividing the waters from the land, marvelous figures showing the highest intellect and worthy of being made by the divine hand of Michelangelo.

The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects, 1550
Giorgio Vasari



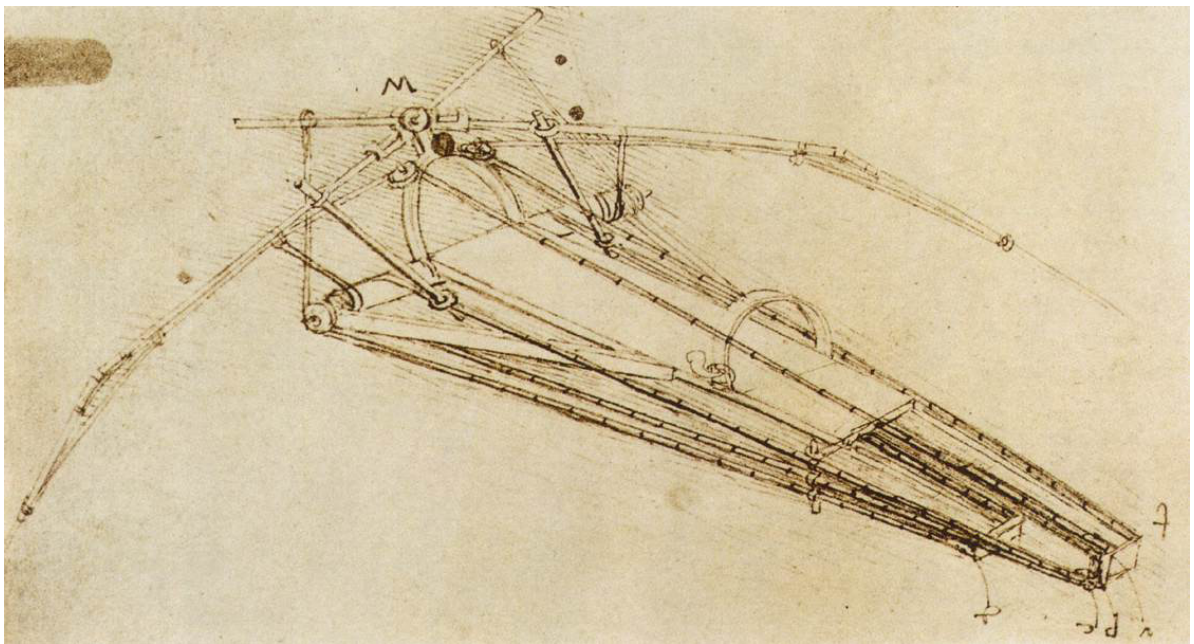


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1. Why are men “stupefied” by the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel?

2. According to Vasari, how did Michelangelo glorify God? Use three specific examples from the excerpt as support.

Document C



Drawing of a Flying Machine, c. 1485
Leonardo da Vinci





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1. Explain how Leonardo da Vinci's illustration would work as a new invention during the Renaissance era.

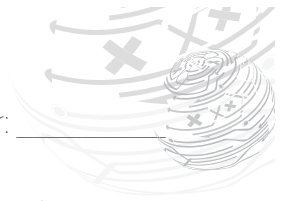
2. Why would Renaissance men and women praise this illustration?

Document D



Pieta, 1498-1499
Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni





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1. What techniques and materials might Michelangelo have used in order to create the *Pieta*?

2. Justify why the *Pieta* has gained admiration in present-day and Renaissance societies.

Document E

If you look at the stars without their rays (as may be done by looking at them through a small hole made with the extreme point of a fine needle and placed so as almost to touch the eye), you will see these stars to be so minute that it would seem as though nothing could be smaller; it is in fact the great distance which is the reason of their diminution, for many of them are very many times larger than the star which is the earth with the water. Think, then, what this star of ours would seem like at so great a distance, and then consider how many stars might be set in longitude and latitude between these stars which are scattered throughout this dark expanse. I can never do other than blame many of those ancients who said that the sun was no larger than it appears; among these being Epicurus; and I believe that he reasoned thus from the effects of a light placed in our atmosphere equidistant from the center; whoever sees it never sees it diminished in size at any distance.

Notes on the Cosmos, 1515
Leonardo da Vinci

1. How was Leonardo da Vinci able to look at the stars? In what way does he explain the size of the stars in this excerpt?





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2. According to da Vinci, how were the “ancients” incorrect?

3. How are these notes a reflection of da Vinci’s intelligence?

Document F

Not even the best of artists has any conception
that a single marble block does not contain
within its excess, and that is only attained
by the hand that obeys the intellect.
The pain I flee from and the joy I hope for
are similarly hidden in you, lovely lady,
lofty and divine; but, to my mortal harm,
my art gives results the reverse of what I wish.
Love, therefore, cannot be blamed for my pain,
nor can your beauty, your hardness, or your scorn,
nor fortune, nor my destiny, nor chance,
if you hold both death and mercy in your heart
at the same time, and my lowly wits, though burning,
cannot draw from it anything but death.

“Poem 151,” 1538–1544
Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni

