**Birth of the Renaissance**

Renaissance

From: Nicole Gilbertson 2016

**History Standards: 7.8.2**

Explain the importance of Florence in the early stages of the Renaissance and the growth of independent trading cities (e.g., Venice), with emphasis on the cities' importance in the spread of Renaissance ideas.

**CCSS Standards:** CCSS RH 6. Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author’s point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

**Guiding Question:** Why would Florence be the “mother” of the Renaissance? How did the city give birth to this cultural movement?

**Overview of Lesson:**

1. As a whole group, ask students to define the term “Renaissance.” Ask students to do this individually and perhaps offer some methods for finding the term, using the index in the textbook, dictionary, going online and using google. As a whole class create a student-friendly definition that includes the term, location, and period (if this information comes up as part of the class discussion).
2. Ask students to consider the lesson questions: Why would Florence be the “mother” of the Renaissance? How did the city give birth to this cultural movement?

Direct students to the textbook to p.476-7. The teacher will work with students to identify the evidence that the textbook provides to support its claim that Italy (and more specifically Florence) “was the birthplace of the Renaissance.” Teachers may want to read the first paragraphs and identify how the text provides specific evidence for the this claim. For example, traders in the cities came into contact with people from around the world and were influence by their ideas. For the section on Florence, students can work in groups to identify the evidence to support the claim and then debrief as a whole group.

Show students excerpts from the film, *The Medici,* from PBS minutes 5:05-12:15

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GOAVRcI6mFU&list=PLrTHhM4X66_gW2dZSXODm6rSNIqnNqopp>

1. Students will then read a *National Geographic* article on “Brunelleschi’s Dome” and consider the question: How was the dome an example of the Renaissance?
2. Students may want to explore the additional resources on the *National Geographic* website such as a cartoon explaining how Brunelleschi built the dome and an interior 3D view of the church to provide further evidence for the lesson question and to learn more about the building of the dome.

http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2014/02/il-duomo/mueller-text

Article:

**Brunelleschi’s Dome**

**How did a hot-tempered goldsmith with no formal architectural training create the most miraculous edifice of the Renaissance?**

By Tom Mueller *National Geographic*

[*http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2014/02/il-duomo/mueller-text*](http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2014/02/il-duomo/mueller-text)

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| In 1418 the town fathers of Florence finally addressed a monumental problem they’d been ignoring for decades: the enormous hole in the roof of their cathedral. Season after season, the winter rains and summer sun had streamed in over Santa Maria del Fiore’s high altar—or where the high altar should have been. Their predecessors had begun the church in 1296 to showcase the status of Florence as one of Europe’s economic and cultural capitals, grown rich on high finance and the wool and silk trades. It was later decided that the structure’s crowning glory would be the largest cupola on Earth, ensuring the church would be “more useful and beautiful, more powerful and honorable” than any other ever built, as the grandees of Florence decreed.  Still, many decades later, no one seemed to have a viable idea of how to build a dome nearly 150 feet across, especially as it would have to start 180 feet above the ground, atop the existing walls. Other questions plagued the cathedral overseers. Their building plans eschewed the flying buttresses and pointed arches of the traditional Gothic style then favored by rival northern cities like Milan, Florence’s archenemy. Yet these were the only architectural solutions known to work in such a vast structure. Could a dome weighing tens of thousands of tons stay up without them? Was there enough timber in Tuscany for the scaffolding and templates that would be needed to shape the dome’s masonry? And could a dome be built at all on the octagonal floor plan dictated by the existing walls—eight pie-shaped wedges—without collapsing inward as the masonry arced toward the apex? No one knew.  *Why was the dome not yet built by 1418?*  So in 1418 the worried Florentine fathers announced a contest for the ideal dome design, with a handsome prize of 200 gold florins—and a shot at eternal fame—for the winner. Leading architects of the age flocked to Florence and presented their ideas...  …[A] short, homely, and hot-tempered goldsmith named Filippo Brunelleschi, promised to build not one but two domes, one nested inside the other, without elaborate and expensive scaffolding. Yet he refused to explain how he’d achieve this, fearing that a competitor would steal his ideas. Brunelleschi’s stubbornness led to a shouting match with the overseers, who twice had him restrained and forcibly ejected from the assembly, denouncing him as “a buffoon and a babbler.”  *Why did the Florentine city leaders have reason to want to hire Brunelleschi?*  *Why might they have not wanted to hire Brunelleschi?*  Nonetheless, Brunelleschi’s mysterious design piqued their imagination—perhaps because they already knew this buffoon and babbler to be a genius. As a boy, during his goldsmith’s apprenticeship, he had mastered drawing and painting, wood carving, sculpture in silver and bronze, stone setting, niello, and enamel work. Later he studied optics and tinkered endlessly with wheels, gears, weights, and motion, building a number of ingenious clocks, including what may have been one of the first alarm clocks in history. Applying his theoretical and mechanical knowledge to observation of the natural world, he single-handedly worked out the rules of linear perspective. He’d just spent several years in Rome measuring and sketching the ancient monuments and noting, in cipher, their architectural secrets. Indeed, Brunelleschi’s life seemed to have been one long apprenticeship for building the dome of unequaled beauty, usefulness, honor, and power that Florence yearned for…  *What skills did Brunelleschi have that would make him a candidate to build the dome?*  **The first problem** to be solved was purely technical: No known lifting mechanisms were capable of raising and maneuvering the enormously heavy materials he had to work with, including sandstone beams, so far off the ground. Here Brunelleschi the clockmaker and tinkerer outdid himself. He invented a three-speed hoist with an intricate system of gears, pulleys, screws, and driveshafts, powered by a single yoke of oxen turning a wooden tiller. It used a special rope 600 feet long and weighing over a thousand pounds—custom-made by shipwrights in Pisa—and featured a groundbreaking clutch system that could reverse direction without having to turn the oxen around...  Having assembled the necessary tool kit, Brunelleschi turned his full attention to the dome itself, which he shaped with a series of stunning technical innovations. His double-shell design yielded a structure that was far lighter and loftier than a solid dome of such size would have been. He wove regular courses of herringbone brickwork, little known before his time, into the texture of the cupola, giving the entire structure additional solidity.  *What inventions did Brunelleschi bring to the project?*  *How did these inventions allow him to solve the problems of building the dome?*  Throughout the years of construction Brunelleschi spent more and more time on the work site. He oversaw the production of bricks of various dimensions and attended to the supply of choice stone and marble from the quarries. He led an army of masons and stonecutters, carpenters, blacksmiths, lead beaters, barrelmakers, water carriers, and other craftsmen. When they were puzzled by some tricky construction detail, one biographer tells us, he’d shape a model out of wax or clay or carve up a turnip to illustrate what he wanted. Brunelleschi took particular care of his workers, both for their safety and to ensure that the dome progressed as rapidly as possible...  *How was Brunelleschi a “hands on” manager of the project?*  …[O]n April 15, 1446, Brunelleschi died, apparently from a sudden illness. At his funeral he lay dressed in white linen on a bier ringed by candles, staring sightlessly into the dome he had built brick by brick, as the candle smoke and the notes of the funeral dirge spiraled into the void. He was buried in the crypt of the cathedral; a memorial plaque nearby celebrated his “divine intellect.” These were high honors. Before Brunelleschi’s time, very few people, among them a saint, were allowed burial in the crypt, and architects were mostly considered humble craftsmen. With genius, leadership, and grit, Filippo Brunelleschi raised true artists to the rank of sublime creators, worthy of eternal praise in the company of the saints, an image that would dominate the Renaissance.  *What was notable about Brunelleschi’s burial place in the church?*  *How was this an example of how he was valued by the people of Florence?*  In fact, he paved the way for the cultural and social revolutions of the Renaissance itself, through his complex synthesis of inspiration and analysis, his bold reworking of the classical past to the needs and aspirations of the present. Once complete, Santa Maria del Fiore was decorated by artists like Donatello, Paolo Uccello, and Luca Della Robbia, making it both the birthplace and the proving ground of the Renaissance. Brunelleschi’s dome still rises from the terra-cotta sea of Florence’s roof tiles…,Somehow Brunelleschi captured freedom in stone, exalting the Florentine skyline ever after with an upward-yearning embodiment of the human spirit.  *How was the dome an example of the Renaissance?*  *How was Brunelleschi an example of a Renaissance individual?* | altar—a platform in a church where the religious ceremony is led by the priest  cupola—a dome or roof  restrained and forcibly ejected—held back and thrown out [of the meeting]  buffoon—a person who makes silly jokes and acts foolishly  tinkered—problem-solving with mechanical tools  cipher—a secret writing only he could understand  quarries—a pit where stone is found for building |