

European Literature: Renaissance and Reformation

This six-week unit introduces students to the literature of the Renaissance and Reformation, exploring its continuity with and departure from the literature of the Middle Ages.

OVERVIEW

- Students consider Renaissance writers' interest in ancient Greek and Latin literature and myth; their preoccupation with human concerns and life on earth; their aesthetic principles of harmony, balance, and divine proportion; and exceptions to all of these. This leads to a discussion of how literary forms themselves reflect religious, philosophical, and aesthetic principles. As students compare the works of the Renaissance with those of the Middle Ages, they will recognize the overlap and continuity of these periods. In addition, they consider how the outstanding works of the era transcend their time and continue to inspire readers and writers. The English Renaissance of the seventeenth century includes additional works by William Shakespeare. In their essays, students may analyze the ideas, principles, and form of a literary work; discuss how a work bears attributes of both the Middle Ages and the Renaissance; discuss convergences of Renaissance literature and arts; or pursue a related topic of interest.

FOCUS STANDARDS

- These Focus Standards have been selected for the unit from the Common Core State Standards.
 - **RL.11-12.4:** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)
 - **RL.11-12.6:** Analyze a case in which grasping point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).
 - **RI.11-12.1:** Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
 - **RI.11-12.2:** Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.
 - **W.11-12.2:** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
 - **SL.11-12.4:** Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range or formal and informal tasks.
 - **L.11-12.4:** Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on *grades 11-12 reading and content*, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

Nonfiction

- *Rabelais and His World* (Mikhail Bakhtin)
- *The Prince* (Niccolo Machiavelli) (excerpts)

Art

- Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini, *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (1647-1652)
- Jacopo da Pontormo, *Desposition from the Cross (Entombment)* (1525-28)
- Leonardo da Vinci, *Mona Lisa* (1503-1506)
- Leonardo da Vinci, *The Virgin and Child with St. Anne* (1508)
- Leonardo da Vinci, *Vitruvian Man* (1487)
- Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni, *David* (1505)
- Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni, *Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel* (1508-1512)
- Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni, *The Last Judgment*, Sistine Chapel altar wall (1536-1541)
- Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *The Entombment of Christ* (1602-1603)
- Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino, *The Niccolini-Cowper Madonna* (1508)
- Sandro Botticelli, *Primavera* (1482)

SAMPLE ACTIVITIES AND ASSESSMENTS

- *Note:* After reading and discussing a work or pairing of works as a class, students prepare for seminars and essays by reflecting individually, in pairs, and/or in small groups on a given seminar or essay question. In this way, students generate ideas. (Seminar and essay assignments include more than one question. Teachers may choose one or all of the questions to explore in the course of the seminar; students should choose one question for the essay.) Seminars should be held before students write essays so that they may explore their ideas thoroughly and refine their thinking before writing. Textual evidence should be used to support all arguments advanced in seminars and in all essays. Page and word counts for essays are not provided here, but teachers should consider the suggestions regarding the use of evidence, for example, to determine the likely length of good essays.

[Scoring Rubric for Seminar](#)

Reading Poetry, Oral Presentation

Select a poem from this unit and recite it from memory. Include an introduction that states:

- Who wrote the poem
- Its form, meter, rhyme scheme, and key literary elements
- An aspect of the poem that comes through after multiple readings (RL.11-12.4)

Reading Literature, Informative Writing

Seminar: Read *Macbeth*. How does the play illustrate the demise of the Great Chain of Being? What does the play say about the divine right of kings? What does it reveal about fate and free will? Use textual evidence from the play to support your response in an original, concise thesis statement. (RL.11-12.1, RI.11-12.1)

Reading Literature, Informative Writing

Seminar: Read *Henry IV*, Part I. How does Falstaff reflect the new ideas of the Renaissance regarding chivalry and honor? How does the play illustrate the demise of the Great Chain of Being? What does the play say about the divine right of kings? Use textual evidence from the play to support your response in an original, concise thesis statement. (RL.11-12.1, RI.11-12.1)

Reading Literature, Reading Informational Text, Argument Writing

Seminar: After reading *Macbeth* and excerpts from *The Prince* by Machiavelli, answer one of the following questions. How do Machiavelli's principles apply to the play? What is Shakespeare saying about Machiavelli's approach to attaining and maintaining political power? Consider the quotation, "It is better to be feared than to be loved." Is this true for Macbeth? Use textual evidence from both texts to support your position. (RL.11-12.1, RI.11-12.1)

Art, Speaking and Listening

Examine and discuss the following artworks: Michelangelo's *David*, Raphael's *Madonna*, and da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and *Vitruvian Man*. How has each artist worked to depict human beauty? What elements of beauty do they highlight? What is idealized? Are there any aspects that are realistic? Do you believe these portrayals are beautiful? Why or why not? (SL.11-12.1, SL.11-12.2, SL.11-12.3, SL.11-12.4, SL.11-12.5)

Art, Speaking and Listening

View Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, da Vinci's *Virgin and Child*, Pontormo's *Deposition*, and Bernini's *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*. What range of emotions is evident in these works of art? What imagery or symbols do the artists use to convey these emotions? What painting or sculpting techniques are used to heighten the effect? Which work do you respond to the most and why? (SL.11-12.1, SL.11-12.2, SL.11-12.3, SL.11-12.4, SL.11-12.5)

Reading Literature, Informative Writing

Seminar: Using literary works as textual evidence, do one of the following: (a) compare two Renaissance literary works, with attention to symmetry and form; (b) compare a Renaissance literary work with a medieval literary work, with attention to depiction of character; or (c) relate a literary work to a philosophical work. Include at least one critical source and one reference to a literary work to support an original, concise thesis statement. (RL.11-12.4, W.11-12.7)

Reading Literature, Informative Writing

Seminar: Show how one of the plays from this unit departs from the medieval conceptions of drama. Use specific textual evidence to support an original, concise thesis statement. (RL.11-12.1, RI.11-12.1)

Reading Literature, Informative Writing

Seminar: Relate Pacioli's *On the Divine Proportion* to a Shakespeare sonnet. In what ways is the sonnet an expression of divine proportion (or not)? Cite specific evidence from both texts to support an original, concise thesis statement. (RL.11-12.1, RI.11-12.1)

Research, Reading Literature, Informative Writing

Using texts from this unit as well as additional sources, explain how literature from the Renaissance breaks with or builds on ideas derived from the Middle Ages. Cite specific textual evidence to support an original, concise thesis statement to answer the essential question. The essay should reflect your reasoned judgment about the quality and reliability of sources consulted (i.e., why you emphasize some and not others), a balance of paraphrasing and quoting from sources, original thinking, the anticipation and addressing of questions or counterclaims, and the proper citation of sources. Your teacher may give you the opportunity to share and refine your initial research questions on the classroom blog in order to get feedback from your classmates. (RL.11-12.4, W.11-12.7, W.11-12.8, RI.11-12.7)

Speaking and Listening

Reflect on seminar questions, take notes on your responses, and note the page numbers of the textual evidence you will refer to in your seminar and/or essay answers. Share your notes with a partner for feedback and guidance. Have you interpreted the text correctly? Is your evidence convincing? (RL.11-12.1, SL.11-12.1)

Reading Literature, Informative Writing

Seminar: Compare one of the satirical stories of *The Canterbury Tales* (from Unit One) with one of the stories from Boccaccio's *The Decameron*. What does the satire reveal about the author's intention and message? Use textual evidence to support an original, concise thesis. (RL.11-12.2)

SENIOR RESEARCH PAPER

- o Meeting the "college readiness" goal of the Common Core State Standards requires that students undertake the challenge of exploring a research question in depth and produce sophisticated expository writing in response.

In twelfth grade, teachers and students may use the research process as a guide to writing a college-level, thesis-driven research paper of at least 4,000 words. Teachers may ask students to apply this process to any of the sample assignments in any of the six units, or may suggest another topic for students to research throughout the year.

High School Research and the Senior Research Paper

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- *Literary Resources—Renaissance* (Rutgers University)
- *The Forest of Rhetoric* (Brigham Young University) (RL.11-12.4)
- *The English Renaissance in Context (ERIC)* (University of Pennsylvania Library) (RL.11-12.1, RL.11-12.2)

TERMINOLOGY

1. Allusion
2. Classicism
3. Divine proportion (golden ratio, golden mean)
4. Divine right of kings
5. Eclogue
6. Epistle
7. Fate
8. Free will
9. The Great Chain of Being
10. Humanism
11. Iambic pentameter
12. Iambic tetrameter
13. Idyll
14. Ode
15. Satire
16. Sonnet
17. Symmetry