

Renaissance History

Lesson One: What In the World is a Renaissance World?

By Rhonda Clark

I'm glad you asked. A Renaissance world is a changing world. By definition Renaissance means "rebirth." [Dictionary.com](https://www.dictionary.com) defines it as:

"the activity, spirit, or time of the great revival of art, literature, and learning in Europe beginning in the 14th century and extending to the 17th century, marking the transition from the medieval to the modern world."

Not only did the world rediscover a love for art and literature that rivaled the ancient Greeks and Romans, but the world was in a period of flux. This period forever changed not only the power and rule of monarchies, but the landscape of the Catholic Church as well. It also laid the foundations for the Protestant Movement.

Although the Renaissance is dated starting in the mid-1300s and ending around 1700, I'm going to travel back a bit further to around 1100-1200 and start our journey there. Those previous 200 years are packed with blueprint and foundational information. You don't want to miss those key details if you want to fully understand what's happening.

Here's a short list of what happened during this time in history:

1. Circumnavigation of the earth and new sailing technologies
2. Pacific Ocean discovered
3. New art techniques developed
4. Explorers found new lands for monarchs to rule
5. Catholic Church leaders were confronted, creating a new religious movement
6. Scientist invented telescopes and calculus, discovered planets and stars, and challenged the way we look at the natural world and astronomy
7. Authors took their works to the masses with the inventions of the printing press and the stage play
8. Majestic cathedrals were built
9. Islam spread throughout the Middle East and into Europe and Africa, making it the third largest religion in the world

Activities:

Mapping: I know, this is probably every kid's least favorite activity, but you can't study history without mapping. As I tell my kids—"If I have to map, so do you." I encourage you to invest in a historical atlas of the world. Rand-McNally has a great one that is very inexpensive, and you'll use it for years.

First we want to look at the world as a whole. [Follow this link](#) to download a blank world map you can print and label—print **two copies** of this map (you'll need one for the next activity). I want to challenge your middle school and high school students with more than just labeling the basic continents and oceans. Try to label the following on one copy of your map:

1. North America
2. South America
3. Australia
4. Asia
5. Africa
6. Europe
7. Antarctica
8. India
9. Alaska
10. New Zealand
11. Japan
12. Greenland
13. Iceland
14. England
15. Ireland
16. Madagascar
17. Arabian Peninsula
18. Caribbean Islands
19. Indonesia
20. Atlantic Ocean
21. Pacific Ocean
22. Antarctic Ocean
23. Arctic Ocean
24. Mediterranean Sea
25. Black Sea
26. Caspian Sea
27. Great Lakes Area—list their names

28. Lake Titicaca
29. Hawaiian Islands
30. Canary Islands
31. Spice Islands

Now we'll take the second map you printed and look at the world as it was in 1100.

1. Following this [link](#) to a world map of around 1100. Don't worry, we aren't going to map this one. I just wanted to give you a view of how disjointed the world was at this time. It was divided mostly by tribes or clans, each ruled by its own leader. Kings ruled small areas—not the vast empires they would eventually reign in the 1600s.
2. Follow this [link](#) to a map of Western Europe around 1100 AD. Notice how different it looks compared to today. Label these countries on your blank map. You don't have to be exact, just give a rough location. You'll refer back to this as you travel through our journey.
3. Follow this [link](#) to a map of Eastern Europe around 1100 AD. As with Western Europe, Russia is divided into Duchies—which are territories ruled by Dukes and Duchesses. Roughly label Russia.
4. If you want to use the world map to map other parts of the world, you may. During the 12th century, most of the population was centered in Europe, or at least we have the most history about those who lived in Europe. Our journey will take us beyond the traditional boundaries of the European Renaissance time to see what was happening all over the world.

Stay tuned!