Although Petrarch’s scheme was grossly unfair to the Medieval period, it outlined a way of looking at the world that most Renaissance humanists came to share.

Another great Italian humanist was Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472). Born in Florence and given a good education, at age twenty he wrote a comedy in Latin that was so completely in the classical style that many people believed it was a classical piece that had been rediscovered. Later Battisti wrote an important treatise on art that helped Renaissance painters learn how to give an impression of depth on a flat surface. Alberti was also a talented architect who worked on many churches and buildings in the classical style in Florence and Rome. Because he was a master of so many arts, Alberti was later known as a “Renaissance Man.”

Leonardo da Vinci

Perhaps the most famous “Renaissance Man” was Leonardo da Vinci. Leonardo was a painter, sculptor, architect, engineer, naturalist, and inventor. He filled notebook after notebook with sketches and notes for inventions, including a robot, a calculator, and a flying machine that looks much like a modern helicopter.

Leonardo was born in Vinci, a town in Tuscany that is near Florence. The name Leonardo da Vinci actually means “Leonardo from Vinci.” As a young man, Leonardo was apprenticed to a painter named Andrea del Verrocchio in Florence. He created a number of promising paintings during this time. Later he went to work for the duke of Milan, whom he served as an engineer and painter. It was in Milan that Leonardo began to fill many of his famous notebooks. He also painted one of his most famous paintings, The Last Supper, which shows Jesus and his apostles. Leonardo used an experimental technique for this painting, oil-tempera paint applied to dry plaster, rather than using the traditional fresco method of applying pigments to plaster while the plaster was still wet. Unfortunately the experiment was not a success, and the painting has deteriorated over the years.

Around 1500 Leonardo returned to Florence. It was there that he painted another famous masterpiece, Mona Lisa. The dreamy quality of the portrait of Mona Lisa resulted from Leonardo’s use of subtle gradations of light and shade. (For more information about Mona Lisa and The Last Supper, see the Visual Arts section, pp. 327–349.)

Leonardo was also interested in anatomy and believed that the human form, as well as animal figures, should be drawn as realistically as possible. For this reason, he studied cadavers and made numerous sketches of human anatomy in order to understand how muscles and bones work. In his last years, he was engaged with scientific studies rather than painting.

Michelangelo

Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564) was a preeminent sculptor, painter, and architect of the Renaissance. He grew up in Florence and was apprenticed to a well-known Florentine painter. As a young man, he was supported by the most powerful man in Florence, Lorenzo de’ Medici. Michelangelo was allowed to spend time in the Medici sculpture garden, which contained a number of fragments of Roman sculptures. As an adult he worked in Florence, Rome, and Bologna.
IV. The Renaissance and the Reformation

Cross-curricular Teaching Idea

Explain that Michelangelo spent four years painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Contrary to popular myth, he most likely did not paint while lying on his back on scaffolding. However, he did stand on scaffolding and had to paint overhead, often bending back to reach the ceiling. Talk about what it must have been like to do this—how tired his arm must have gotten; how the paint must have run down his arm, probably splattering onto his face. Ask students to try it out. You might do this in class, but it would probably be a better homework assignment.

Give each student a piece of drawing paper and tell them to take it home and tape it as far over their heads as they can reach. They should ask an older sibling, parent, or a caregiver to time them for 10 minutes. Then the students should try drawing with a marker or crayon—not paint—for 10 minutes straight. When the other person calls time, students should untape their pictures and write a brief paragraph describing what it was like painting, how they felt, and what they think of Michelangelo. Display their artwork on the ceiling of the class.

Among his sculptures are the following:

- His Pietà in St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. A pieta is a statue of the Virgin Mary mourning over the dead body of Jesus.
- A colossal statue of David, the young Hebrew boy who used his slingshot to defeat the hulking giant Goliath in the Old Testament. Michelangelo carved this statue from a gigantic piece of marble that another sculptor had begun working on and then abandoned.
- A statue of the Hebrew leader Moses, which he carved for the tomb of Pope Julius II. Julius II had been a supporter and patron of Michelangelo before his death.

Among his best-known frescoes are the following:

- The Creation of Adam on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. This is one of several paintings based on episodes from the book of Genesis in the Bible that Michelangelo painted in the Sistine Chapel, an important meeting place for cardinals and high church officials in Rome.
- The Last Judgment, also in the Sistine Chapel, but done many years later, in a somewhat different style. Christ is in the center passing judgment; the saved souls rise, while the damned sink down.

In addition, Michelangelo wrote poetry and worked as an architect. His most important work in architecture was the design of the great dome on St. Peter’s. (See more information about Michelangelo in the Visual Arts section, pp. 337, 339–340.)

Patrons and Patronage

It takes a lot of time and money to carve a block of marble into a statue or paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Many of the great artistic and literary achievements of the Renaissance might never have occurred if there had not been wealthy people willing to commission works and subsidize artists. Fortunately, there were a number of wealthy people in Italy who were eager to be patrons, or supporters, of the arts.

In order to understand where the great patrons of the Renaissance came from, it is important to know a little about politics and economics during the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance. At this time Italy was not a unified nation but a collection of independent city-states. Among the most important of these city-states were Venice, Florence, Rome, Milan, Genoa, Ferrara, and Naples. These city-states competed with one another, and a number of them eventually grew wealthy from trade. Ships from Italian city-states controlled much of the commerce in the Mediterranean. They transported goods back and forth from the Middle East and sold goods to the rest of Europe. (It was this Italian dominance of trade that the Portuguese and Spaniards set out to break with their voyages of exploration.) Gradually some men in these Italian city-states began to acquire large fortunes. Bankers and merchants often did especially well. Some of these wealthy men eventually emerged as patrons of the artists and humanists.

Florence and the Medici

The most famous of the patrons were the Medici [MED-uh-chee] family of Florence. Florence is located on the Arno River in central Italy. The city flourished from the 1300s to the 1700s and dominated the region. Florence was a republic and an important center of commerce and the arts. Among its trade
What do you feel looking at this work? Answers will vary.

Did Leonardo use linear perspective in the same way in both The Last Supper and Mona Lisa? Answers will vary.

**Michelangelo, The Creation of Adam (Sistine Chapel ceiling, detail) (1508–1512)**

Pope Julius II commissioned art to reflect the growing power of the Catholic Church in Rome. He hired Michelangelo (1475–1564) to paint the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican, even though the artist desperately did not want the enormous and painful task of painting the entire chapel ceiling; he was already working on Julius's tomb. The pope, papal advisors, and theologians dictated the subject matter: scenes from the Old Testament book of Genesis. In the center of the ceiling are nine rectangular panels, including The Creation of Adam. This story is told in the book of Genesis, chapter 2, verses 4b–25 of the Bible.

Michelangelo does not show God creating Adam's body, but rather the exact moment in which God will give Adam life: breath and soul. God gestures forcefully forward. Adam's arm is limp as he reclines weakly into the ground, not yet alive. Michelangelo makes clear God's power to give life to man.

Michelangelo spent over four years painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. He built enormous scaffolding and then climbed up every day to paint. He had assistants to help him, but he did not like the way they painted, and so he did most of the painting himself. There are 145 pictures on the ceiling with over 300 figures in them.

The walls of the Sistine Chapel feature paintings by other Renaissance painters, including Botticelli. For more on Michelangelo, see the World History and Geography section “The Renaissance and the Reformation,” pp. 164–188.

**Looking questions**

- Explain to students that this scene is from the book of Genesis in the Old Testament. Here, God is said to have “breathed life” into Man. Ask: What is happening between the two figures? Their hands are outstretched between Heaven and Earth, and they are about to touch.
- Who might the older figure represent, considering his age and heavenly figures around him in the sky? The figure might represent God.
- What is the contrast in energy in the forms of Man and God? Why is that? God is the life force; Man is barely alive in this instant before he is touched by God.
- How does Michelangelo draw our eyes to the two hands? He uses the silhouette of the nearly touching fingers against a light, empty background.
- In what type of building do you think this image of God creating the first man, Adam, would appear? It would probably appear in a religious building; in fact, it is in the Sistine Chapel.

**Raphael, Marriage of the Virgin (1504)**

The master painter Raphael Sanzio (1483–1520) was born in Urbino but settled in Florence. His style was influenced by the works of Leonardo and Michelangelo. He is best known for his paintings of the Virgin Mary, also known as Madonna. He did a great deal of work in the Vatican for Pope Julius II and was the chief architect of Saint Peter's Basilica under Pope Leo X.

**Teaching Idea**

Show students additional pictures of details from the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. If possible, also show a picture that shows the entire ceiling, so students can see the scope of the project. Pictures are widely available in books and online. If it’s not against your school’s policy, you can build on this assignment by reading the stories from Genesis on which the paintings are based and then asking students to discuss the paintings in light of the stories.

**Teaching Idea**

Explain that Michelangelo spent four years painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Contrary to popular myth, he most likely did not paint while lying on his back. However, he did stand on scaffolding and had to paint overhead, often bending back to reach the ceiling. Talk about what it must have been like to do this—how tired his arm must have gotten; how the paint must have run down his arm. Ask them to try it out. You might do this in class, but it would probably be a better homework assignment.

Give each student a piece of drawing paper and tell them to take it home and tape it as far over their heads as they can reach. Then the other person calls time; students should untape their pictures and write a brief paragraph describing what it was like painting, how they felt, and what they think of Michelangelo.

Display their artwork on the ceiling of the class.
I. Art of the Renaissance

Teaching Idea
With masking tape, measure the height of Saint George along a classroom wall. (The statue is 6 ft. 10 in. or 209 cm.) Have students stand next to the mark and imagine seeing the sculpture. Based on what they viewed in the reproduction, have them write about how they might feel before this mighty marble figure. How does his size and expression affect them? Have students peer-edit one another’s work for correct punctuation, spelling, grammar, and clearly expressed ideas.

Teaching Idea
Saint George’s expression is intense. His furrowed brow suggests passion and dedication. Donatello visually tells us that Saint George is the brave hero who saves the king’s daughter from the menacing dragon.

The Armorer’s Guild commissioned this work from Donatello for the Or San Michele Church. This was a guild church on the main road in Florence that had fourteen niches for sculpture. Saint George originally sat in one of the niches. A copy has since replaced it; the original is now in the National Museum of the Bargello in Florence. Different guilds commissioned different artists to represent their patron saints. Given the nature of its work, the Armorer’s Guild demanded that Saint George be depicted fully armed. Despite the limitations this imposed, Donatello imbued his Saint George with a deep expressive quality.

Students who were in Core Knowledge schools in Grade 4 should be familiar with the story of Saint George and the dragon, though you may wish to review it. At a minimum, explain that Saint George is the patron saint of England. Around the time of the First Crusade, he is said to have slain a dragon that was holding a Libyan king’s daughter captive. As his reward, he asked that the king and all his people convert to Christianity, and his request was granted.

Looking questions
• What object is the figure holding and what is he wearing? He is holding a shield and wearing armor.
• What do these items suggest about the man’s duty? The items suggest that the man is a knight or warrior.
• What does the figure’s stance indicate about his attitude towards fighting? His stance indicates that he is courageous and determined.
• What do you think his facial expression suggests? Answers will vary.
• Where do you see evidence that this warrior is a Christian knight? The sign of the crucifix is on his shield.

Michelangelo, David (c. 1501–1504)

Michelangelo referred to himself as a stonemason, believing it his foremost skill. (Notice the three-dimensional quality of his painted figures in the Sistine Chapel.)

At a mere 26 years of age, in Florence, Michelangelo carved a huge piece of marble—about 14 feet long—into a 13-foot tall statue of the biblical hero, David. Michelangelo’s figure imitates the scale and idealization of ancient Greek sculpture, which celebrated beauty, youth, balance, and harmony. Michelangelo studied the human body to see how the muscles and skin moved; thus his statue has very obvious muscles and veins. The statue is leaning on one leg, as do many of the ancient Roman sculptures that copied the Greek style.

In the Old Testament story, David is a young boy who faces the giant warrior Goliath. This story can be found in the Bible, first book of Samuel, chapter 17, verses 1–58. Why did Michelangelo depict a heroic and strapping older youth? Although the sculpture has a religious theme, it was displayed in Florence’s government center and served as a symbol of republican civic pride.

At that time, Florence was an independent city-state that had just ousted the
Medici rulers. David was originally located in the square in front of the city hall in Florence, Italy. It is now located in the Accademia delle Belle Arti in Florence, to protect it from the elements and pollution.

Students will undoubtedly notice that David is nude. Remind students that the Greeks competed in the nude during the Olympics, and many Greek and Roman statues show figures in the nude. In general, the classical civilizations were less squeamish about nudity than we are today. While medieval artworks generally avoid nudity, Renaissance painters and sculptors followed the example of the classical artists before them by depicting many figures in the nude. Not everyone is comfortable with this nudity, and there are some Renaissance paintings in which the original figures were nude and a painter of a later era painted clothing on top of the naked bodies!

We urge schools to teach the selected works, which are great works of art and have also become part of cultural literacy. However, if you, your administrators, or parents of your students are extremely uncomfortable with nudity, you may wish to substitute other works by the same artists that feature clothed figures.

Looking questions

• How did Michelangelo make the figure look real? Answers will vary, but students should note the muscles on the torso, veins on the hands, and the shifted-weight stance.

• How did Michelangelo create a sense of movement in the standing figure? The bent knee of the figure gives it a sense of movement.

• What details show the normal strain of the human body when it is twisting slightly? David’s neck muscles are standing out; his ribs aren’t level; most of his weight is on one foot.

• The Florentines were expecting the statue of a hero. Why do you think Michelangelo shows David in this pose, and not slinging a stone toward Goliath? Answers will vary. One of the reasons this statue is so striking is that this hero is perfectly composed and at ease. He is the image of confidence.

• The David is more than twice life-size and is placed on a high pedestal. How might it feel to stand at its base? It would feel overwhelming; the figure physically looms over the viewer, creating an intense mood.

• Given how David is standing and the sling over his shoulder, what do you think is on his mind? Answers will vary.

• How do the David and Donatello’s Saint George reflect the Renaissance belief that humankind could shape its own destiny? Both heroes triumphed in the face of adversity, using their own will and strength.

Filippo Brunelleschi, Dome of Florence Cathedral (1420–1436)

The Renaissance was a time of great accomplishments in art and architecture. The dome of the Florence Cathedral, built by Brunelleschi [broon-ell-ESS-key], is one of its greatest achievements. The cupola was the largest dome built since the Pantheon in Rome and the highest one ever created up to that time.

Brunelleschi was born and raised in Florence. He excelled in many fields. As