

**RENAISSANCE
FLORENCE:
POWERBROKERS AND
PATRONS: THE MEDICI
FAMILY**



RENAISSANCE FLORENCE: POWERBROKERS AND PATRONS: THE MEDICI FAMILY

Description

Through the use of various primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain how the Medici family was able to come to power in Florence, how the family's patronage of different artists and architects made Florence the very heart of the Renaissance and how the Medici family influence reached far beyond the borders of Tuscany to different countries in Europe and to the center of Christendom itself.

Subjects

World History, European History, Art

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

90 minutes

Tour Links

- Basilica of San Lorenzo, Florence
- Cosimo de Médici Monument, Florence
- Uffizi Museum, Florence
- Pitti Palace, Florence

Essential Questions

- What was the Medici family? What was their position in Renaissance Florentine society?
- How was the Medici family able to dominate Florence during the Renaissance?
- What role did the Medici family play in promoting the arts during the Italian Renaissance?
- What influences and legacies did the Medici family have outside of Tuscany?

Academic Summary

Thus Lorenzo's mode of life, his ability and good fortune, were recognized with admiration, and highly esteemed, not only by all the princes of Italy, but also by those at a great distance. Matthias, King of Hungary, gave him many proofs of his affection; the Sultan of Egypt sent ambassadors to him with precious gifts; and the Grand Turk gave up to him Bernardo Bandini, the murderer of his brother. These proofs of regard from foreign sovereigns caused Lorenzo to be looked upon with the greatest admiration by all Italy; and his reputation was daily increased by his rare ability, for he was eloquent and subtle in speech, wise in his resolves, and bold and prompt in their execution. Nor can he be charged with any vices that would stain his many virtues, though very fond of women, and delighting in the society of witty and sarcastic men, and even taking pleasure in puerile amusements – more so than would seem becoming to so great a man, so that he was often seen taking part in the childish sports of his sons and daughters. Considering, then, his fondness for pleasure, and at the same time his grave character, there seemed as it were united in him two almost incompatible natures. During his later years he was greatly afflicted with sufferings from his malady, the gout, and oppressed with intolerable pains in his stomach, which increased to that degree that he died in the month of April, 1492, in the forty-fourth year of his age. Neither Florence nor all Italy ever lost a man of higher reputation for prudence and ability, or whose loss was more deplored by his country, than Lorenzo de' Medici. And as his death was to be followed by the most ruinous consequences, Heaven gave many manifest indications of it. Amongst these was that the highest pinnacle of the church of the Santa Reparata was struck by lightning, so that a large part of the pinnacle fell to the earth, filling every one with terror and amazement. All Florence, then, as well as all the princes of Italy, lamented the death of Lorenzo; in proof of which there was not one who did not send ambassadors to Florence to express his grief at so great a loss.

Niccolo Machiavelli, History of Florence: Lorenzo de Medici, 1532

You are not only the youngest cardinal in the college, but the youngest person that ever was raised to that rank; and you ought, therefore, to be the most vigilant and unassuming, not giving others occasion to wait for you, either in the chapel, the consistory or upon deputations. You will soon get a sufficient insight into the manners of your brethren. With those of less respectable character converse not with too much intimacy; not merely on account of the circumstance in itself, but for the sake of public opinion. Converse on general topics with all. On public occasions, let your equipage and address be rather below than above mediocrity. A handsome house and a well-ordered family will be preferable to a great retinue and a splendid residence. Endeavor to live with regularity, and gradually to bring your expenses within those bounds which in a new establishment cannot perhaps be expected. Silk and jewels are not suitable for persons in your station. Your taste will be better shown in the acquisition of a few elegant remains of antiquity, or in the collecting of

handsome books, and by your attendants being learned and well-bred rather than numerous. Invite others to your house oftener than you receive invitations. Practice neither too frequently. Let your own food be plain, and take sufficient exercise, for those who wear your habit are soon liable, without great caution, to contract infirmities. The station of a cardinal is not less secure than elevated; on which account those who arrive at it too frequently become negligent; conceiving their object is attained and that they can preserve it with little trouble, This idea is often injurious to the life and character of those who entertain it. Be attentive, therefore, to your conduct, and confide in others too little rather than too much. There is one rule which I would recommend to your attention in preference to all others. Rise early in the morning. This will not only contribute to your health, but will enable you to arrange and expedite the business of the day; and as there are various duties incident to your station, such as the performance of divine service, studying, giving audience, and so forth, you will find the observance of this admonition productive of the greatest utility. Another very necessary precaution, particularly on your entrance into public life, is to deliberate every evening on what you may have to perform the following day that you may not be unprepared for whatever may happen. With respect to your speaking in the consistory, it will be most becoming for you at present to refer the matters in debate to the judgment of his holiness alleging as a reason your own youth and inexperience. You will probably be desired to intercede for the favors of the pope on particular occasions. Be cautious, however, that you trouble him not too often; for his temper leads him to be most liberal to those who weary him least with their solicitations.

Lorenzo de Medici, "Paternal Advice to a Cardinal" (letter to his 14-year-old son, Giovanni), 1491

Medici...

The very name still evokes memories of greatness, wealth and power across Europe. Three hundred years after the last Medici ruler died in the 18th century, the Medici family is still remembered for its banking prowess and its domination of Florentine politics. Today, symbols of Medici rule can be seen all over Florence. Monumental patrons of artists and architects, the Medici family was directly responsible for the birth of the Renaissance in Italy. They were involved in trade across the Mediterranean region and eventually around the world. The Medici Bank, Europe's premier banking institution in the 15th and 16th centuries, had branches across the continent, including one as far away as London (an amazing feat for an age before computers). Through Medici patronage, famous Renaissance artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and others made Florence the crucible of the Renaissance for which it is known today. Their influence even extends to the chair of St. Peter itself. Four Medici popes, Leo X, Clement VII, Pius VI and Leo XI all reigned over the Church at one point or another during the 16th century, and through its control of papal financial matters, the family was able to exert power over most of Christendom itself, especially in the days before the Reformation.

Through the use of various primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will

identify, understand and be able to explain how the Medici family was able to come to power in Florence, how the family's patronage of different artists and architects made Florence the very heart of the Renaissance and how the Medici family influence reached far beyond the borders of Tuscany to different countries in Europe and to the center of Christendom itself.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain how the Medici family was able to come to power in Florence during the late 14th and early 15th centuries.
2. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain how the family's patronage of different artists and architects made Florence the very heart of the Renaissance.
3. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain how the Medici family's influence reached far beyond the borders of Tuscany to different countries in Europe and to the center of Christendom itself.

Procedure

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: What families exercise control over American banking and politics today? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of the primary sources and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – The Medici Family (20 min)
- Videos – Medici Family (10 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the sources and articles about the Medici family (20 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of the articles for homework to prepare for class discussion.
- Suggestion: Break students into groups and assign different articles to each group.
- Group Activity – Socratic Discussion: How did the Medici family come to power in Florence? How did the family's patronage of different artists and architects make Florence the heart of the Renaissance? How did Medici family influence reach far beyond the borders of Tuscany to different countries in Europe and to the center of Christendom itself? (20 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment – Essay / DBQ: Explain in detail how the Medici family was able to come to power in Florence, how the family's patronage of different artists and architects made Florence the very heart of the Renaissance and how the Medici family influence reached far beyond the borders of Tuscany to different countries in Europe and to the center of Christendom itself.

Extension

On tour: Medici Coat of Arms - Various places around Florence and other Italian cities

While on tour, students in Florence will undoubtedly see various symbols of Medici rule, including statues, artistic representations of the family and different works of architecture. One symbol for students to look for is the Medici coat of arms, which can be found on various buildings across Florence. The coat of arms is easy to spot. It consists of six round balls (five red and one blue) in a circular pattern on a gold shield. Legends abound as to the origins of the symbol. Some say the balls represent coins (the Medici were bankers). Others say they represent oranges (representing trade). Still others say they represent dents on the shield of a famous knight from Tuscany (the Medici family claimed to have descended from such a warrior). Students with a sharp eye will also see various other symbols associated with the Medici family in Florence and across the Italian peninsula. The family's influence reached far and wide, as Medici "cousins" ended up as monarchs, regents and even popes. Eventually, monarchs from Spain, France, Austria and England could all trace a piece of their family tree to a Medici ancestor. The family's royal rule ended in 1737 when Gian Gastone de Medici died without children. His death brought to an end almost 300 years of Medici rule in Florence, and the family officially died out six years later, in 1743, when Anna Maria Luisa de Medici died. Before she passed away, the last Medici arranged for all the art and treasures collected by her family over their long rule to remain in Florence for all time, where they still can be seen today. Sixteen years after her death, the Uffizi, originally built as a set of offices by Cosimo I de Medici in the 16th century, was opened to the public.

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/lorenzomed1.asp
Paternal Advice to a Cardinal (Letter from Lorenzo de Medici to his son).
Primary source (1491) from Lorenzo to his son Giovanni (later Pope Leo X) just after the young man (aged 14) became a cardinal.
- employees.oneonta.edu/farberas/arth/Arth213/Medici_patronage.html
Medici Patronage: Magnificence and Splendor (website) From Dr. Allen Farber, Associate Professor of Art at SUNY Oneonta (NY).
- www.theflorentine.net/articles/article-view.asp?issuetocId=7605
The Medici Balls: Origins of the Family's Coat of Arms (website). From The Florentine, the English-speaking news magazine in Florence.
- www.economist.com/node/347333
Those Medici (website) – from the Economist
- www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=aa24
History of the Medici (website) – from History World
- galileo.rice.edu/gal/medici.html
The Medici Family – from the Galileo Project at Rice University
- www.slideworld.com/slideshow.aspx/The-Medici-Family-ppt-312596
The Medici Family (PowerPoint)
- sandstrange-classinfo.wikispaces.com/file/view/House+of+Medici.ppt
The House of Medici (PowerPoint)
- www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video). Great 2-minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA. Highly recommended for teachers.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=VrKD69pzzdE&list=PLJnsX9GucEmvFyCd9dR1MZkHn8fNq1QOD
The Medici: Makers of Modern Art (video). This 60-minute BBC documentary is perhaps too long for most classes, but it is worth it. Highly recommended for students and teachers, perhaps in an out-of-class setting.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=0enkNIMAPHU
Renaissance Medici Family Beginnings (video). 5-minute video (part of the PBS series, “Medici: Godfathers of the Renaissance”).

Background Information

- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medici_family
House of Medici – Wikipedia article
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medici_bank
Medici Bank – Wikipedia article
- passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/italy/Florence
On the Road: Florence – from Passports Educational Travel

- [passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/italy/florence_sightseeing](https://www.passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/italy/florence_sightseeing)
On the Road: Florence Sightseeing – from Passports Educational Travel

Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans

- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-botticelli-birth-of-venus
Renaissance Florence – Botticelli: Birth of Venus
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-brunelleschi-dome-on-the-duomo
Renaissance Florence – Brunelleschi: Dome of the Florence Duomo
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-donatello
Renaissance Florence – Donatello
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-giotto-father-of-renaissance-art
Renaissance Florence – Giotto
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-machiavelli-the-prince
Renaissance Florence – Machiavelli: The Prince
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-medici-family
Renaissance Florence – Medici Family
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-michelangelo-david
Renaissance Florence – Michelangelo: The David
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-verrocchio
Renaissance Florence -- Verrocchio
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-leonardo-overview
Renaissance Italy – Leonardo da Vinci: An Overview
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/renaissance-europe-leonardo-da-vinci-mona-lisa
Renaissance Europe – Leonardo da Vinci: Mona Lisa
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-italy-leonardo-last-supper
Renaissance Italy – Leonardo da Vinci: The Last Supper
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-rome-michelangelo-last-judgment
Renaissance Rome – Michelangelo: Last Judgment
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-rome-michelangelo-sistine-chapel-ceiling
Renaissance Rome – Michelangelo: Sistine Chapel Ceiling
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-rome-michelangelo-pieta
Renaissance Rome – Michelangelo: The Pieta
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-rome-raphael-school-of-athens
Renaissance Rome – Raphael: School of Athens

Key Terms

- Banking
- Florence
- Medici family
- Patronage
- Renaissance
- Uffizi

