

## The Renaissance

The word *Renaissance* means a rebirth, or a renewed interest in the arts and sciences. The Renaissance began in the fifteenth century in Italy. Theater was part of this rebirth. During the Renaissance, elaborately staged productions entertained the royal courts and the upper class. At the same time, forms of popular theater entertained the middle and lower classes.

The Renaissance began in Italy where theater moved indoors and designers developed better methods of lighting the stage. They also created realistic, three-dimensional scenery. The Italian stage was set within an arch. This arch, called the *proscenium*, served as a "picture frame" through which the audience viewed the beautiful scenery. Technicians invented many mechanical devices to change the scenery. For instance, a curtain was lowered during scenery changes. The new scenery was then a surprise to the audience.

Designers also provided beautiful costumes for the productions. Music, song, and dance became important parts of the theater. The elaborate productions evolved into opera.

At the same time that opera became fashionable, a type of theater known as *Commedia dell' arte* became popular with the middle and lower classes. Wandering troupes of actors and actresses performed the *Commedia* throughout the countryside. They did not use scripts, but improvised their lines as they went along. The *Commedia* troupes used the same types of characters, called *stock characters*, in each play. The more important characters included Harlequin, a clever servant who was known by his costume, which looked like a patchwork quilt. Pantalone was the foolish old man whose costume included baggy trousers. Our word *pants* comes from his name and costume.

The Renaissance spread to the other countries of Europe. Both the spectacle of the opera and the fun of the *Commedia* became part of theater throughout Europe. The French theater imitated the Italian theater. The courts of the French kings Louis XIV, Louis XV, and Louis XVI produced spectacular entertainment. At the same time, popular troupes similar to the *Commedia* performed in Paris and the countryside. Molière became the most important playwright of the French Renaissance.

In Spain, troupes performed religious dramas similar to those of the Middle Ages. The people also enjoyed popular adventure plays. Spain produced two major Renaissance playwrights, Lope de Vega and Calderon. Both wrote religious plays and adventure plays. De Vega was a soldier, explorer, sailor, and priest. Over 700 plays are attributed to him.

The Renaissance came later to England during the Elizabethan Age. It was during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I that Christopher Marlowe wrote important tragedies and Ben Jonson wrote popular comedies. However, their fame was overshadowed by the greatest English playwright of all time, William Shakespeare. Shakespeare wrote and produced about 36 comedies, tragedies, and histories. Both the royal court and the common people enjoyed his plays.



Several stock characters were used in the *Commedia dell' arte*, including Harlequin and Pantalone.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Questions for Consideration

1. What does *Renaissance* means?

2. What country was the birthplace of the Renaissance?

3. What type of scenery did the Italians develop?

4. What is the name of the arch in front of a stage?

5. Why did they lower the curtain while they changed scenery?

6. What developed out of the elaborate Italian productions?

7. What was the popular entertainment performed by wandering troupes?

8. Whose costume looked like a patchwork quilt?

9. What modern word comes from the character Pantalone's name?

10. Who was the most famous French playwright?

11. What Spanish playwright wrote over 700 plays?

12. What name is given to the English Renaissance era?

13. Who is the most famous of all English playwrights?

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**For Further Research**

The Renaissance produced many amazing men and women. Write a <sup>paragraph</sup> ~~paper~~ on one of the following Renaissance persons who worked in or enjoyed the theater of their time:

Leonardo da Vinci  
Lope de VegaMolière  
CalderonChristopher Marlowe  
King Louis XIVBen Jonson  
Queen Elizabeth**Matching**

Match the following people and characters with the countries in which they were first noted:

- |                              |            |
|------------------------------|------------|
| _____ 1. Molière             | A. England |
| _____ 2. Lope De Vega        |            |
| _____ 3. William Shakespeare | B. France  |
| _____ 4. Calderon            |            |
| _____ 5. Ben Jonson          | C. Germany |
| _____ 6. Harlequin           |            |
| _____ 7. King Louis XIV      | D. Italy   |
| _____ 8. Leonardo da Vinci   |            |
| _____ 9. Queen Elizabeth I   | E. Spain   |
| _____ 10. Pantalone          |            |

**An Art Activity** (Optional)

Look at pictures of theaters in an encyclopedia or in other books. Then make either a drawing or a model of one of the following:

Shakespeare's Globe

A French court or Molière's theater

An Italian Renaissance theater—can you also show the proscenium arch and three-dimensional scenery?

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Word Search Puzzle**

Find the words listed below and circle them in the puzzle. The words may be printed forward or backward, horizontally, vertically, or diagonally.

W A Y J W R E B I R T H H Q I K D E I V  
 L T X E O J L P T G D J T G Y J Q F G J  
 U H S N P R U D F F J S O H K Z Z N K S  
 W R F O E E V S S X U H D N H U I Z J S  
 M E L L R T X R P S H L M U S T F B U R  
 K E I A A A N Y F A S S I G H O E C X J  
 W D V T K E O I R N Z M O G V Q N A S T  
 D I E N K H O D U B Y U I N I A T R U C  
 W M C A E T K M Y Q Q L Y B E P Q Z D J  
 Y E N P L R V Q T R E T V F M R D R E W  
 R N A U A A Z C X G B L V S A O E G L S  
 E S S B B L C H A Y M I R W K S V B I G  
 N I S W O U M T E R O W A A S C E G Z M  
 E O I J R P S S Z Z L Z J H H E G P A B  
 C N A P A O R W J N I T X Q C N A A B X  
 S A N B T P M A I D E M M O C I M Q E B  
 Q L E E E T X B M A R L O W E U C Q T M  
 D N R N A K L P H R E A N P U M X O H E  
 B Y D C A L D E R O N M Z S Z W J Q A G  
 Y D X Y T S H A K E S P E A R E F W N P

**WORD LIST**

Calderon  
 De Vega  
 Harlequin  
 Molière  
 popular theater  
 Renaissance  
 stage lighting

Commedia  
 elaborate  
 Jonson  
 opera  
 proscenium  
 scenery  
 three dimensional

curtain  
 Elizabethan  
 Marlowe  
 Pantalone  
 rebirth  
 Shakespeare