Florence Video Notes
Florence: Birth Place of the Renaissance

• Located in central Italy, near the Arno River
• 3 bridges cross the river, Ponte Vecchio is the most colorful
• Many squares with stone buildings and sculptures form outdoor museums
• Foothills surround the town
• City was founded on a field of flowers, the city’s emblem is the lily or iris
• Florence means “The Flowering”
• Renaissance = Rebirth of Western classical heritage

Florence was founded in 200BC as an outpost for the Etruscans. A colony is established here in the middle of the 1st century BC for veterans of Julius Caesar's campaigns. It is referred to a few years later as Colonia Florentina - the flourishing colony due to the rapidly growing success with agriculture and commerce.

- Piazza della Republica is the heart of the city.
- With the fall of Rome around 410AD, feudalism takes root to protect the people.
- Roads fall into disrepair, trade becomes limited and travel dangerous
- Peasants, warriors and priest grow to depend on Lords and the Church to protect them.
- The stability of the Church preserves culture and civilization in Florence.
- Monks begin to teach about wool and it develops as a local industry.
- Valley setting is less protected but perfect for industry and trade.

Workers organize into guilds. The guilds become very powerful and grow to have great political power and influence.

- There are seven major guilds: silk, bankers, notaries, druggest and wool workers
- One of the most powerful guilds is wool workers
- Other industries form the lesser guilds: ex. baker, carpenter, shop-keeper, etc
- Each guild has their own banner

City grows quickly through trade and becomes a free commune or self-governing city. The city is controlled by consuls, chosen individuals from the upper class families.

- Jealousy and feuds develop
- Cities fight each other: Pisa and Lucca fight Florence to gain control over trade routes via the sea and the mountains
- Two opposing political factions divide Florence
  - Guelphs: Supporters of the papacy (Church), their buildings use square battlements
  - Ghibellines: Partisans of the German Emperor, their buildings use fish-tale battlements

Homes become tall towers due to lack of space and war. They become fortresses during times of war. Walls surround suburbs. Homes were small and dark so shops are out on the streets to be amongst the people.
Merchants become bankers and at the beginning of the 16th century Florence is the banking center of the Western world. Trade flourishes. Florence becomes rich and during the 13th and 14th century experiences a building boom.

- Marble strips decorate the buildings in a style that will become known as the “Florentine Style”
- 1296 Santa Maria del Fiore cathedral is begun, it was considered “the greatest example of faith, power and civic pride”
- Palazzo Vecchio housed executive officials
- Convents established to look over the city
- Fresco paintings decorate church walls and are considered the “Bible of the Poor”

Artist were initially brought in from outside of Italy to decorate churches but local artist begin to emerge and influence local art and ideas.

- Renaissance thought emerges with Petrarch
- Black Death kills half of the population of Florence and draws people’s attention to the world around them
- Education becomes universal, focusing on a “Classical Education”
- Rich begin to build country villas and palaces which contain art and other great works

The wealthy believe in civic patronage, giving back to the people as an act of appreciation to God for their successes.

- Commission many community works
- The rich sponsor music, festivals and competitions surrounding art and involve the public

Artist began apprenticeships at 6-12 years old. Brunelleschi and Donatello bring classic styles back from Rome. The arts of architecture, sculpture and painting begin to embrace these “new” ideas and innovations. The use of color and perspective change the style further.

The Medici family is the greatest patrons of the arts. Two queens and two popes would also emerge from the Medici family line. The family provides Florence with numerous public works.

- Giovanni: Ospedale degli Innocenti (hospital)
- Cosimo (the Elder): Arts flourish, he offered refuge to Byzantine scholars fleeing the sack of Constantinople, established a public library, created an art museum, embellished churches, monasteries and had the Palazzo Medici Riccardi built
- Lorenzo: The Medici family reached its height, brought beauty, dignity and peace to Florence. After his death, Florence begins to decline.

Savonarola, a prior from a convent in Florence, takes control of the city in 1491 and establishes a republic. He acts as dictator and speaks out against decadence and luxury, encouraging puritanical practices.

Florence does not recover its former glory despite the Medici family’s return to power. In 1537 Grand Duke Cosimo restores some of Florence’s culture. Subsequent family members continue to make progress but the family line is running out. In 1737, with no male heirs left, the last of the Medici line gifts all art owned by the family to the city.