



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1986 Volume III: Topics in Western Civilization: Ideals of Community and the Development of Urban Life,
1250-1700

The Ideas and Ideals of Man, From the Renaissance to the Reformation

Guide for Curriculum Unit 86.03.04
by Peter N. Herndon

This unit is intended to be a 10-15 day inquiry into the streams of thought which fed the Renaissance and resulted in a “rebirth” of learning and civilization in the arts, literature and lifestyles. Students will be encouraged to understand the conflicts which existed in the men and women of the Renaissance which can still be experienced and felt today. This study of the ideas expressed in the Renaissance will, it is hoped, challenge the student to take a stand on issues representative of these changing times. What is “success? Is morality based on absolute or “relative” standards? What constitutes a “right” decision? The Renaissance was a time for individual achievement and accomplishments. What can a person do that will be admired and remembered in the minds of others? Is reputation-building something worth thinking about and taking action toward?

The second part of the course will examine the causes for the Protestant Reformation within the setting of Humanistic demands for reform within the Catholic Church. What were the challenges to the authority of the Church and how did the Church treat these upheavals? In our study of the ideas and individuals who effected change during the Reformation period we consider the Christian humanist Erasmus, and the man whose program for reform turned into a movement which broke western Christianity into two different factions, Catholic and Protestant. To what extent was Luther a man of the times, and to what extent did he shape his times? Included are lessons that will help the teacher conduct a mock trial as Luther appeared before the Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Worms in 1521. Would Luther bow before the Imperial authorities or would he maintain his teachings for which he had already been excommunicated by Pope Leo? Would he risk death just for the sake of conscience and personal convictions? How does this man’s personal courage speak to us today? What beliefs do we have worth risking our lives for?

This unit is designed to get students to think about ideas in relationship to themselves and the culture in which we live today. A set of slides is included in this unit, depicting artistic expression of the Renaissance and the Reformation

(Recommended for Western Civilization and Advanced Western Civilization classes, grade 9)

Key Words

Reformation European History Renaissance General

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