The Renaissance: Past & Present

NCSS Thematic Strand: Time, continuity & change
Class periods: 3-45 minute periods
Grade level: 7

Background/Context:

Prior to the Renaissance was a time period called the Middle Ages. During the Middle Ages the plague caused the population to decrease significantly, which in turn caused the continent to fall into an economic depression. As the incidence of the plague decreased, the population grew, and a new middle class emerged as bankers, merchants, and tradespeople, and the market grew. As this new market brought more goods, the economy began to grow.

The Renaissance began in Italy in the 14th century and spread throughout Europe. It lasted into the 16th century. Renaissance means rebirth, renewal, or rediscovery, not only intellectually, but also economically This Renaissance in Italy was a renewed interest in the Italian ancient culture. It included a rediscovery of Greek and Roman art and literature, an important aspect of this time period. It allowed artists, writers, and inventors to work on their craft without the worry of money due to patrons. A patron was a person who supported the artist and patronage grew as the upper and middle classes grew.

Navigation and trade began to improve during the Renaissance. Maps became more reliable, and cartographers began to use information from travelers and explorers in their work. As navigation improved, so did shipbuilding and sails were used more than men rowing with oars. With the improvement of shipbuilding and navigation, trade by water became more popular. Sailors could travel further and with greater accuracy.

As the Renaissance emerged, so did the Renaissance Man. Traditionally, a Renaissance Man is an expert in many different fields of study. The Renaissance introduced men like Sir Thomas Moore and Leonardo da Vinci. Sir Thomas Moore was an Englishman most known for his book, Utopia. He believed that girls should be educated and at least taught to read. Leonardo da Vinci is known most for his painting, but he also designed the first hang glider.

As we study history, we find more and more Renaissance people. Benjamin Franklin was not only a scientist, he was also a writer and inventor. Albert Einstein was a scientist, mathematician, educator, and violinist. Both were creative, out-of-the-box thinkers, who went a step beyond the majority. Today we have Renaissance people like Steve Jobs. At the time of his death, he held 313 patents. He was most known for his work at Apple. Within Apple he revolutionized computing, communication, animation, and business.

Objectives
Students will:
- ❖ Define Renaissance
- ❖ Understand and explain the Italian Renaissance and its importance and impact on the world
- ❖ Define and identify Renaissance people of the past and present
- ❖ Brainstorm and identify areas of culture and society that could, have or are experiencing a renaissance
- ❖ Identify the next area of society/culture that is due for a change and create and justify the product that will take that area to the next level

Procedures
Day 1

Procedure 1:
The class should take notes on the history of the Renaissance and what renaissance means. Use the background section of this lesson as a script. Be sure to address:
- ❖ What does renaissance mean
- ❖ History of the Renaissance
- ❖ Economy
- ❖ Travel and Trade
- ❖ Stop at Renaissance people

Procedure 2:
Ask the class:
- ❖ Who is Leonardo da Vinci?
- ❖ What is he known for?
- ❖ Who was Shakespeare?
- ❖ What was he known for?

Show video of Renaissance men from Youtube. Ask students: what do all of these Renaissance people have in common?
- ❖ How was Benjamin Franklin a renaissance man?
- ❖ How was Albert Einstein a renaissance man?
- ❖ Who was Steve Jobs? How was he a renaissance man?

Day 2

Procedure 1:

Review:
- ❖ What does renaissance mean?
- ❖ Who is a Renaissance man?
- ❖ Who were some of the Renaissance men we talked about?

Procedure 2:

Ask for questions and clarify anything that was unclear about the previous day.

Procedure 3:

As a class brainstorm areas of society and culture that have or could see a renaissance. Record student answers on the board and have students write them down in their notebooks. Some ideas include: medicine, transportation, farming, engineering, education, fashion, sports, art, and architecture.

Procedure 4:

Split the class into groups of 3-4. In groups students should continue to brainstorm, but about possible products that could take any of these areas of culture or society to the "next level." The product should be realistic.

Procedure 5:

Assign homework. Pass out blank, legal sized paper. Ask the class to come to class the next day with a preliminary sketch of a product idea.

Day 3

Procedure 1:

Have students get back into groups from previous day. Instruct students to present their sketches and constructively critique each idea.

Procedure 2:

Direct students to think about presentation: color, details, labeling, creative naming, and written explanation of what the product is, why it's special and what it will do.

Procedure 3:

Work on project.

Assessment:

Assess students' products based on presentation directions in day 3, procedure 2.

Extension:

Students can create posters of modern day Renaissance people.

Resources:

http://www.learner.org/interactives/renaissance/index.html