

A photograph of a wooden table with a glass of red wine, a book, and a pen, with the text "SOCIAL CONTEXT" overlaid in white.

# SOCIAL CONTEXT

# SOCIETY

- Renaissance is the French word for rebirth. It is the time of change that happened in Europe between the 14th and 16th centuries.

It was an age of growth in Europe. New, powerful city states emerged. A new middle class had more and more money to spend. Great artists, writers and thinkers lived during this time.

# THE PLAGUE

- Between the middle and the end of the 14th century, the plague, also called “Black Death” killed almost half of Europe’s population. It spread most rapidly in the larger cities where many people lived.

This led to economic depression. Merchants and traders had fewer people to sell their goods to, so they lost a lot of money.

# THE NEW MIDDLE CLASS

- When the plague slowly decreased in the 15th century, the population in Europe began to grow. A new middle class emerged —bankers, merchants and tradespeople had a new market for their services.
- People became wealthier and had more than enough money to spend. They began to build larger houses, buy more expensive clothes and get interested in art and literature.
- The middle class population also had more free

# PRINTING

- In 1445 the German Gutenberg invented the printing press. He changed the lives of millions of people throughout Europe. For the first time, bookmaking became cheap and Gutenberg was able to print many books very quickly.
- In the Renaissance the middle classes had the money to buy books but they wanted books that they could read in their own language. A publishing boom broke out and buying and selling books began to prosper in many

# HUMANISM

- The printing of books led to a new way of thinking. Scholars of the Renaissance returned to the writings of Greek and Roman philosophers. These writings are called the “classics”. More and more scholars learned to read Greek and Latin and studied old manuscripts on topics like science, art and life.
- During the Middle Ages people were guided by the church, which was against wealth, trading goods and other worldly interests. Humanists,



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