

Decision Making in World History

# Renaissance through Scientific Revolution

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# INTRODUCTION

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## OVERVIEW

There are six lessons in this volume on Renaissance history: Renaissance Florence, pre-Columbian American societies, the Reformation, Philip II, Tokugawa Japan, and the scientific revolution. As in the other volumes, no effort is made to cover all the major topics in this time period. Rather, lessons were chosen around interesting decision-making problems.

## THE *DECISION MAKING IN WORLD HISTORY* SERIES

The lessons in *Decision Making in World History* are meant to be used independently within a standard world history course in middle school, high school, or college. The teacher should decide when to use a decision-making lesson. There are several volumes in the series, listed on the back cover of the book. The lessons in this series have four main goals:

1. **Make History More Interesting.** Simply giving students the problems, having them make decisions, and then telling them what the people involved actually did will keep student interest high. It is exciting to make decisions before you know what the historical characters actually did. It is dynamic, open-ended learning. Students enjoy comparing their decisions to those of their classmates and to the decisions actually made by the historical characters. Even if you decide to use the lessons without giving instruction on how to perform the skills involved in decision making, students will still enjoy learning history this way.

This increased interest should also lead to increased reading comprehension. After all, when students read their texts, they will be actively searching for what actually happened and how it compared to what they chose.

2. **Improve Decision Making through Experience.** The primary way people learn to make better decisions is by making them, both good and bad. Students therefore become more sophisticated decision makers with every positive or negative outcome of their choices, especially the surprising ones. By giving students many chances to make decisions, we are giving them the chance to learn from mistakes and surprises, and as a result we can speed up the process of making them savvy decision makers. For example, students who decide to have a foreign government overthrown and then see many negative consequences will think twice before trying that again, and will be skeptical of such a plan if proposed in the present day. Experience itself becomes the teacher.
3. **Develop More Complex Ethical Thinking.** Ethical questions will arise regularly, and by discussing their positions students will develop more complex moral arguments and understandings. Please note, however, that these lessons are not aimed primarily at ethical reasoning. Teachers who want to focus primarily on those types of lessons should consult *Reasoning with Democratic Values* by Alan Lockwood and David Harris (New York: Teacher's College Press, 1985).

4. **Improve the Use of Decision-Making Skills and Reflection on Those Skills.** As much as students can improve their decision making through experience, they will develop those skills that much more if they learn specific subskills, which can then become guidelines for thinking through decision-making problems more carefully. The instruction in these books is based on the skills of the **P-A-G-E** model. The specific elements of **P-A-G-E** are described in the section “Guide to Thoughtful Decision Making,” and the strategies for teaching those skills are explained in the section “P-A-G-E Explanations and Examples.”

One of the teaching strategies emphasizes journal writing, whereby students reflect on the problems they encounter, including how they could improve their own decision making. Teachers who succeed in getting students to reflect on how to improve on the decisions they just made will help them learn to be more reflective in general. Ideally, we want to train our future citizens to approach decision-making problems by asking insightful questions, carefully probing for underlying problems, seeing the problem from a variety of perspectives, setting clear and realistic goals, and imagining consequences.

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Before you take a closer look at the lesson components, take a moment to consider the following tips. It is best to use these lessons:

1. **Before students read about or study the topics.** If students read about the topics before they do the problems in each lesson, they may know which options worked well or poorly. That will spoil the whole decision-making experience!
2. **Individually.** These are stand-alone lessons. They are meant to be plugged into your world history curriculum wherever you see fit. They are not intended as part of a sequence.
3. **Flexibly.** Each lesson can be used either as a quick introduction to a historical topic or unit or, alternatively, as a lengthier in-depth study of the topic.
4. **To teach skills as well as history content.** These lessons focus on real, historical problems and are often accompanied by pages of historical context; as such, they provide both challenges to students’ decision-making skills and the historical backdrop that will allow them to understand those situations.

## LESSON COMPONENTS

Each lesson includes the following:

1. **Introduction.** The first section of each lesson includes an overview of the topic, defines content vocabulary, and identifies the decision-making skills emphasized in the lesson.
2. **Lesson plan.** The main part of each lesson offers suggestions for how to use the handouts, how to focus on decision-making skills, how to connect the decision problem to the

larger historical context, how to use video and other supplementary sources, and how to troubleshoot problems should any arise.

3. **Teacher notes.** This section includes notes for expanding discussion, along with information about outcomes (versions for students are also provided—see item 6 below), references to historians, interpretations of the topic, decision-making analysis, and in some lessons suggestions for further research.
4. **Sources.** This section includes the specific publications and other sources of information used in the lesson.
5. **Problem(s).** Each lesson includes reproducible handouts used by students to read and analyze the problem, including a vocabulary list of relevant terms and concepts.
6. **Historical outcome of the problem.** In this section, students can read about what people in history actually did to solve the problem(s), along with the consequences of their decisions.
7. **Primary sources and visuals.** These resources are integrated into several of the lessons themselves, not included merely as window dressing.

Each individual decision-making challenge is referred to as a “problem.” Some lessons have one problem to challenge students, while others contain numerous problems. The basic format of each lesson is problem, decision, outcome, discussion. The handouts for each lesson are designed to be photocopied or scanned, the teacher selecting which parts of handouts to use to advance the lesson.

While decision making is the main focus of the books, historical content is also very important. These lessons emphasize real historical problems that convey powerful lessons about world history—issues concerning taxation, regulation of business or individuals, welfare, war, and so forth. In addition, the problems are not all approached from the perspective of political leaders; many problems ask students to take the perspective of ordinary people. Including problems from the perspective of ordinary people prepares students for their roles as citizens in a democracy and encourages empathy for unfamiliar groups.

Most of the problems are brief—some as short as one paragraph. They could be used as class warm-ups that last no more than ten minutes. Even the short problems, however, can be quite complex and can draw forth some sophisticated analyses. You are the best judge of how much analysis should be included for each problem and for how long to run each problem and discussion.

On the other hand, some problems are obviously more complicated. These problems deal with crucial turning points in world history. For these problems, students will almost certainly need more background information before making decisions, and analysis of these problems could take several class periods. These more involved problems could form the basis for an entire unit of study. The second lesson in the book, for example, could serve as an organizing device for investigating pre-Columbian civilizations (Aztecs, Inca, and Maya).

# LESSON 1: RENAISSANCE FLORENCE

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## Teacher's Guide

### INTRODUCTION

#### ■ Overview

Florence was at the center of the Italian Renaissance. In this lesson, students make decisions as two of the leaders of Florence, Cosimo and Lorenzo de' Medici. In the process, students will see some of the issues facing leaders during the Renaissance and some of the values held by people at the time.

#### ■ Vocabulary

- city-state—a city with its own independent government, its own army, and its own territory
- Cosimo de' Medici—a political, economic, and social leader of Florence during the Renaissance
- humanism—a philosophy emphasizing human, rather than divine, matters
- Lorenzo de' Medici—a leader in Florence and the grandson of Cosimo de' Medici
- Niccolò Machiavelli—writer of *The Prince*, which gives advice to political leaders
- oligarchy—rule by a few select people
- patron—a person who gives financial or other support to a person or activity
- Renaissance man—a person with talents in many areas
- republic—political rule shared by the people through their elected representatives

#### ■ Decision-Making Skills Emphasized

- Identify underlying problems
- Consider other points of view
- Identify assumptions
- Establish realistic goals
- Predict unintended consequences



## LESSON PLAN A: IN-DEPTH LESSON (40–50 minutes)

### ■ Procedure

Tell the class that in this lesson they are going to make some important decisions as two leaders of Renaissance Florence. They will not know what actually happened until *after* they make the decisions themselves.

Distribute Handout 1 (from the perspective of Cosimo de' Medici), and have students read the problem. If necessary, review the situation and the ten choices. Is there any vocabulary that students do not understand? Are there any other questions? Have students individually decide what they will do. Remind them that they can only choose four options for spending their money, from A to J. If you use the **P-A-G-E** sheet for making decisions, encourage students to refer to that sheet to remind themselves of the decision-making criteria before deciding.

After students have chosen their option(s), have students pair up and discuss their choices. The students in each pair do not have to agree; they are exchanging views in order to help them think through the problem more deeply. Circulate through the room to answer questions and clear up misunderstandings. Bring the class back together, conduct a preliminary vote on the problem, and discuss reasons for and against each proposal. You might want to have students look once again at the **P-A-G-E** sheet as they make their arguments. Have them explain why they would include some items but not others. Use the board to record student votes and arguments. Because some students may have changed their thinking, have the class revote.

Repeat this procedure for Handout 2 (from the perspective of Lorenzo de' Medici). Review the situation, the four problems, and their respective choices. Is there any vocabulary that students do not understand? Are there any other questions? Have students individually decide what they will do.

When the problems in Handouts 1 and 2 have been discussed and voted on, distribute the outcomes in Handouts 3 and 4. Have students read the results in Handout 3 and comment on the similarities and differences between the items chosen by Cosimo de' Medici and those chosen by the students. What do the choices reveal about what the Medicis valued?

Next, tell students to read the results in Handout 4 and answer the questions for analysis at the end of the sheet.

### Questions for Analysis Possible Answers

1. Evaluate the decisions made by Cosimo and Lorenzo de' Medici. How well did they do on their decisions?

*The choices by Cosimo in Handout 3 are strictly a matter of values, not subject to what happened in the outcomes. Answers will vary for the choices outlined in Handout 4 for Lorenzo.*

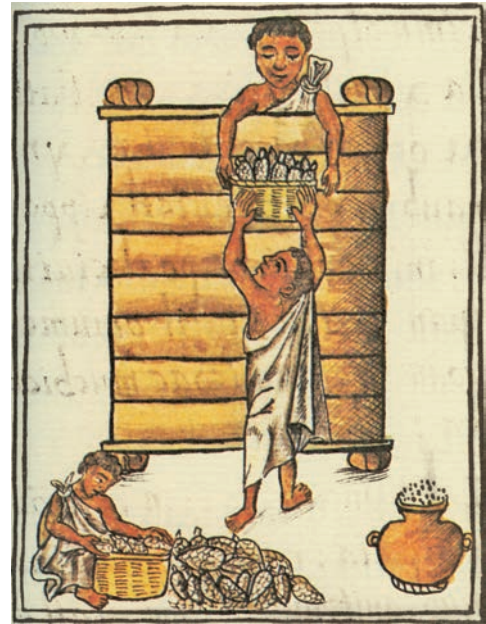
2. Evaluate your decisions on these problems. On what did you do well or poorly in terms of decision making?

*Answers will vary.*

These people built aqueducts to bring clean water to their great city, and they built a dike (a wall) to prevent flooding. The city is also extremely clean, with each neighborhood responsible for keeping its area spotless and sanitary.

The empire is ruled by a king, who is also a religious and military leader. Warriors from this kingdom regularly attack other people and expand the size of the empire. Taxes are moderate (much lower than Society C). The kingdom collects food and other resources, called tribute, from conquered cities. Crime is punished severely. Many crimes, including theft and wearing the wrong clothes, are punished by torture and death. Despite the severe punishments, there is a high level of crime, including theft and murder.

There are many social classes, with the nobles at the top, followed by warriors, and then common people (such as merchants, farmers, and slaves) at the bottom. Nobles dress in fine clothes, live in large houses with courtyards, and host large feasts to show their wealth and high position in society. Commoners, including rich merchants, are not allowed to dress in fine clothes or to wear the sandals that nobles wear. Most common people live in huts. People meet to trade at markets in all the villages and cities, using cocoa beans for money.



Storing corn to prevent starvation



A warrior

Warriors are heroes in this society. Boys are trained in the skills of fighting, such as spear throwing and sword fighting with their sharp wooden swords. To become a warrior, a young man has to capture a fighter from another society and bring him back to be executed. Only then can a man marry. Each neighborhood has its war heroes, similar to sports heroes in many cities today.

These people are great engineers, as shown by their dikes to control flooding, their canals, and their great religious temples. They are advanced in spinning and weaving cloth, and can make complex, colorful patterns for their clothes. On the other hand, they lack the wheel, the plow for farming, and iron for metal tools. Without the wheel and without donkeys or horses, everything has to be carried by people over dirt roads. These people also do not have a written alphabet or language. There is no formal education and no one can read or write. Instead, parents and relatives teach children the traditions of society and the skills of working.



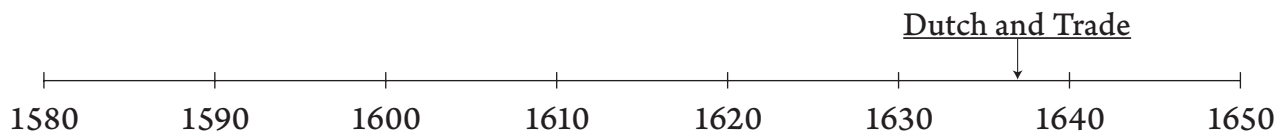
A temple to the gods

Religion is central to everyone's life, from the king to the lowest servant. They all ask priests to prophesy (foretell) the future before making decisions. The religion is focused on suffering and sadness on earth. People pray and fast so the gods will give them favorable sunlight and rain. Human sacrifice is thought to be much more effective than prayer in gaining the favor of the gods. These people sacrifice humans in their temples. The victim is stabbed and cut open so the priest can pull out and hold up the still beating heart to the gods.

Human sacrifice is constant in this society, reaching perhaps more than ten thousand people killed per year. When one temple was completed, twenty thousand people were sacrificed. Almost all the victims are captives from outside the empire.

People in this society value religion, competition, cleanliness, military power, traditions, and community (clans/neighborhoods). Clans (extended families) are very important, with local warrior heroes increasing local pride. Clan members keep local areas clean, help raise children, meet at local markets, and weave together. Local visitors drop into people's houses all the time to talk and gossip. People are expected to always welcome visitors. Men are warriors and are involved in public affairs, such as government or craft work. Women's role is in the home, spinning and weaving cloth and doing other chores. All marriages are arranged by the parents or government officials. Young people do not choose their spouses.

# DUTCH POINT OF VIEW



The year is 1637, and you are the head of the Dutch East India Company.

## ■ Trade Conditions

The Japanese government has expelled the Portuguese, while other European countries are not trading with Japan for several other reasons. That situation leaves the Dutch as the only European country that is trading with Japan. That is good news for your company, which will control all that trade. The Dutch East India Company is already large, as shown in the visual below, and has trading ports in Africa, India, and Southeast Asia. Trading with Japan could open those markets for even more trade.

There are conditions though. First, the trade will take place only through one port, and the ships will come to that port only once a year for a couple of months. Second, the Dutch traders will be restricted to a small island in the port. They will not be allowed to leave the island. Third, the Dutch are not to bring any signs of Christianity with them—no Christian Bibles, crosses, or any other symbols of Christianity. Dutch officials will be required to engage in anti-Christian demonstrations, including publicly stepping on crosses or religious icons. Fourth, every year the leaders from the island are required to travel to Edo, the capital city, to bow down before the shogun, showing him to be the ultimate authority. There is no negotiating with the Japanese on these conditions. If you want to trade, you have to do these things.



A Dutch East India Company shipyard and warehouse