Once upon a time, there was a family in Florence, Italy. They began as merchants and morphed into bankers. They owned the biggest bank in Europe. They were the richest family in Europe. They were richer than princes.

**Lorenzo the Magnificent**

Beginning in 1400, the Medici family ruled the city of Florence for 300 years. Lorenzo the Magnificent was the most famous member of the family. Talented and ambitious, he ruled the city around 1492 and made it the most powerful city-state in Italy.

Florence was a republic; it had no king. But the merchants lived like kings. The 800 wealthiest families lived in palaces - all designed by Renaissance architects. In a certain sense, they recreated the glory that was ancient Greece and Rome.

**Florence, birthplace of the Renaissance**

Some of the world’s greatest art was created there.

When Dante wrote *The Divine Comedy*, he put Florence’s politicians in “Dante’s Inferno.” When Boccaccio wrote *The Decameron*, he described bawdy life in the city of 100,000. When Machiavelli wrote *The Prince*, he modeled his book on Lorenzo the Magnificent.

When Giotto created frescoes (paintings on damp plaster), he did so on church walls in Florence. When Michelangelo sculpted *David*, that statue became the city’s symbol. When Leonardo da Vinci painted *Mona Lisa*, she was the wife of a merchant in Florence. When Brunelleschi created domes, he built the Cathedral of Florence.

And when Galileo studied astronomy, his telescope was aimed at the stars above Florence.

**Predict:**

What did the Medici family have to do with the Renaissance?

They financed it!

The Medici family financed the Renaissance. Of course, the Catholic church did, too. But the Medici family was there first and fast to finance artists. They were bankers. As patrons of the arts, the Medici sponsored all the major painters, sculptors, and architects. Lorenzo the Magnificent financed Michelangelo. The Medicis loved their city. They wanted it to be the center of the greatest art in world history.
Once upon a time, a boy named Giotto was born poor in Florence, Italy. His father was a shepherd.

One day, according to legend, the 12-year-old boy was out in the meadow guarding his sheep. Using chalk, he was busy drawing a picture on a flat rock. A famous painter strolling by spotted the boy’s talent and took him on as an apprentice.

A revolutionary artist
When it came to painting, Giotto was revolutionary. During the Middle Ages, artists painted people in a flat, unrealistic style. Giotto was more realistic.

First, he painted individuals as being natural and lifelike. Second, he painted with depth, using light and shadow. Third, he painted with deep human emotion and dramatic force.

Later, Giotto became the chief architect of the Cathedral of Florence. And a painter of frescoes - that is, he painted on walls of damp plaster. That was stressful work: he had to paint fast - before the plaster dried!

Giotto was short and homely, but a great wit. He had to be - for his best friends were Dante and Boccaccio. Both authors praised him in their books.

And Giotto was a practical joker. Once, the pope sent for a sample of his work. Giotto grinned, dipped his brush in red paint, and drew a perfect circle freehand. Hence the phrase “Giotto’s O.”
Once upon a time, a boy named Filippo lived in Florence, Italy. His last name was Brunelleschi.

**First he revolutionized painting**
He loved math, especially geometry, by inventing linear perspective - a way to show depth on a flat surface.

Brunelleschi was a three-dimensional guy. He tried sculpture and finally settled on architecture.

**Then he revolutionized architecture**
In 1401, a competition was held in Florence. A cathedral needed a set of bronze doors. Brunelleschi, the runner-up, was furious.

Disgusted, Brunelleschi and his best friend Donatello headed for Rome. There, they studied classical architecture built by the ancient Romans. Working with wheels, gears and weights, Brunelleschi focused on building construction.

In 1418, another competition was held in Florence. This time, the cathedral needed a new roof. Brunelleschi’s revolutionary design won the contest. His roof required heavy-duty engineering and hydraulic machinery. His roof was built without supports: no scaffolds, columns, or arches.

Predict:
What type of roof did Brunelleschi pop on top of the cathedral?

A dome!
A dome is like a bowl turned upside down.

Brunelleschi’s dome revolutionized Renaissance architecture. And building it took most of his life. It was no easy feat raising the construction materials.

He also built the dome for the Basilica of St. Lawrence in Florence. It was the home church of the Medici family.

Famous domes
In Western architecture, the most influential domes built since the Renaissance are: St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome, St. Paul's Cathedral in London, and the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C.

p.s.
Not everything went swimmingly for Brunelleschi. He built a monster of a ship to transport marble up the Arno River to Florence. The ship - loaded with marble - sank on its first voyage. When he nearly went bankrupt, he was rescued by the Medici family. They hired him to build more churches, chapels, and palaces.

Special thanks to Brian Childers
Once upon a time, a boy was born in Florence, Italy. His name was Donatello.

**St. George slays the dragon**
Unlike medieval sculptors, Donatello gave individual personalities to his statues. In his marble statue of St. George, the hero who slays the dragon is proud, youthful, and self-confident.

Donatello’s statues are always expressive. They express their emotions by a scowl, a stare, a wondering gaze. Or by the slightest gesture.

**David slays Goliath**
Unlike medieval sculptors, Donatello made a serious study of anatomy. In 1430, he sculpted his masterpiece - the bronze statue, David. It was the first free-standing nude statue since the days of ancient Greece and Rome. It was the first major work of Renaissance sculpture. And it was first displayed in Florence at the wedding of Lorenzo the Magnificent, where it dominated the courtyard of the Medici palace.

An equestrian statue
In 1443, Donatello created a controversy. He was commissioned to create a colossal statue of a famous ruler in Venice. It was an equestrian statue - an historical figure on horseback. No equestrian statue had been created since the days of the Roman empire. And equestrian statues were reserved for the rulers of Rome.

This single statue launched all the equestrian monuments since. From then on, every European ruler wanted a similar statue with his own face infused with intellectual power and Roman nobility.

Predict:
Which was Donatello’s most famous sculpture?

**David!**
It was the first free-standing nude statue of the Renaissance. It created a sensation when it was first displayed.

Unlike the medieval knight, David is wearing no armor. In fact, he is wearing nothing at all - except a floppy hat and a pair of boots. With an enigmatic smile, he stands holding a gigantic sword, his foot resting on Goliath's severed head. David is so small and slight it is difficult to imagine him slaying a giant.

Donatello’s intention? To show that David could only have done the deed with the help of God.
Once upon a time, there was a handsome boy named Leonardo. He was born in the village of Vinci - just outside of Florence. His mom was a peasant. He was raised by his dad, a wealthy notary (legal specialist).

At 13, Leonardo da Vinci moved into the city of Florence. At 14, he was apprenticed to Verrocchio, the leading painter and sculptor of his day. Every day, the two worked together on the same painting. One morning, when Verrocchio took a peek at Leonardo's latest addition, he was thunderstruck - and resolved never to touch a paint brush again. The student had outshone the master.

The Last Supper
At 30, Leonardo moved to Milan to work as court artist for Lodovico Sforza, the Duke of Milan. For 17 years, the duke allowed Leonardo to pursue any project that captured his imagination. As a result, Leonardo became a “Renaissance man” - artist, mathematician, engineer, and inventor. As an inventor, he drew designs for hundreds of inventions - including the helicopter.

But in 1497 he painted his masterpiece, The Last Supper. Jesus, sitting at the center of the table, has just told the 12 apostles that one will betray Him. The apostles, sitting in clusters of three, are all agog. (Judas, in the shadows, is clutching a bag of silver.) It is the most famous religious scene in all Christianity.

The Mona Lisa
When Leonardo returned to Florence, he painted the Mona Lisa - the most famous portrait ever painted. It was of a real woman - Lisa del Giocondo - the young wife of a wealthy silk merchant. It is famous because of her mysterious smile. You cannot tell if she is moving into or out of the smile. Whichever, she looks as if she is keeping a secret.

Predict:
Leonardo and Michelangelo lived in the same city at the same time. How did they get along?

They were rivals!
Leonardo da Vinci was a versatile genius, a Renaissance man, and one of the greatest painters who ever lived.

The old man
But by the time Leonardo returned to Florence, he was growing old. He was 48 when he returned and that was considered old. He was very old - 67 - when he died.

The newcomer
While in Florence, Leonardo shaped the work of the next generation: Botticelli, Raphael, and Michelangelo.

Michelangelo was the younger, rising star.
Once upon a time, Michelangelo was born in Florence. His father, a minor noble, was violently opposed to his son becoming an artist. So Michelangelo lived with a stonecutter’s family in a marble quarry. At 12, he became an apprentice to a famous artist. At 14, he was “adopted” by Lorenzo the Magnificent and lived in the Medici palace.

The sculpture David
Above all else, Michelangelo loved creating sculptures in marble. At 23, he created the Pietà - a marble sculpture of Christ taken down from the cross. Christ lies in the arms of his mother. When you see it, you are filled with enormous pity. Today, it is in St. Peter’s Church in Rome.

At 26, he created David - a marble statue of the young man about to slay Goliath. It is the most recognizable statue in the history of art.

The Sistine Chapel
At 33, he painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican in Rome. Lying on his back high in the air, Michelangelo spent four long years painting the ceiling.

The ceiling of the Sistine Chapel consists of nine scenes from the Old Testament: How God created the world, Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, Noah and his ark.

St. Peter’s Church
At 71, Michelangelo became the chief architect for St. Peter’s Church in Rome. And at the end of his life he became very religious.
Once upon a time, a boy named Raphael lived in Urbino, Italy. When he was 8, his mother died. When he was 11, his father died. By 17, he was a master painter. At 21, he moved to Florence, Italy.

There, Leonardo had just finished painting *The Last Supper*. It was a fresco—a wall painting on damp plaster. Painting on wet plaster is stressful work: You have to paint quickly before the plaster dries. If you make a mistake, you must plaster over it and start again.

Like Leonardo, Raphael painted frescoes. But Raphael was unique. While Leonardo and Michelangelo painted with dark intensity and excitement, Raphael painted softer people in a calmer, more perfect style. His women are idealized beauties.

**The School of Athens**
In 1510, at 25, Raphael painted his masterpiece. Pope Julius II hired him to paint frescoes in the Vatican, so Raphael painted *The School of Athens*.

Covering an entire wall, it is a large gathering of philosophers in ancient Greece. In the background are Plato and Aristotle. In the center are clusters of Greek scholars: Diogenes, Ptolemy, Euclid, Archimedes, Pythagoras. In the forefront is Michelangelo—who had just begun work on the Sistine Chapel. To the far right is the artist Raphael and to the far left is Raphael’s sweetheart, Margherita.

It is a masterpiece of perspective: Despite the enormous crowd, your eye automatically lifts up and converges on the two central figures: Plato and Aristotle.
Once upon a time, there was a boy in Florence, Italy. Born Allesandro, he was nicknamed “Sandro.” His last name was Botticelli.

A romantic
Unlike his artist-friends, Botticelli was not a realist. He did not worry about anatomy or perspective. Instead, he was a romantic. He ran riot with lavish colors, poetic rhythm, and dramatic action. For this reason he was the favorite painter of Lorenzo the Magnificent.

Venus on the half shell
In 1486, he painted *The Birth of Venus*. And it is pure poetry. It is based on a Roman myth: Venus, the goddess of love and beauty, arose from the sea as a full-grown woman. Standing slim and long-limbed, her wild hair flowing in the breeze, she rises from the sea and floats to shore on a clamshell.

Bonfire of the Vanities
Late in life, Botticelli became super-religious. He created paintings to illustrate scenes of hell in Dante’s book, *The Divine Comedy*. And he came to regard his own paintings as “pagan.”

One night, stricken with guilt, he burned his paintings in what was known as the "Bonfire of the Vanities."

Luckily, *The Birth of Venus* was not thrown into the fire.

Botticelli was no dope. The Medici was the richest family in Florence. They were the merchant princes - and bankers - who financed the Renaissance in Florence.

In *Adoration of the Magi*, many of the faces are the Medici family, the rulers of Florence.

In *The Birth of Venus*, “Venus” may have been an actual woman - Simonetta Vespucci - who lived by the sea. (One of the Medici men was in love with her - and commissioned the painting.)

His Venus is based on a marble statue of Aphrodite - the goddess of love in ancient Greece.
Once upon a time, there was a Dutch boy who lived in Bruges, a city in Flanders (Belgium).

The city of Bruges was the most important trading center in northern Europe. Thanks to sheep in nearby England and Scotland, it was the birthplace of the wool industry. (Fabric - whether wool or silk or velvet - was a big deal in Bruges.) There, textile merchants became rich bankers. And began trading with Italian cities like Florence and Venice.

Jan Van Eyck became the most famous artist of his day. First, he painted using oil-based paints. Second, worked as court painter for the Duke of Burgundy. Thanks to the duke, he was sent on missions throughout Europe, including Italy. There, he learned about the artistic masterpieces of the Renaissance.

**Loaded with symbolism**

In 1434, Jan Van Eyck painted *The Arnolfini Wedding*. Loaded with symbolism, it is one of the most complex paintings in art history.

Two people - a man and woman - are getting married. The single candle symbolizes the presence of God. The dog symbolizes fidelity in marriage. The mirror reflects two witnesses at the wedding - one of whom is the artist, Jan van Eyck. Yes, he put himself into the story!

**Predict:**

Flemish painters like Van Eyck invented oil painting. Why?

**Northern Europe was damp and rainy!**

*Oil is perfect for a rainy climate*

Italy was sunny and dry, so regular paint dried there quickly. Even painting frescoes on wet plaster dried quickly.

But Northern Europe was rainy and damp, so paintings took forever to dry - and frescoes never did. Oil-based paint is perfect for a rainy climate: it contains no water.

*Oil is perfect for painting details*

Using oil-based paints, Jan Van Eyck painted one spot - layer upon layer - until it shone like a jewel. Using oil paint, he created something so realistic it almost looks like a photograph.

**Jan Van Eyck’s masterpiece**

Van Eyck’s masterpiece was the Ghent Altarpiece painted at a cathedral in Ghent, Belgium. It is the world’s most famous polyptych - a series of 12 panels.

In 1539, it survived riots against Spanish rule. In 1789, it survived the French Revolution.

But in the 1940s, it was stolen by the Hitler and Nazi Germany. When World War II ended, it was found buried in a salt mine.
Once upon a time, a boy named Albrecht Durer was born in Nuremberg, Germany. His father was a goldsmith who had 18 children.

At 15, Durer was apprenticed to a painter. At 23, he crossed the Alps and visited Venice to learn about the Italian Renaissance. (This was unusual since most artists in northern Europe did not visit Italy.) There, he befriended all the masters of his day.

He was sad to leave sunny Italy, opining: “O, how cold I will be away from the sun; here I am a gentleman, at home a parasite.” Back home in Germany, Albrecht Durer was regarded as a mere craftsmen. Yet he became the most famous artist that Germany has ever produced.

Painting portraits
Durer was brilliant at painting portraits - because he makes the individual’s personality jump out at you. Beginning at 13 and continuing for the rest of his life, Durer painted self-portraits. He knew he was a genius (even if nobody else did) and the self-portraits create a fascinating record of his life.

Woodblock prints
But Durer was first and foremost a graphic artist. He engraved on a small copper plate and then turned these etchings into black-and-white woodblock prints.

In 1498, at 27, he created his most famous print: *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. According to the Book of Revelations - the last book in the Bible - the end of the world is upon us when the four horsemen ride. The four horsemen are: War, Famine, Plague, and Death.
Once upon a time, there was a Dutch boy whose brain was out of the box.

A boy named Bosch
The boy - named Bosch - was a bit “off.” That is, his head was chockful of medieval crap: especially witchcraft, astrology (fake science, the opposite of astronomy), and alchemy (fake science, the opposite of chemistry). In short, he was obsessed with the Devil and Hell.

What is such a boy to do? What will become of him? What else? He became a Renaissance artist.

Your worst nightmare
His typical painting is your worst nightmare: A decaying landscape loaded with malformed people, distorted animals, and monstrous demons.

As a boy, Hieronymous Bosch must have read Dante’s book, The Divine Comedy. Especially “Dante’s Inferno.” Maybe he read the Bible - but surely only the Old Testament, where God is angry at man.

Everybody was doomed
Whichever, Bosch’s philosophy was simple. First, he believed that human beings on earth were foolish, greedy, and lustful. Second, he believed that EVERYBODY was sinful and, therefore, doomed to Hell. Third, in his heart of hearts, he wished folks would return to the innocence of Adam and Eve.

The Garden of Earthly Delights
In 1504, he painted his masterpiece, The Garden of Earthly Delights. It is a triptych - a painting in three panels. To the left is the Garden of Eden, where God loves Adam and Eve. In the center is Earth, where people are frolicking idiots in the nude. To the right is Hell, a place of indescribable (and humiliating) torture.

Predict:
Hieronymous Bosch died in 1516 and hopefully went to heaven. The following year Martin Luther launched the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther wanted everybody to read the Bible. If Bosch had read the New Testament, what would he have discovered?

The good news!
While the Old Testament is scary, the New Testament is not. That’s where Jesus died for everybody’s sins. So, in theory, NOBODY is going to hell. And Bosch would never have created his masterpiece.

Surrealism in the 20th century
Hieronymous Bosch inspired surrealism in the 20th century. Modern artists like Salvador Dali created spooky scenes very similar to those of Bosch. Modern comedians like Monty Python are surreal.
Once upon a time, Hans Holbein was born in Germany. He became one of the world’s greatest portrait painters.

Hans Holbein lived at the same time as Martin Luther, who launched the Protestant Reformation. Luther translated the Bible into German - and then Hans Holbein drew the illustrations.

Court painter for Henry VIII
At 29, Hans Holbein moved to London and served as court painter for Henry VIII, the King of England. Henry VIII had six wives, many of whom he put to death. Holbein sketched Henry VIII’s second wife - Anne Boleyn - before she was beheaded.

Hans Holbein painted portraits of famous people: Henry VIII, who was the King of England. Sir Thomas More, beheaded by Henry VIII. Erasmus, who criticized the Catholic church.

Hans Holbein was a superior artist because his portraits look like photographs. The longer you stare at a portrait, the more it reveals the individual’s personality.

Predict:
After 1517, Hans Holbein gave up all religious painting and stuck to portraits. Why?

The Protestant Reformation!
The Protestant Reformation began in 1517. After that, Europe was divided between Protestants and Catholics. In those days, if you made the wrong (religious) move, you could lose your head.

She was not as pretty as his portrait
Hans Holbein angered King Henry VIII only once. When the King was hunting for Wife No. 4, he considered Anne of Cleves, a German princess. But he could not marry her without seeing her first.

So he sent Holbein to paint her portrait. Holbein did and Henry VIII liked the portrait. But when his bride arrived at the wedding ceremony, she was not as pretty as her portrait.

The King called her “a fat cow” - but married her anyhow. Six months later, he had the marriage annulled. That was too bad, but at least he did not cut off her head. Or Holbein’s.
Once upon a time, Pieter Bruegel lived in Flanders (Belgium). Although he was a city guy, he painted witty scenes of everyday life among the peasants.

**The Fight Between Carnival and Lent**
Here is the annual carnival in the town square. On the left is an inn - where folks are busy guzzling beer. On the right is a church - where well-behaved children play. While Protestant moralists condemned carnival as the devil's week . . . Bruegel was poking fun at the humor in human nature.

**The Harvesters**
Cutting wheat out in the fields is backbreaking work.

**The Peasant Wedding**
Dozens of peasants, stocky and coarse, are eating at a long board table. It is a masterpiece of perspective.

**The Land of Cockaigne**
This was the medieval peasant’s dream. According to legend, it was a land of milk and honey where the houses were made of sugarcake and the streets were paved with pastry. It was a land where there was no pitiful hunger and no back-breaking labor.

**Hunters in the Snow**
This is spellbinding. Three exhausted hunters, shrouded in black and shivering in the snow, are headed home. They have only one rabbit to show for being out in the freezing cold all day. Down below, folks are iceskating on a frozen pond.
Once upon a time, a Dutch boy who lived in Amsterdam became one of the greatest painters in the history of the world.

During his lifetime, he painted 100 self-portraits. These form a unique record of his life.

In painting, Rembrandt was a powerful storyteller. Using light and shadow, he painted the human drama. Drawing a face, he could show a person’s innermost thoughts. Above all, he had a great sympathy for humanity. He tried to find the divine spark within every human being.

**Dissecting a corpse**
At 26, Rembrandt painted the *Anatomy Lesson of Professor Tulp*. It was a show stopper: The professor is lecturing to his seven students . . . while he dissects a corpse!

In those days, anatomy lessons were a social event. The Amsterdam Guild of Surgeons allowed only one public dissection a year. It was held in a theater and the general public was invited to attend.

**The Night Watch**
At 36, Rembrandt painted his masterpiece, *The Night Watch*. It is a dramatic group scene of musketeers from the local militia. In the darkness, a little girl is blazing yellow - like a candle lighting the world.

**Predict:**
At 50, Rembrandt had to declare bankruptcy. His house and paintings were sold at auction. What went wrong?

**He stopped painting for money!**

**He followed his own inner light**
Rembrandt stopped painting portraits of wealthy princes and merchant-princes.

Instead, he was painting to please himself. It was okay. He was an individual following his own inner light.

**He ignored the Protestant Reformation**
Rembrandt lived during the Protestant Reformation. People were choosing sides: Whether to remain Catholic or switch to Protestant.

But Rembrandt ignored it all. He lived in and made friends with the Jewish community. Instead, he painted many scenes from the Bible. When painting stories from the Old Testament, his models were his Jewish neighbors.
Once upon a time, a boy with a very long name (Dominikos Theotokopoulos) was born in Greece. Since he was very religious, he lived only in Catholic countries.

At 20, he visited Renaissance artists in Italy. At 36, he settled in Spain, the most Catholic country in Europe. Folks there called him “El Greco” (the Greek).

The King of Spain was a dope
The King of Spain did not like El Greco’s work and refused to finance him. (The king was a dope. He sent his navy to invade England. And there the Spanish Armada was sunk.) So El Greco had to depend on the Spanish nobility and the Catholic church. When painting elegant nobles, he was realistic. When painting anything else, he was abstract.

Elongated figures
You can always tell a painting by El Greco.
His figures are elongated.

For example, in 1586, El Greco painted his masterpiece, The Burial of Count Orgaz. The count was a nobleman in Toledo, Spain. The painting is intense, full of religious fervor and mystic rapture. It is in two halves: Below, the count - who has just died - is being buried by his friends. Above, the count is entering heaven - surrounded by angels. The angels are deliberately elongated - that is, distorted to show their spiritual quality.

Abstract art
In 1595, El Greco painted a landscape called View of Toledo. It was his own strange dream-vision of the Spanish city. A sinister storm hovers over Toledo, the city on a hill. The landscape is dark except for white light that is fitful and unreal. White symbolizes God’s grace. The greenish colors are unearthly. The whole painting is abstract.

Predict:
El Greco was not fully appreciated until the 20th century. He inspired the most famous abstract artist of the 20th century - who was also from Spain. Who was he?

Picasso!
Pablo Picasso is regarded as the most famous painter of the 20th century.
Once upon a time, a boy named Dante was born in the city of Florence, Italy. And it became the birthplace of the Renaissance.

Dante received a classical education - religion, poetry, philosophy. He then got a job with the city government, but politics was rough. When one political group took over the city government, they sent him into exile. If he ever returned to Florence, he would be put to death. (He never did; he died in exile.)

**The Divine Comedy**

Around 1300, Dante wrote his masterpiece, *The Divine Comedy*. It is a summary of medieval thinking. Medieval folks worried about their salvation in the afterlife.

“*Dante’s Inferno*”

So Dante (the narrator) travels from Hell to Purgatory to Heaven. And describes exactly who is in hell and why. (Not surprisingly, they are the same corrupt politicians and church officials who sent him into exile.)

Dante wrote his story in three parts:

1. **Hell** is a place of incredible suffering and despair - and very crowded. Outside of hell, there is a sign: “All hope abandon, ye who enter here!”

   There are 9 circles in Hell:
   Each is reserved for one group of people.
   One for corrupt government officials, one for corrupt clergymen, including the pope.

   For each circle, the devil invents specific tortures that fit their specific crimes on earth.

2. **Purgatory** is a better, more hopeful place, where sinners seek forgiveness for their sins.

3. **Heaven** is paradise.

**Predict:**
What impact did Dante’s book have on Western civilization?

- **A vision of hell!**
  Until Dante, nobody had a clear vision of hell. Since Dante, everybody thinks of hell in his terms.

- **It helped launch the Renaissance!**
  Dante’s book was the model for Renaissance writing.

  The Renaissance began in his hometown of Florence. It was a great cultural and intellectual movement. It focused on the individual and life on earth. People began to believe that man should try to better his life in this world, rather than wait for heaven or hell.
Once upon a time, Petrarch was born outside of Florence, Italy. At 15, his mom died. At 17, his father forced him to study law. When Petrarch refused, his father was furious. He threw his son’s books into the fireplace. From then on, Petrarch spent decades searching for classical manuscripts from ancient Greece and Rome. He found them - dusty and forgotten - in Europe’s monasteries. Petrarch was the world’s first humanist. That is, he celebrated life on earth - and did not delay his joy for the hereafter. Later, humanism became associated with secularism (freedom from religion). But Petrarch was extremely religious.

Poet
For the next fifty years, Petrarch wrote 366 poems praising the love of his life - Laura. He spotted her in church one day and spent the rest of his life writing poems about her.

He was 23 and she was 17. Both were members of the nobility. Her presence caused him unspeakable joy. But they had little or no personal contact. (She was married - at 15 - to another man.) So Petrarch suffered unrequited love.

His masterpiece, The Book of Songs, consists of two parts. The first half are poems about his earthly love for Laura - while she was alive. The second half are poems about his spiritual love for Laura - after her death. Ultimately, Laura acts as Petrarch’s guide to God and salvation.

Laura could not bring Petrarch love, but she did bring him fame. On Easter Sunday in 1341 Petrarch was crowned poet laureate in Rome. He was the first to be given this honor since the days of the Roman empire.
Once upon a time, a boy named Boccaccio lived in Florence, Italy. His father was a merchant-banker. His contemporaries - Dante and Petrarch - wrote poetry. But Boccaccio became the first great writer of modern prose.

**The Decameron**
In 1348, the Black Death hit Italy. Thanks to the bubonic plague, the city of Florence lost 75% of its population. Including Boccaccio’s father and mother. And friends.

In 1353, Boccaccio wrote his masterpiece, *The Decameron*. Here’s the story: Ten young people flee Florence to escape the plague. For ten days they live in the countryside and hold a storytelling marathon. (Ten individuals x ten days: In Greek, *decameron* means “ten.”)

It is a collection of 100 stories. The storytellers - 3 men and 7 women - are clever individuals who enjoy life. The young people do not hold medieval values, but the values of the new middle class. That is, they are urban, sophisticated, intelligent, and witty - and delight in ridiculing folks who are dim bulbs.

Each day a “king” or “queen” chooses a theme: Stories about the power of fortune, stories about the power of human will, love tales that end happily, love tales that end tragically, tricks that men play on women, tricks that women play on men.

At the time, Boccaccio’s book created a sensation. Medieval literature was highly moral, designed to uplift humanity and glorify God. But Boccaccio’s stories - many of them bawdy - were designed to entertain.

**Predict:**
Boccaccio influenced the greatest English author of his day. Who was he?

Chaucer!

Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* is very similar to Boccaccio’s *The Decameron*.

In both, folks tell bawdy stories that reveal everyday life.
Once upon a time, Chaucer was born in London.

**He was a middle-class guy who saw it all**
1. Economics - He was the son of a wealthy merchant in London.
2. Politics - He became a member of Parliament.
3. Law - He served as a justice of the peace.
4. Nobles - As a boy, he trained to be a knight.
Most of all, he was fascinated with life and fascinated by people.

As a diplomat, Chaucer travelled to many countries, including Italy. There, he read Dante and Boccaccio, who made fun of corruption in government and the Church.

**The Canterbury Tales**
Around 1400, Chaucer wrote his masterpiece, *The Canterbury Tales*. In it, he describes life in England and makes fun of people in all walks of life.

It tells the story of 30 pilgrims on their way to Canterbury Cathedral near London.

Some characters are feudal:
The knight, the priest, the peasant plowman.

Some characters are modern:
middle-class townsmen.

Each character fits his group in society.
The merchant is like a merchant, etc.


In the process, the reader discovers the true personality of each individual.

**Predict:**
Chaucer had a big impact on English authors. How so?

**He influenced Shakespeare!**
He was the greatest English writer of his day. His book became a classic in world literature. His rowdy characters and their bawdy speech had a big impact on Shakespeare.

He is regarded as the “Father of English Literature.”

World Humanities

Special thanks to Brian Childers
Once upon a time, Machiavelli lived in Florence, Italy. And for decades he worked in government.

**Politics & Morality**

During the Middle Ages, people were idealistic about politics. They felt politics should conform to religious values.

Machiavelli was more realistic. In fact, he was downright cynical. According to him, politics had nothing to do with ethics.

In 1512, the Medici family was restored to power in Florence. Machiavelli was arrested on suspicion of trying to overthrow them. He was tortured, imprisoned for a year, and sent into exile.

**The Prince**

In 1513, he wrote his masterpiece, *The Prince*. He began with two premises:
1. The government must provide stability.
2. Only a tyrant can provide stability.

*The Prince* is a classic study of power: how to get it and how to keep it. Once in power, a political leader must rule by any means necessary - including cruelty, deception, and force. In short, "The ends justify the means."

According to Machiavelli, the ideal politician should
1. imitate the behavior of great men.
2. be articulate when speaking to the people.
3. appear religious to sway the people.
4. be ready - at all times - to go to war.
5. be ready - at all times - to use force against his own people.

**The “Father of Modern Political Science”**

Thanks to this book, Machiavelli became the most important political thinker of the Renaissance. He is regarded as the "Father of Modern Political Science."

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**Predict:**

When we say a politician is "Machiavellian," what do we mean?

**He is cunning and unscrupulous!**

- He deceives people for political gain.
- He ignores the rule of law.

**His critics**

- Almost immediately European thinkers argued against Machiavelli's political philosophy.
- Erasmus, the Dutch humanist, argued that political leaders should follow Christian principles.
- Cardinal Pole regarded Machiavelli as “an enemy of the human race” and urged political leaders to be virtuous.
- Frederick the Great - with the help of Voltaire - also found Machiavelli’s ideas disgusting.

**In short**

Political leaders who use amoral methods debase moral standards throughout society.
Once upon a time, a boy named Tom lived in London. For decades he worked for the English government. Trained as a lawyer at Oxford University, he became an author and statesman. And then he went to work for Henry VIII, the King of England.

**Utopia**

In 1516, Thomas More wrote his masterpiece, *Utopia*. Utopia was an imaginary island nation. It was an ideal society, where government provides justice and equality for all. In short, politics required ethics.

**He burned people at the stake**

In 1517, Martin Luther launched the Protestant Reformation. Thomas More was opposed to the Protestants. He regarded them as a threat to stability in Europe. So he persecuted Protestants in England. In fact, he had six followers of Martin Luther burned at the stake.

**He lost his head**

By 1530, Thomas More was Lord Chancellor, the king's most trusted advisor. But when England went Protestant, he refused to accept King Henry VIII as supreme head of the Church of England.

This ended his political career.

He was imprisoned in the Tower of London, convicted of high treason, and beheaded.
Once upon a time, a boy named Will was born in Stratford-on-Avon in England. His father was a glovemaker and his mother was a housewife. He had no formal education beyond grammar school.

At 18, he left his small town and headed for the big city of London. There, he began as a lowly actor. And became the world’s leading playwright.

A command performance
Shakespeare lived during the Elizabethan Age when England was ruled by Elizabeth the Great. When the Queen gave a command performance, Shakespeare had to perform.

He wrote for the people of London
Shakespeare wrote his plays for his fellow actors and the audience at the Globe Theater. Using bawdy populism and philosophical depth, he appealed to everyone - from rough apprentices to polished intellectuals. So even his most violent tragedies include comic scenes by ordinary folks, like gravediggers.

Comedies
Comedy of Errors - a case of mistaken identity between identical twins.  
A Midsummer’s Night Dream - four young lovers in a moonlit forest full of fairies. 
Taming of the Shrew - how to deal with a hot-tempered wife. 
Much Ado About Nothing - a romantic comedy about two pairs of lovers.

Tragedies
Romeo & Juliet - the fate of two very young lovers. 
Othello - Othello is persuaded to murder his bride. 
Macbeth - vaulting ambition leads to the betrayal and murder of a king. 
Hamlet - The prince wants revenge; everybody dies. 
King Lear - a foolish father is outwitted by his ungrateful daughters.

Predict: 
Shakespeare’s plays: 
Why are they so great?

He understood human nature!

When it came to creating characters, Shakespeare knew people. For example, his character Iago is insanely jealous of Othello. (Shakespeare called jealousy “the green-eyed monster.”) We have all known a jealous person. But Shakespeare turns Iago into the most hateful person in all of literature. In short, he explored what it means to be human.

To this day, we all know Shakespeare’s most famous lines:
“To be, or not to be: that is the question.”
“Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears.”
“A horse! a horse! my kingdom for a horse!”
“Lord, what fools these mortals be!”
“I will wear my heart upon my sleeve.”
“The world’s mine oyster.”
“He hath eaten me out of house and home.”
“It was Greek to me.”
“All the world’s a stage.”
“All’s well that ends well.”
Once upon a time, a rich boy named John lived in London. But when he became a teenager and turned Protestant, he was disinherited by his Catholic family.

John Milton attended Cambridge University. At first, he was expelled for starting a fistfight with his tutor. He wanted to become a minister, but decided the Church of England was wicked. Instead, he became a Puritan. And dedicated himself to God by becoming a poet.

A radical Puritan
In 1642, John Milton was a radical during the English Civil War. He was a Puritan and the Puritans defeated the king's army, beheaded the king (Charles I), and established a republic headed by Oliver Cromwell.

In 1643, John Milton got married. He was 35 and she was 16. It was not a happy marriage. After only one month, she got bored and left him. In response, he wrote pamphlets about the right to divorce based on intellectual incompatibility. For this disgrace, he was nicknamed "Milton the Divorcer."

Milton went blind
In 1652, at 44, John Milton went blind. He wrote a sonnet - *When I Consider How My Light Is Spent* - about going blind. Writing blind was tough: By night, he composed poetry in his head. By day, he dictated it to a secretary.

In 1660, the republic fell and King Charles II was restored to the throne. John Milton was devastated. His hope - that the Puritans would establish God's kingdom on earth - was crushed.

**Paradise Lost**
*1667*

**England**

**Predict:**
*Paradise Lost* is the greatest epic poem in the English language. What is the story about?

**How Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden!**

Here's the story:
Satan had once been an angel in Heaven. He was supposed to serve God. But Satan did not want to be a subordinate. He wanted to be *equal* to God. He concluded: "Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven."

Satan rebelled against God and was expelled from heaven. Then disguised as a snake, he led Adam and Eve astray.

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Once upon a time, a boy named Frank (Francois) was born in France.

At 26, he became a fun-loving Franciscan friar. At the monastery, he studied Greek and Latin, science and the law. At 36, he studied medicine and practiced as a physician.

At 38, he became a delightful storyteller who was extremely popular in France. He used satire - dry humor - to poke fun at all the major institutions of his day.

A tall tale about two giants
In 1532, using a pen name, he began publishing hilarious novels about Gargantua and Pantagruel. It is the story of a father and son, both giants, with enormous appetites. They were stupid oafs who discussed philosophy. But most of the time their philosophy was: “Eat, drink, and be merry.”

For starters, Gargantua built his own personal monastery with a swimming pool and maid service. There were no clocks, for each monk was allowed to “Do What Thou Wilt.” (In today’s terms that amounted to “Do your own thing.”) For a monk, such behavior was scandalous.

Gargantua and Pantagruel travel through a France brimming with greed, stupidity, and violence. On their mock quests, they poke fun at politics, the law, the church, marriage, and superstition.

Every story is a tall tale where the giants - obnoxious and grotesque - spout crude jokes, bawdy songs, and vulgar insults at each other and at the world.

It’s a tough read for the squeamish.

Predict:
The Catholic Church of France: How did it react to Rabelais?

He was hung by his toenails!
Just kidding: he was condemned for heresy.

The Sorbonne - the theological college of the University of Paris - had a cow. And the Catholic church banned his books.

For his book Gargantua, Rabelais was condemned for heresy. For his book Pantagruel, Rabelais was condemned for obscenity.

Luckily, Rabelais was befriended - and protected - by the King of France. Else he would have been burned at the stake.

When he died in 1553, he left a one-sentence will: “I have nothing, I owe a great deal, and the rest I leave to the poor.”
Once upon a time, there was a boy in Paris. He studied law, but never became a lawyer. At 21, he began life as a lowly actor. By 40, he was the greatest playwright in France. His stage name was Moliere.

Out in the boondocks
In 1643, Moliere and his friends - all amateur actors - founded the Illustrious Theater in Paris. When it went bankrupt, the troupe spent 12 years on a wandering tour of France. Moliere, who wrote the plays, became a fine writer. Rural folks always gave him feedback: the audience either laughed or pelted him with ripened fruit.

Eventually, his plays became so popular he attracted the attention of the King of France - Louis XIV, “the Sun King” who built the fabulous palace at Versailles. Moliere returned to Paris and put on his productions at the king’s theater, the Palais Royal.

Moliere wrote his greatest plays are about controversial subjects that attracted public attention: Youth vs age, love vs selfishness, and nature vs fake imitation. Yet all his masterpieces revolved around just one theme: The difference between how people see themselves - and how others see them.

He was especially fond of ridiculing nobles and churchmen.

School for Wives makes fun of old men who want young wives.

Tartuffe is about a man of religious virtue who turns out to be a scheming hypocrite.

Don Juan is a rake who seduces women and then abandons them.

The Misanthrope is about a man who refuses to engage in social conventions, like being polite.

Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme is about a middle-class poser, a wannabe gentleman.

Blasphemy!

The Catholic church regarded Moliere as “that demon clad in human flesh.” They charged him with blasphemy and banned his plays. Blasphemy: showing irreverence toward God.

When Moliere died on stage - during The Imaginary Invalid - no priest would give him the last rites. Because he was an actor, he was not allowed to be buried in an ordinary cemetery. And the archbishop ordered that Moliere should be buried without any ceremony.

Luckily, Moliere’s friend - the King of France - had a sense of humor. (Moliere never ridiculed the monarchy.) Throughout Moliere’s life, the king supported the playwright.

Today, the French national theater - the Comedie Francaise - is known as “The House of Moliere.”
Once upon a time, a boy named Miguel was born near Madrid, Spain. He was the son of a surgeon who presented himself as a nobleman. Together, father and son roamed from town to town. As a man, Miguel Cervantes became a wanderer, just like his father.

At 21, Cervantes became a soldier. He fought against the Turks at the Battle of Lepanto and was wounded. On the way home, his ship was captured by pirates on the Barbary Coast of North Africa. He and his brother were taken as slaves to Algiers. After five long years, he was ransomed.

For the next 20 years Cervantes wandered around Spain - living in poverty, dithering his life away. He worked as a tax collector - and was hated. He helped build the Spanish Armada. (It was sunk off the coast of England.) He was excommunicated, went bankrupt, and went to prison twice. Finally, he settled down in Madrid long enough to write the world’s first modern novel.

Don Quixote was delusional
In 1605 Cervantes published his masterpiece, Don Quixote. It is set in La Mancha - a harsh, dry, waterless region south of Madrid. The hero - Don Quixote - is an idealist who presents himself as a feudal knight. His companion - Sancho Panza - is a realist, exasperated by his friend, the dingbat.

By 1600, feudalism was dead. Yet the medieval romance - of knighthood and chivalry - still ruled the literary world in Spain. Disgusted, Cervantes wrote a satire, ridiculing medieval romances. He mocked their unrealistic plots, characters, and multitude of virgins, giants, and magicians.

His main character is delusional. Don Quixote has read so many stories about knights that his mind snaps. He comes to believe he is a knight. He wears a hand-me-down helmet and armor. He fights to defend the honor of an old hag named Dulcinea. He rides a skinny old horse named Rocinante. Worst of all, he tilts at windmills.

Predict:
Don Quixote is regarded as the first modern novel. Why?

Psychology!
The medieval romance
The medieval romance told of adventures - with little exploration of the inner life of the main character.

The modern novel
The modern novel focuses on the psychological evolution of the main character. In short, it focuses on the inner life of Don Quixote - and how he comes unravelled.

Freud
Cervantes’ insights into human nature influenced Freud, who invented psychoanalysis.

To dream the impossible dream
In 1965, Don Quixote was turned into a Broadway musical, “Man of La Mancha.” Its most famous song is “To Dream the Impossible Dream.”

Don Quixote was wishing for the return of medieval life - just when the Middle Ages was coming to an end.