Learning for Change

Compare how humanists used learning to improve society.

9-12.WC.32 "Analyze the ideas of Renaissance and Northern humanism."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two beliefs or practices shared by Italian and northern humanists. Circle one distinct goal for each group so you can compare their ideas.

Two Ways to Put Learning to Work

1. In fifteenth-century Florence, a student might study a speech from ancient Rome before drafting one for a city council. Italian Renaissance humanists sought out Greek and Roman writings and studied grammar, history, poetry, and rhetoric. They believed that careful reading and persuasive speech could develop human abilities and help people act wisely in public life. Leonardo Bruni, a Florentine scholar and official, praised active citizenship in a republic. This focus did not mean rejecting Christianity: many Italian humanists were Christians. But Bruni's example shows how classical learning could serve civic duties, not only private study.

2. Now move to a printing house in Basel in 1516. The northern humanist Erasmus published a Greek edition of the New Testament alongside a revised Latin translation. By comparing Greek manuscripts, he hoped readers could examine Christian teachings more carefully. Erasmus argued that faith should appear in everyday conduct rather than in ceremonies performed without understanding. Like Italian humanists, he valued ancient languages and close study of texts. Yet his most urgent goal was to renew Christian life through learning. Printed books helped his arguments travel widely, though printing also spread the work of Italian humanists.

3. These approaches could lead to different questions about the same problem. If officials used public money for themselves, a civic humanist might ask what ancient histories teach about responsible government and how a persuasive speech could change the council's course. A northern Christian humanist might ask how biblical teaching challenges greed and how leaders could make their actions match their professed faith. Neither approach guaranteed honest officials, and the two traditions were not sealed off from each other. Both treated learning as a way to improve human choices, but they often emphasized different texts and settings for change.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does Bruni's view of citizenship help explain why an Italian civic humanist would study ancient speeches?

2. How did Erasmus use careful study of texts toward a goal different from Bruni's?

3. In the example of officials using public money for themselves, how might each kind of humanist try to change their behavior?

4. Why would it be misleading to say Italian and northern humanists had nothing in common? Give two points of overlap.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A town has funds for one new library program. In 5 to 6 sentences, propose a program and explain how an Italian civic humanist and a northern Christian humanist might each evaluate it. Identify one belief they would share and one difference in what they would emphasize.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two beliefs or practices shared by Italian and northern humanists. Circle one distinct goal for each group so you can compare their ideas. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does Bruni's view of citizenship help explain why an Italian civic humanist would study ancient speeches?	**Bruni valued active citizenship. Studying ancient speeches could help citizens speak persuasively and act wisely in public life.**
2	How did Erasmus use careful study of texts toward a goal different from Bruni's?	**Erasmus compared Greek New Testament manuscripts to help readers understand Christian teachings and renew Christian conduct. Bruni emphasized learning for civic duties.**
3	In the example of officials using public money for themselves, how might each kind of humanist try to change their behavior?	**A civic humanist might draw on ancient histories and persuasive speech to change the council's course. A northern Christian humanist might use biblical teaching to challenge greed and call for conduct consistent with faith.**
4	Why would it be misleading to say Italian and northern humanists had nothing in common? Give two points of overlap.	**Both valued ancient languages and close study of texts, and both saw learning as a way to improve human choices.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would fund a weekly reading and discussion program for neighbors. An Italian civic humanist might favor it because participants could study history and practice speaking about town decisions. A northern Christian humanist might favor it if readers also examined religious texts carefully and discussed how to treat neighbors honestly. Both would expect reading to shape people's actions rather than just fill shelves. The Italian civic humanist would stress public debate, while the northern humanist would stress conduct guided by Christian teaching.

Accept other programs if the response connects both views to the proposed activity, identifies a defensible shared belief, and distinguishes civic from Christian moral aims. Students should not treat the two traditions as entirely separate or claim that Italian humanists rejected Christianity.