Ideas Into Action

Humanist learning and civic life in Renaissance Florence

MWH.C.2.2.B "Describe how humanism furthered the values of republicanism, liberty, and individualism."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline three ways humanist learning could shape civic life. Label each one R for republicanism, L for liberty, or I for individualism.

Learning to Shape a City

1. In fifteenth-century Florence, public decisions were made in a republic rather than by a hereditary king. Its government still belonged mainly to a small circle of wealthy men. Humanists studied ancient Greek and Roman writing, then asked what those texts could teach people living in their own cities. The scholar Leonardo Bruni praised citizens who learned history and persuasive speaking so they could serve the city. Such learning gave educated citizens tools for debating public choices and holding officials to account. In this way, humanist education could strengthen republicanism, the idea that citizens should govern public affairs rather than a monarch.

2. Florentine humanists also used ancient Rome to think about liberty. Bruni celebrated Florence's independence from outside rulers and argued that citizens should have a voice in laws made for their city. To him, liberty meant more than being left alone: a citizen needed a community free from foreign domination and a chance to help direct it. This claim could give people a reason to resist a prince who tried to take control. Yet it did not mean equal political rights for everyone. Women and most poorer residents had little or no place in Florence's governing councils.

3. Humanism also encouraged attention to the abilities of each person. In a famous work, the Italian thinker Giovanni Pico della Mirandola described human beings as capable of shaping themselves through their choices and learning. Humanists often valued study, talent, and achievement rather than inherited status alone. That outlook could encourage a student to develop a voice and offer useful ideas in public life, joining individual growth to civic duty. But this ideal reached people unevenly: advanced schooling was costly, and girls rarely received the same education as boys. Humanist promises could exceed everyday opportunities.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How could the skills Bruni praised help citizens sustain a republic?

2. How did Bruni connect liberty to both independence and participation?

3. How could the view of individual ability described in the third paragraph benefit public life?

4. Why did humanist ideas about liberty not produce equal political rights in Florence?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a Renaissance city council is deciding whether to fund a school that teaches history and public speaking to more residents. Write a four- to five-sentence speech explaining how the school could advance republicanism, liberty, and individualism, and name one historical limit on who could benefit.

Ideas Into Action

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three ways humanist learning could shape civic life. Label each one R for republicanism, L for liberty, or I for individualism. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How could the skills Bruni praised help citizens sustain a republic?	**History and persuasive speaking could help citizens debate decisions and hold officials to account instead of leaving public affairs to a monarch.**
2	How did Bruni connect liberty to both independence and participation?	**He linked liberty to freedom from outside rulers and to citizens having a voice in their city's laws.**
3	How could the view of individual ability described in the third paragraph benefit public life?	**It could lead people to develop their talents and voices so they could contribute ideas to their city.**
4	Why did humanist ideas about liberty not produce equal political rights in Florence?	**Florence's governing councils excluded women and most poorer residents, despite humanist arguments for citizens' participation.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Council members, fund this school so more residents can study history and learn to speak in public. Those skills could help citizens debate laws and hold leaders accountable, strengthening our republic. Learning to defend our city's independence could also help citizens protect its liberty. Each student could develop a voice and talents that serve both the student and the city. We must recognize, however, that girls were rarely offered the same education as boys in Renaissance cities.

Accept other passage-supported links among humanist education, civic participation, liberty, and individual ability. In Part 3, the proposed school's effects should be plausible, and the historical limit may concern gender, wealth, or access to government.