**Reading: Why the Renaissance Started**

**Vocabulary Words: Secular, Patron, Patronize, scribe, Renaissance**

1 The Renaissance, a movement which stressed the ideas of the classical world, has been described as ending the medieval era and heralding the start of the modern age. Its causes were many. The mid fourteenth century is a common date for the start, although some commentators go back further. In addition Florence was once identified as the initial home of the Renaissance, but some histories widen this to Italy as a whole. The following are the main factors.

**2 New Secular Hunger for Discovering Texts**

The courts and monasteries of Europe had long been repositories of old manuscripts and texts, but a change in how scholars viewed them stimulated the massive reappraisal of classical works in the Renaissance. Fourteenth century writer Petrarch typified this – he may even have triggered it – by writing about his own lust for discovering texts which had previously been ignored and were just gathering dust. Now **secular** readers developed a taste, even a hunger, **for seeking out, reading and spreading old works** on a more widespread level than centuries previous. **New libraries developed to facilitate access to old books.**

**3 Reintroduction of Classical Works**

While there were classical texts in western Europe at the start of the Renaissance, many had been lost and existed only in the east, in both Christian Constantinople and Muslim states. During the Renaissance many key texts were reintroduced into Europe, whether by merchants taking advantage of the new hunger for old texts, or by scholars who had been invited over to teach. In addition, a huge number of Greek texts and scholars arrived in Europe with the fall of Constantinople in 1453.

**4 The Printing Press**

A hunger for forgotten texts may have developed in Europe, but it was the new printing press that allowed these works to be mass produced, feeding a much wider audience than the old hand written methods could ever have hoped to reach. This in turn allowed the Renaissance to develop more fully. In addition, the press removed **scribal** errors.

**5 The Political Situation: The Need for Display and Administration**

The Renaissance needed wealthy patrons to support it, and Renaissance Italy was especially fertile ground. Political changes in the ruling class of Italy shortly before this period had led to the rulers of most of the major city states being powerful and rich men, without much of a political history. They attempted to legitimize themselves with conspicuous display including all forms of art and creativity.As the Renaissance spread, the Church and other European rulers would use their wealth to adopt the new styles to keep pace.

**6 New Wealth and the Black Death**

In the middle of the fourteenth century the [Black Death](http://europeanhistory.about.com/od/cultureartliterature/a/blackdeath.htm) swept across Europe, killing perhaps a third of the population. While devastating, some of the survivors found themselves better off financially and socially, with the same wealth spread among fewer people, and better potential for climbing the social ladder. This was especially true in Italy, where social mobility was much greater. While some areas saw struggles between the more competitively positioned workers and their bosses, this ‘new’ wealth was often was spent on display items to reinforce prestige, much like the rulers above them. This also allowed people to patronize Renaissance artists. In addition, the merchant classes of a region like Italy also saw a great increase in their wealth from their role in trade, from the same trade routes which spread the Black Death so quickly. This trade income was further developed, some might say revolutionized, by Renaissance developments in commerce, giving the merchants further wealth to patronize with.