

Example 2: What Does the Renaissance Mean to You?

Below is an email one of our history teachers shared on our history department list. (Each department at LePort has a common email list; they also meet regularly to help each other grow as teachers, and to gain a deeper understanding of LePort's unique, chronological history curriculum.)

Ask yourself: could you answer this question as well as this 7th grader did? Do you think a child who is drilled, day-in, day-out, in checking off facts on multiple-choice, standardized tests, could articulate such a thoughtful perspective on any historical time period? Can you see how the careful instruction at LePort "lit a torch" of lasting knowledge in this student's mind?

Subject: A Great 7th Grade History Answer

Hey all,

I meant to send this along a while back. Just wanted to share one particular excellent answer from one of my 7th graders. The question was "What was the Renaissance, and why do you think it began in Italy (rather than, say, England or Norway)? Explain using the facts you've learned in history class."

Here's his answer...

"The Renaissance is the rebirth of secularism. The Greek and Roman torch was lit again. History, not God, started to lead the way. The blindfold was lifted from the European people's eyes and Earth's beauty was seen again. The Renaissance started in Italy for a few main reasons. Rome, which held the secrets of art and architecture, is in Italy. Thus, the Italian people had a figurative open book of knowledge at their doorstep. Also, the Crusades, which initially opened up the Italian people's eyes to the wealth and knowledge of the outside world, were started in Italy by the Pope. Finally, early explorers, the most famous of whom is Marco Polo, often came out of places like Florence, or Rome because of the wealthy patrons living in those cities. All of these reasons add up to the Renaissance beginning in Italy. Once the Renaissance started, artist and inventors immigrated to Italy to begin their careers. This influx of thinkers, artists, and innovators in Italy ultimately sustained the glory of the Renaissance."

Matt Ballin, History teacher

For comparison, look at how similar historical material is covered in typical standardized tests. Even if your child scored 100% on [this test](#), would you have any

confidence that he actually understood why these historic events mattered? How likely do you think he would be to remember and be able to reflect upon this historic period after studying for and acing this multiple-choice test? How about if he was able to write an answer like the LePort 7th grader did above? Do you think this young man will remember the Renaissance – and be able to link his knowledge to later historical or current events?

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How did the Crusades affect the economies of Central and Western Europe?

- A** Gold and silver brought back by crusaders caused monetary inflation.
- B** The Crusades led to a decline in the production of crafts and food crops.
- C** Cloth and spices brought back by crusaders led to greater interest in trade.
- D** The Crusades limited access to luxury goods from China and India.

- 39** Use the quotation to complete the following statement.

Your brethren who live in the East are in urgent need of your help . . . For, as most of you have heard, the Turks and the Arabs have attacked them . . . They have killed and captured many, and have destroyed the churches and devastated the Empire . . .

—Pope Urban II in 1095

The Pope is issuing a call for

- A** help in fighting Martin Luther and the Protestants.
- B** Crusaders to regain the Holy Land from Muslims.
- C** the Emperor to restore the glory of the Frankish Empire.
- D** armies to fight against the Mongol invaders.