

**RENAISSANCE  
FLORENCE:  
MACHIAVELLI'S PRINCE**



# RENAISSANCE FLORENCE: MACHIAVELLI'S PRINCE

## Description

In this full analysis of Machiavelli's literary masterpiece, *The Prince*, and through the use of various other primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain Machiavelli's theories behind power and government, his ideas on how a ruler should deal with religion and the Church, and finally what he believed should be the relationship between a ruler and his or her subjects.

## Subjects

European History  
World History  
Government  
Philosophy  
English / Language Arts

## Grade Level

11-12

## Duration

90 minutes

## Tour Links

- Uffizi Museum, Florence
- Basilica di Santa Croce, Florence
- Palazzo Vecchio, Florence

## Essential Questions

- Who was Niccolò Machiavelli? What is the Prince?
- How does Machiavelli see human nature in the Prince?
- How does Machiavelli see government in the Prince? From where does a ruler derive his power? What is a ruler's primary responsibility?
- According to Machiavelli, what relationship should a ruler have with his subjects? Should a prince be feared or loved by his subjects?

## Academic Summary

Therefore a prince, so long as he keeps his subjects united and loyal, ought not to mind the reproach of cruelty; because with a few examples he will be more merciful than those who, through too much mercy, allow disorders to arise, from which follow murders or robberies; for these are wont to injure the whole people, whilst those executions which originate with a prince offend the individual only.

Upon this a question arises: whether it be better to be loved than feared or feared than loved? It may be answered that one should wish to be both, but, because it is difficult to unite them in one person, is much safer to be feared than loved, when, of the two, either must be dispensed with.

Because this is to be asserted in general of men, that they are ungrateful, fickle, false, cowardly, covetous, and as long as you succeed they are yours entirely; they will offer you their blood, property, life and children, as is said above, when the need is far distant; but when it approaches they turn against you. And that prince who, relying entirely on their promises, has neglected other precautions, is ruined; because friendships that are obtained by payments, and not by greatness or nobility of mind, may indeed be earned, but they are not secured, and in time of need cannot be relied upon; and men have less scruple in offending one who is beloved than one who is feared, for love is preserved by the link of obligation which, owing to the baseness of men, is broken at every opportunity for their advantage; but fear preserves you by a dread of punishment which never fails.

Nevertheless a prince ought to inspire fear in such a way that, if he does not win love, he avoids hatred; because he can endure very well being feared whilst he is not hated, which will always be as long as he abstains from the property of his citizens and subjects and from their women. But when it is necessary for him to proceed against the life of someone, he must do it on proper justification and for manifest cause, but above all things he must keep his hands off the property of others, because men more quickly forget the death of their father than the loss of their patrimony.

... Returning to the question of being feared or loved, I come to the conclusion that, men loving according to their own will and fearing according to that of the prince, a wise prince should establish himself on that which is in his own control and not in that of others; he must endeavor only to avoid hatred, as is noted.

*Niccolò Machiavelli, The Prince, Chapter XVII, 1515*

It is better for a ruler to be feared than to be loved?

Niccolò Machiavelli, a 16th century Florentine writer, philosopher, and minor government official, wrote those sentiments almost 500 years ago. They appear in his best known work, *The Prince*. Written in Italian in 1515, during an especially turbulent time in Florence's history, *The Prince* was dedicated to Lorenzo de Medici, a member of the Medici family that ruled Florence for most of the Renaissance.

Machiavelli was born in 1469 in the Republic of Florence, a city in Tuscany then under the reign of the Medici family, one of the most powerful and wealthiest families in Renaissance Europe. A dynasty founded in 1434 by Cosimo de Medici, at a time when the map of Northern Italy looked like a patchwork quilt due to its lack of unity. North of the Papal States (a kingdom controlled from Rome by the pope), Italy was

divided into a patchwork of city states, republics and duchies, each vying for control of the peninsula. All Italian, the separate states often warred on each other and competed with each other for trade. The lack of unity led to the rise of powerful families in each state, often focused on maintaining power and getting rich. In many ways, the Medici family in Florence was not much different than others around the region, except in its wealth and power was so great that the family was able to control the papacy for a time.

The Prince is Machiavelli's advice to rulers on how to maintain their hold on Florence. Like Plato and Aristotle of Ancient Greece, Machiavelli first goes through a critical analysis of different types of governments, listing both the good points and bad points of each. His analysis, however, leads Machiavelli to depart from proposing an idealist Platonic republic run by philosophers. He is a realist, and his beliefs instead focus on the realities of the situation in which he finds himself in the 16th century. Contrary to many modern notions on where a ruler gets his power, Machiavelli argues that the feelings and wants of the governed should mean little. A ruler instead must be concerned with his own survival. Accordingly, being feared is much more important than being loved. If a prince is loved and then makes a decision that the people don't like, those subjects could then turn on the prince, killing him or forcing him from power. Even if he is not forced down, policies necessary to the functioning of the state will simply be pushed aside according to the whims of a populace too ignorant to govern themselves. On the other hand, if a prince is feared, the people will be too afraid to challenge his decisions, thus keeping the prince in power. In his lifetime, Machiavelli witnessed multiple instances of a leader's fall from power. He even spent some time in prison and was tortured because he ended up on the wrong side of one such conflict in Florence. No doubt his experiences colored his later writing, but even Machiavelli came to see that cruelty, while horrible towards a populace, was effective in maintaining control – again the ideas of a realist, not a dreamer.

Machiavelli's Prince, published in 1532 (five years after his death), also challenges both religion in general and the Roman Catholic Church in particular. Machiavelli saw religion as a useful tool for controlling the masses of people, a view no doubt heavily influenced by the obvious corruption found throughout the Renaissance Church (especially at the highest levels), a fact recently brought to light in Northern Europe by Martin Luther and other reformers. Machiavelli advises rulers to use religion as a way to control and comfort their subjects. In an age where the vast majority of Europeans were illiterate and poor, using the carrot of salvation through the Church could be a very effective way of controlling the people...if one could also control the religious institutions. The Church in turn put all of Machiavelli's works on the "List of Prohibited Books" in 1559, thus officially banning him in the Catholic world. As a result, for many centuries Machiavelli was seen by many as somehow akin to the devil himself. Nonetheless, many of the world's great leaders over the last 500 years have read and followed the ideas of Machiavelli's Prince.

In this full analysis of Machiavelli's literary masterpiece, The Prince, and through the use of various other primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain Machiavelli's theories behind power and government, his ideas on how a ruler should deal with religion and the Church, and finally what he believed should be the relationship between a ruler and his or her subjects.

## Objectives

1. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain Niccolò Machiavelli's ideas on power and government as expressed in his 16th century Renaissance masterpiece, *The Prince*.
2. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain Niccolò Machiavelli's philosophy on how governments should deal with religions and religious institutions as expressed in his 16th century Renaissance masterpiece, *The Prince*.
3. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain Niccolò Machiavelli's theories on the relationship between government and the governed as expressed in his 16th century Renaissance masterpiece, *The Prince*.

## Procedures

### I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: What should be the relationship between governments and their subjects? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of the primary sources and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

### II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Brief overview of Dante's *Paradiso*. (15 min)
- Video – Machiavelli BBC documentary (20 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the sources and articles about Machiavelli and *The Prince* (15 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of the articles for homework to prepare for class discussion.
- Suggestion: Break students into groups and assign different articles to each group.
- Suggestion: AP/advanced students should read Machiavelli's *The Prince* full text (translated) over the course of multiple days.
- Group Activity – Socratic Discussion: Identify and explain Machiavelli's theories behind power and government, his ideas on how a ruler should deal with religion and the Church, and finally what he believed should be the relationship between a ruler and his or her subjects. (15 min)

### III. Closure

- Assessment – Essay / DBQ: Explain in detail Machiavelli's theories behind power and government, his ideas on how a ruler should deal with religion and the Church, and finally what he believed should be the relationship between a ruler and his or her subjects.

## Extension

### On tour: Basilica de Santa Croce, Florence

While on tour, students in Florence will visit the Basilica di Santa Croce, where many famous Florentines including Michelangelo, Galileo and Machiavelli are buried. Florence is full of references and symbols from Machiavelli's time. Students with a keen eye will be able to find Medici symbols everywhere. Hint: look on the wall of the Palazzo Vecchio (the town hall) for one of the most well known Medici symbols.



# Web Links

## Lesson Plan Websites

- [www.constitution.org/mac/prince00.htm](http://www.constitution.org/mac/prince00.htm)  
The Prince by Niccolo Machiavelli (primary source) – Full text (1908 translated edition) of Machiavelli's work from the Constitution Society
- [www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/prince-excerpt.asp](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/prince-excerpt.asp)  
Niccolo Machiavelli: The Prince (primary source – excerpts) – from the Medieval Sourcebook at Fordham University – These excerpts cover the main highlights of Machiavelli's theories as found in The Prince
- [www.historyguide.org/intellect/machiavelli.html](http://www.historyguide.org/intellect/machiavelli.html)  
Niccolo Machiavelli (website) – from the History Guide (UK)
- [www.csupomona.edu/~plin/ls201/machiavelli.html](http://www.csupomona.edu/~plin/ls201/machiavelli.html)  
Giants of the Renaissance: Niccolo Machiavelli (website) – from Cal Poly Pomona
- [www.online-literature.com/machiavelli/prince/](http://www.online-literature.com/machiavelli/prince/)  
The Prince (website)
- [political-science.uchicago.edu/faculty-workingpapers/McCormick%20-%20Niccolo%20Machiavelli.pdf](http://political-science.uchicago.edu/faculty-workingpapers/McCormick%20-%20Niccolo%20Machiavelli.pdf)  
Niccolo Machiavelli (academic paper) – PDF file of a 7 page scholarly academic paper from John P. McCormick, Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago – Highly recommended for AP / Advanced students
- [www.gradesaver.com/the-prince/study-guide/major-themes/](http://www.gradesaver.com/the-prince/study-guide/major-themes/)  
The Prince Major Themes (website) – good place to start for all students
- [www-pmhs2.stjohns.k12.fl.us/morrisl/Machiavelli.pdf](http://www-pmhs2.stjohns.k12.fl.us/morrisl/Machiavelli.pdf)  
Political Philosophy: Machiavelli (worksheet) – contains excerpts and questions – from Laura Morrison, History teacher at Pedro Menendez High School in Saint Augustine, FL
- [faculty.njcu.edu/fmoran/Machiavelli.ppt](http://faculty.njcu.edu/fmoran/Machiavelli.ppt)  
Machiavelli (PowerPoint) – from Fran Moran, Political Science Professor at New Jersey City University
- [www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1](http://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1)  
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video) – great 2-minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA. Highly recommended for teachers.
- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=g4xcvSxW4WA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g4xcvSxW4WA)  
Machiavelli, The Prince: Common Sense of Politics (video) – this 50 minute video is perhaps too long for most in-class showings, but it's worth it. Highly recommended for both students and teachers.
- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=sMkt1Vq7tJ4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sMkt1Vq7tJ4)  
Who's Afraid of Machiavelli? (video) – This 50 minute BBC full documentary is concise enough for most in-class showings.

## Background Information

- [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niccolo\\_Machiavelli](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niccolo_Machiavelli)  
Niccolo Machiavelli – Wikipedia article
- [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Prince](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Prince)

The Prince – Wikipedia article

- [passports.com/group\\_leaders/on\\_the\\_road/italy/Florence](https://www.passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/italy/Florence)  
On the Road: Florence – from Passports Educational Travel
- [passports.com/group\\_leaders/on\\_the\\_road/italy/florence\\_sightseeing](https://www.passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/italy/florence_sightseeing)  
On the Road: Florence Sightseeing – from Passports Educational Travel

## **Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans**

- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-botticelli-birth-of-venus](https://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-botticelli-birth-of-venus)  
Renaissance Florence – Botticelli: Birth of Venus
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-brunelleschi-dome-on-the-duomo](https://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-brunelleschi-dome-on-the-duomo)  
Renaissance Florence – Brunelleschi: Dome of the Florence Duomo
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-donatello](https://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-donatello)  
Renaissance Florence – Donatello
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-giotto-father-of-renaissance-art](https://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-giotto-father-of-renaissance-art)  
Renaissance Florence – Giotto
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-machiavelli-the-prince](https://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-machiavelli-the-prince)  
Renaissance Florence – Machiavelli: The Prince
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-medici-family](https://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-medici-family)  
Renaissance Florence – Medici Family
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-michelangelo-david](https://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-michelangelo-david)  
Renaissance Florence – Michelangelo: The David
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-verrocchio](https://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-verrocchio)  
Renaissance Florence -- Verrocchio
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-leonardo-overview](https://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-florence-leonardo-overview)  
Renaissance Italy – Leonardo da Vinci: An Overview
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/france/renaissance-europe-leonardo-da-vinci-mona-lisa](https://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/renaissance-europe-leonardo-da-vinci-mona-lisa)  
Renaissance Europe – Leonardo da Vinci: Mona Lisa
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/italy/renaissance-italy-leonardo-last-supper](https://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-italy-leonardo-last-supper)  
Renaissance Italy – Leonardo da Vinci: The Last Supper
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/italy/renaissance-rome-michelangelo-last-judgment](https://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-rome-michelangelo-last-judgment)  
Renaissance Rome – Michelangelo: Last Judgment
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/italy/renaissance-rome-michelangelo-sistine-chapel-ceiling](https://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-rome-michelangelo-sistine-chapel-ceiling)  
Renaissance Rome – Michelangelo: Sistine Chapel Ceiling
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/italy/renaissance-rome-michelangelo-pieta](https://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-rome-michelangelo-pieta)  
Renaissance Rome – Michelangelo: The Pieta
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/italy/renaissance-rome-raphael-school-of-athens](https://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/renaissance-rome-raphael-school-of-athens)  
Renaissance Rome – Raphael: School of Athens

## Key Terms

- Florence
- Machiavelli
- Medici family
- *The Prince*
- Renaissance

