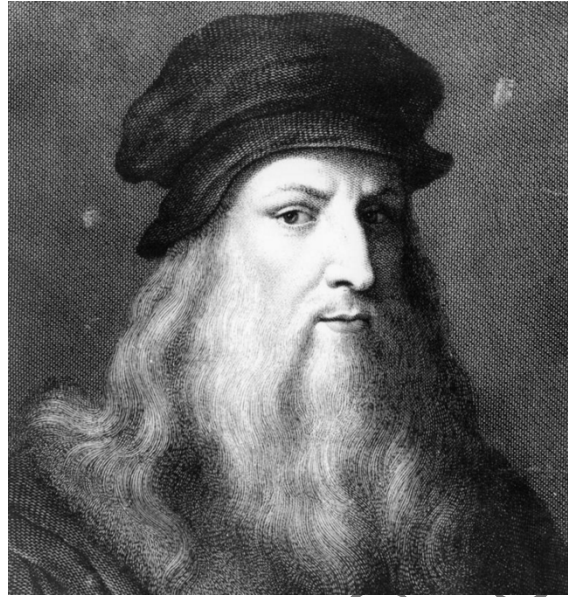


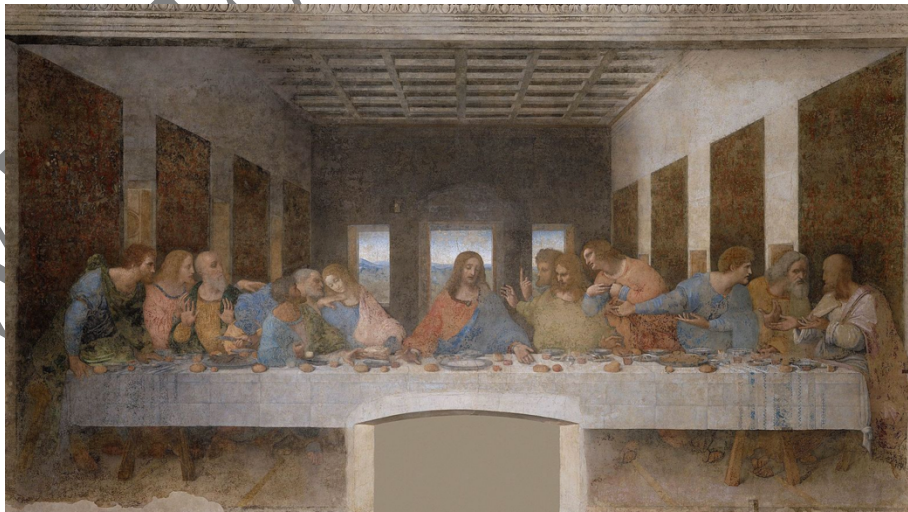
Leonardo da Vinci

Born: April 15, 1452, Vinci, Republic of Florence (present-day Italy)

Died: May 2, 1519, Amboise, Kingdom of France



Leonardo da Vinci was a brilliant artist and scientist. He was a genius inventor as well as the creator of some of the most famous works of art in history including The Mona Lisa, The Vitruvian Man and The Last Supper. His talent with art was matched only by his curiosity as he studied an astonishing array of subjects from botany to the first robot, knowledge that he recorded in thousands of pages of notes that he left behind. His genius was best expressed by King Francois I of France who reportedly said that “...never had there been a man who knew as many things as Leonardo... (Bramly, 1994, p. 8).”



The Last Supper

Early life

There are a great many unknowns about da Vinci's childhood but it is known that he was born on Saturday, April 15, 1452, at 10:30 pm. His entrance into the world is known with such precision because of his grandfather, Antonio da Vinci, who made precise notes of it. Other details about his early life are fuzzier. It was a very different time and da Vinci was considered illegitimate, as his parents were unmarried. His father, Piero da Vinci did claim his illegitimate son, however, so it is likely that he spent much of his childhood in his father's household



Casa Leonardo, the house where Leonardo grew up

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Leonardo the Engineer

Throughout his career, da Vinci pursued both art and science, sometimes in combination. It is notable, however, that during his years working for the Duke of Milan, Ludovico Sforza, he was most often referred to as ingegnere – an engineer. He studied hydraulic dams, underwater breathing suits, crossbows, armored tanks, tower construction, and ice-skating. Influenced by the war Florence waged against Rome and Naples, he



da Vinci's underwater breathing suit

also studied weapons and made designs for improvements and new pieces. A theme throughout his creations was efficiency and reducing human control. Gun barrels would move into position and fire or a drum would beat, compelled by the forward motion of a carriage.

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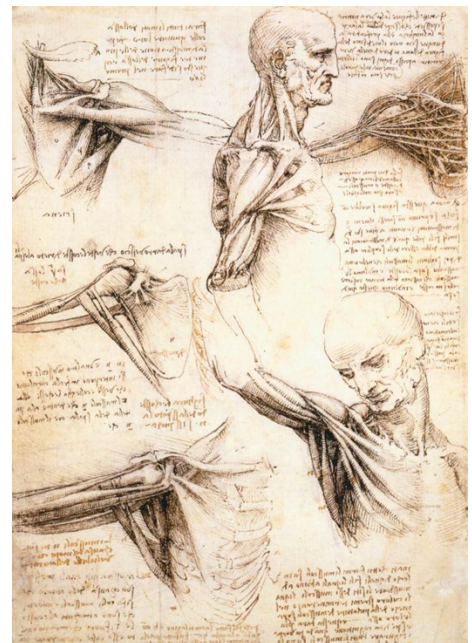


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Arts and Sciences

Although most of da Vinci's designs were never built, his scientific studies are very evident in his art. Harkening back to the lessons of the Polliuolos in Florence, he studied human anatomy to make his paintings as realistic as possible. When working on the Battle of Anghiari, he had a workshop in the Santa Maria Novella hospital where he performed autopsies and dissected human corpses (Bramly, 1994). He claimed to have performed at least 30 autopsies (Bortolon, 1967). He made careful sketches of what he saw and, as a corpse would rot before he could complete the drawing, each sketch represented multiple dissections (Bramley, 1994).

In addition to informing his art, da Vinci's anatomical studies led to many discoveries that went against the conventional medical



Leonardo's anatomical drawing of the shoulder - 1510

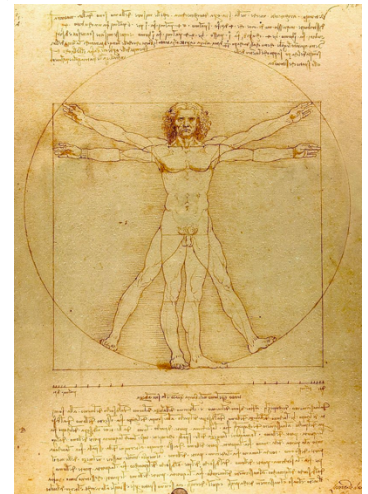
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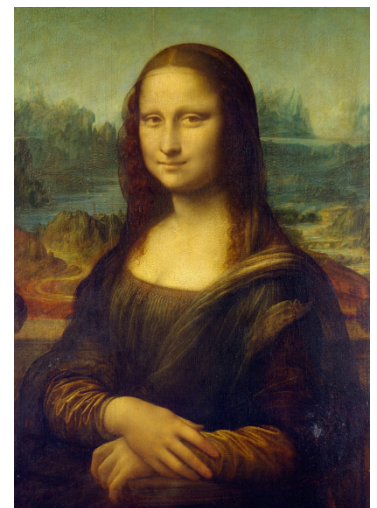
Leonardo's legacy

Da Vinci was truly a man ahead of his time. He sought to quench his thirst for knowledge in a manner that could only be described as scientific, a method that was supposedly not invented until the 17th Century as a key part of the Scientific Revolution (Nuland, 2000). He would not have even called himself a scientist, as that word was not used until the early 19th Century (Krull, 2005). The notebooks he left behind are a treasure-trove of sketches and notes in his characteristic right-to-left mirrored writing. The pages were filled with designs for helicopters and humanoid robots that he could not hope to complete (Phillips and Priver, 2011) and in the case of helicopters, wouldn't be invented for another 400 years.



The Vitruvian Man

Da Vinci intended to organize these notes into structured books but unfortunately; this task was never completed (Bramly, 1994). The more than 10,000 pages (Hunt, 1967) were instead left to his student, Francesco Melzi (Phillips and Priver, 2011). Many of them were lost to time but at least 7,000 remain preserved in libraries and archives around the world (Hunt, 1967). In addition to his scientific works, his legacy includes the spectacular art he left behind. Leonardo da Vinci was indeed a man ahead of his time.



The Mona Lisa

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. What
2. Why wasn't da Vinci allowed to attend university?
3. Under
4. What did da Vinci do to make angels' wings look more realistic?
5. What
6. How many autopsies did he claim to have performed?
7. What
8. What
9. How many pages of notes did he leave behind and how many are known to have survived.

Extension Questions

10. Many people are either very art-focused or science-focused in their academic pursuits. Explain why da Vinci was a man of both disciplines.
11. One
12. Watch the video below to answer the following question.

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TWF READING

References

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4. Krull, K. (2005). *Leonardo da Vinci*. New York: Puffin Books.
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6. Phillips, C. and Priver, S. (2011). *Amazing & extraordinary facts: Leonardo da Vinci*. Exeter, UK: David and Charles.