Name: _____

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THE RENAISSANCE
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The Medici of Florence

The streets of Renaissance Florence bustled with merchants, horse carts rattling across cobblestones, artists at work, ringing church bells, and the noise of thousands of people buying and selling on streets so narrow you could sometimes touch buildings on either side. Towering above them stood great palaces and churches that announced to every visitor: this was a place where ambitious, talented people could build a fortune.

Florence became famous for its wool and textile industries. Raw wool arrived from surrounding regions and was turned into fine cloth, which merchants traded over long distances. As Florence prospered, the Medici family grew increasingly powerful. Their influence came not from armies but from banking. Merchants traveling across Europe needed loans, currency exchange, and safe places to store money. The Medici Bank became one of the most respected financial institutions of its time, with branches that extended far beyond Florence's city walls. Florence called itself a republic and elected leaders, but behind the scenes, the Medici often shaped the city's government and economy.

Cosimo de' Medici

Cosimo de' Medici inherited a successful banking business when his father died in 1429, but he would transform it into something far more powerful. Cosimo understood that wealth could do more than make a person rich. It could create loyalty, influence important decisions, and quietly shape events. Cosimo used his wealth and influence to build alliances, support important projects, and place trusted people in positions of power. Florence had elected leaders, but Cosimo's influence was so great that he became the city's most powerful person.

Banking and Power Beyond Florence

As Cosimo's wealth and fame grew, his influence extended beyond Florence. He opened branches of his bank as far away as London and, most significantly, Rome. The Medici bank managed the church's finances, handling enormous sums of money flowing into Rome from across Christendom. The arrangement brought the family into close contact with popes and powerful church officials. Few people wanted to challenge a family whose influence stretched from the streets of Florence to the halls of Rome.

Lorenzo the Magnificent

Medici influence continued after Cosimo's death in 1464. His grandson, Lorenzo, was a scholar, a poet, and a clever politician. Known as "Lorenzo the Magnificent," he attracted young artists and thinkers such as Leonardo da Vinci to Florence, seeking his support. Lorenzo invited fifteen-year-old Michelangelo to live in the Medici household, where he studied sculpture and learned among scholars, poets, and artists. Lorenzo's patronage transformed the city into a magnet for ideas and one of the great cultural centers of the Renaissance.

Decline and Exile

Lorenzo's later years were not as successful as his early ones. Wars, political struggles, and costly projects caused the family's wealth to shrink. After Lorenzo's death in 1492, questions arose about his use of public funds to advance Medici interests.

Two years later, a French army passed through territory under Florence's control. Lorenzo's son, Piero, surrendered Florentine territory rather than risk war. Many Florentines felt Piero was a coward, and, coming shortly after the bank failure, they drove the Medici family from the city.

Return and Legacy

Although the Medici were driven from Florence and their bank closed, the family still had powerful connections. Over time, family members became popes and married into royal families. Pope Julius II and other powerful allies helped the Medici return to Florence in 1512. The Medici return was strengthened the following year when another of Lorenzo's sons became Pope Leo X. The family remained powerful and influential for over 200 years. The last Medici ruler died without an heir in 1737, but the family's influence can still be seen today in the churches, palaces, libraries, and works of art that helped make Florence one of the world's great cities.

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Fill in the Blanks

Florence became wealthy through its w_____ and t__x__i__e trade, and as the city prospered the M__d__ci family gained power. Their w__a__th and power came from b__n__i__g. The Medici Bank provided l__a__s, currency exchange, and safe places to store m__n__y. Although Florence called itself a r__p__b__ic with e__e__t__d leaders, the Medici often shaped events behind the scenes. C__s__mo de' Medici i__h__r__t__d the family bank in *_____ years ago and used wealth to build a__l__a__c__s and gain i__f__u__n__e. He later expanded the bank to cities such as L__n__on and R_____ and managed c__u__ch finances. L__r__n__o the M__g__i__i__e__t later supported a__t__s__s and s__h__l__rs including L__o__a__do da V__n__i and M__c__e__a__g__lo. Financial problems, the bank's *c__lla__se, and Piero's *d__c__s__o__s during a French crisis eventually led to the Medici family's exile from Florence, but the family later returned and remained a powerful influence for the next two *c__n__u__i__s.

Answer in Complete Sentences

1. How did the Medici family become wealthy?

_____

_____

_____

2. Why was the Medici family's relationship with the church significant?

_____

_____

_____

*3. Was Cosimo, Lorenzo, or Piero the leader who helped Florence the most? Defend your answer.

_____

_____

_____

_____

*4. Explain how the Medici were able to return to Florence after nearly twenty years away from the city?

_____

_____

_____

*A higher-order learning question. Any reasonable answer will be accepted.

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