



Unit

Topic

The Renaissance

The Medici's

Lesson Plan

Aim

To determine if the Medici family served as a role model for cities to accumulate wealth by evaluating the factors that led to their success in Florence.

Rationale

Credited with much of the success of the Renaissance was the Medici family of Florence. Their history is a tribute to early capitalism and its roots in adding value to wealth and those willing to take risks. As a successful banking family, the Medici's secured much of their power through the loyalty of the people of Florence, who trusted them to have influence over the city. It is clear that the Medici's built Florence into a great city, and evidence suggests that the well-being of Florence was at the heart of many of their decisions. However, power comes at a price, and the Medici's had to be careful of enemies who resented their success and influence. Over the course of several generations, the Medici's took extreme measures to secure their place in Florence. While some argue that the Medici's were an example of how private wealth could improve the lives of a people and its city, others say that their actions were less than ideal. In this lesson, students explore the question of the Medici's as role models by engaging in thorough research and discussing opposing viewpoints.

Student Learning Objectives

Students will be to identify positive and negative traits of the Medici's in Florence by researching their history.

Students will be able to make and test a claim by analyzing their research of the Medici family and present their arguments to their peers.

Civics Connection

- How does one contribute to an evolving political, social, or economic system individually and as a group?
- What issue(s) does this topic remind you of today? What action would you take in response?

*See the *Civics Connection Through Questioning* guide in *Civics* for more ideas.



Vocabulary

Renaissance	Lorenzo de Medici	Florence
Giovanni de Medici	Michelangelo	
Cosimo de Medici	Botticelli	

Materials and Resources

1. Handout: Medici Family Tree
2. Text: The Medici Family of Florence
Source: <https://www.pbs.org/empires/medici/show/index.html>
Source: Zophy, Jonathan W. *A Short History of Renaissance and Reformation Europe Dances over Fire and Water*. 4th ed., Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009.
3. Handout: Individual Argument
4. Handout: Group Argument
5. Handout: Discussion Notes From Presented Arguments

Procedure

Do now:

What makes a [city] wealthy? How does a [city] become wealthy? Who is responsible for accumulating the wealth, why? Who is responsible for maintaining the wealth, why?

Lesson:

Review with students the role of Florence in the Renaissance including the famous works of art that emerged and other recognizable aspects. Students should know that the Medici family is responsible for much of the Renaissance in Florence, Italy. Introduce the objective of the activity, which is to answer the question: Were the Medici's exemplary role models for building a city's wealth? Explain the procedure for independent and collaborative work.

Independent/Collaborative Work:

1. Research the Medici's using the notes provided and other reliable resources. While researching, note positive and negative traits, events, and circumstances regarding the Medici's on the handout provided.
2. Evaluate your lists and determine your individual claim in response to the question: Were the Medici's exemplary role models for building a city's wealth?
3. After taking a quick written survey, students will be grouped with others who made the same claim. (There should be a nearly even divide in claims. If not, assign a few groups to work with the other claim so that it can be presented to the class. See modifications for other options.) The groups will meet together to complete the argument worksheet by discussing and recording the top 5 arguments that support their claim.
4. Each group will collaboratively select their best argument to present to the class. Each group member should take notes of the arguments presented for reference in the next step.



5. After each group presents, they will discuss and record counterarguments. Students will also discuss and record how to strengthen arguments with which they agree. Students will have a handout provided for this step.

6. The class will share their responses and engage in a discussion of the topic. Allow students to dictate the arguments they talk about, but intervene if necessary.

Share:

After a class discussion, students will independently revisit their initial claim and determine whether it stayed the same or changed after the discussion and why.

Close:

Write a quote that you think best represents the ideals of the Medici. In other words, what is something a Medici might have said and wanted passed down in history?

Modifications

- The teacher may assign claims to different groups before the lesson.
- The teacher may assign the readings the night before for homework.
- This lesson may be a two-day lesson.
- The teacher may provide arguments selected from the readings that student must categorize.
- The teacher may provide accountable talk guidelines for discussion.

Extension

Mentioned in the notes only briefly is Cosimo I, the Grand Duke of Tuscany (1519-1574). Although he was not in the main bloodline of the Medici family, he inherited their power through an attempt by Medici supporters to keep the family in power. His struggles and achievements are worth exploring since they brought the Medici family to a new level of splendor, risk-taking, and security. Students should research Cosimo I and conclude whether he continued a positive or negative legacy of the Medici's, or if he started a brand-new chapter on his own in a positive or negative way.

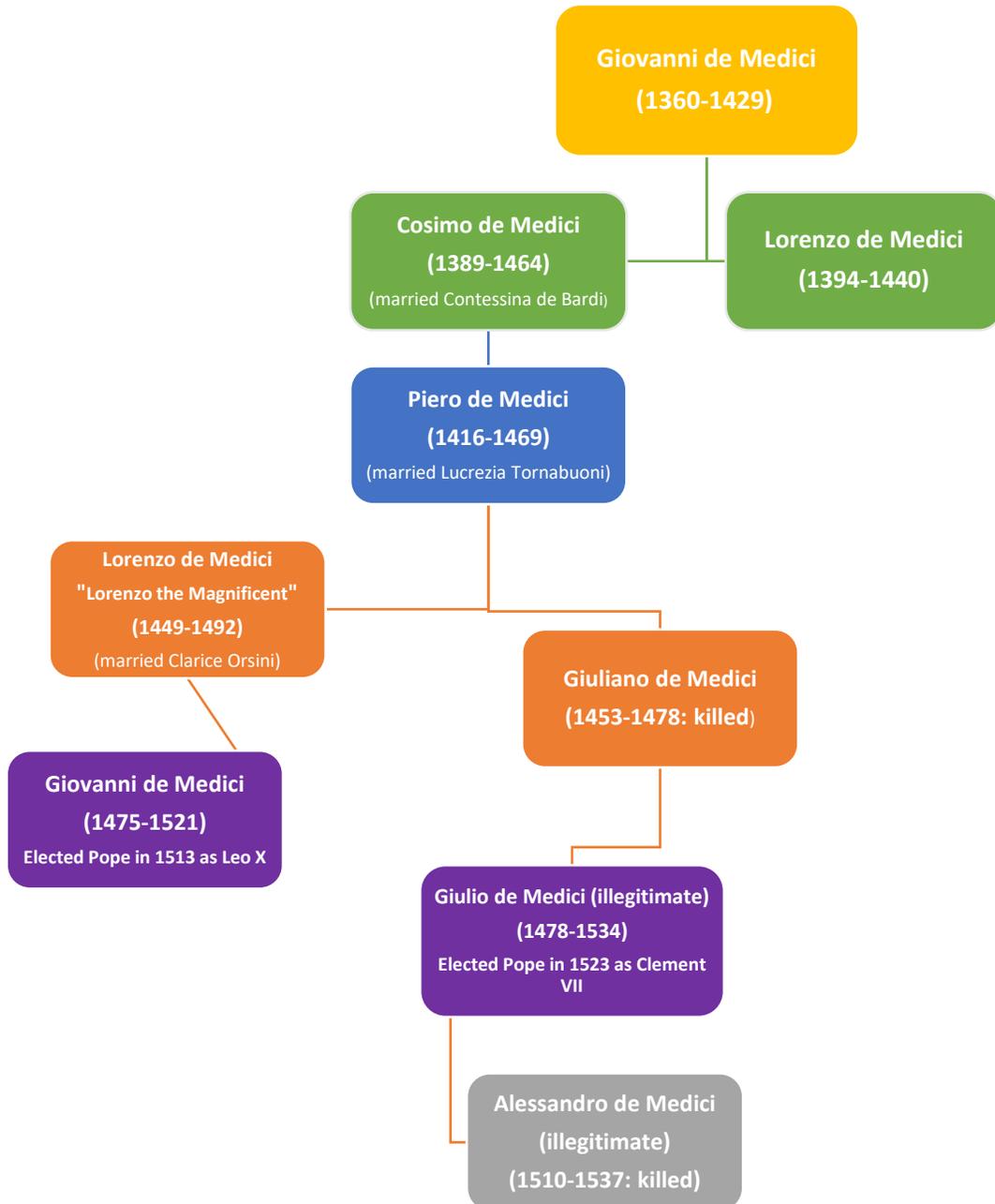
Notes

**Use discretion for activities according to what is appropriate for your class.*



MEDICI FAMILY TREE

Simplified for the purpose of identifying individuals from the readings. The only children included in the tree are those who are mentioned in the readings; there were more members than depicted.



THE MEDICI FAMILY OF FLORENCE

BANKING

The Medici family built their wealth through banking and commerce. In 1397, Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici established the headquarters of the Medici Bank in Florence, Italy. In the early 1400s, Florence was a major trading center, promising numerous opportunities for investment. Florence was also a republic where powerful families competed for political control. With the bank's initial profits, Giovanni bought farmland, financed a workshop for cloth production, and opened an office in Venice in addition to Rome, Naples, and Geneva in Switzerland. Giovanni started his banking empire small, and with good salesmanship and being cautious about finances, the Medici Bank successfully grew. He chose his clients carefully too, as Giovanni did not only value profit, but he valued loyalty as well. The Medici's would dominate Florence for nearly 300 years, but the rise to political power truly began with Cosimo de Medici, Giovanni's son. Cosimo added more branches to the Medici Bank in Avignon, Bruges, London, Milan, and Pisa and began the assumption of political power. His strategy in spending money turned his wealth into power. The family's supremacy, although they would face many challenges, would remain for 300 years.

ART AND HUMANITIES

The Medici used much of their wealth to improve the status of Florence and the lives of Florentines. It was their patronage that pulled the world out of the medieval times with an eruption of new ideas that advanced art, philosophy, and science; however, these ideas would be dangerous as they launched a modern world.

The Medici's commissioned Filippo Brunelleschi to complete the dome for the Florence Cathedral, which stood unfinished for years, allowing the building to finally become sacred. Brunelleschi was an unconventional architect, which attracted him as the architect for what seemed such an impossible task. The Medici's were right to put their faith in Brunelleschi, for his study of classical techniques used in Ancient Rome over 1,000 years before enlightened his mind on how to build the dome. When the dome, which weighed 37,000 tons and used over 4 million bricks, was completed in 1436, Cosimo honored the achievement with a grand international celebration of the greatest artists, thinkers, merchants, and churchmen from all over the eastern and the western world. Brunelleschi, with the patronage of the Medici's, sparked a revolution in architecture all over Europe. In 1434, Brunelleschi even developed a new technique that forever changed western art; he discovered linear perspective, which allows flat surfaced pictures to have a three-dimensional appearance of space and objects, making the artwork more natural and realistic. Brunelleschi's unconventional talent, spotted by the Medici's, would go down in history as one of the greatest.

Cosimo de Medici was the most popular patron in Florence, spending thousands of gold florins in search for the greatest artists and thinkers. Patronage was a political strategy; the work that Cosimo commissioned highlighted the beauty and prestige of Florence, along with



the Medici's themselves. He is regarded to some as being the patron of the people of Florence. Cosimo also is said to have treated his workers well, knowing that one produced better work when they were happy. The workshops in Florence, like many businesses at the time, were filled with artists as they competed for the next extraordinary commission.

Cosimo was the patron of artists including Filippo Lippi and Donatello. He sought work that was new, unique, and even radical for the time. Cosimo was not afraid to take risks or push boundaries. Donatello's *David* was a piece that brought admiration to some and repulsion to others. Although Donatello is said to have had a violent temper, smashing his own work at times, Cosimo stood by his loyal friend and believed in his talent. Cosimo did all he could to show the people of Florence that Donatello deserved respect.

Years later, Cosimo's grandson, Lorenzo de Medici, would follow in his footsteps in patronage of the arts. Lorenzo supported Sandro Botticelli, who was another very talented and radical artist who pushed the dangerous boundaries that Lorenzo was willing to explore. Knowing that he had the protection of the Medici's, Botticelli created *Primavera*, a painting that depicted Venus, the ancient goddess of beauty, and included controversial imagery and ideas for the time. Botticelli's *The Adoration of the Magi* was a work of art that glorified the Medici's, placing the family at the heart of the nativity and Botticelli himself alongside them.

Lorenzo oversaw this new culture that was created by the greatest artists and thinkers of his time and in doing so propelled Florence into a modern world. In 1488, he founded the first art school and provided artwork from his own personal collection, including classical sculptures, for students to study.

Lorenzo discovered the incredibly talented Michelangelo Buonarroti at a young age. When Michelangelo was just a boy, Lorenzo brought him into his family where he learned the craft of artistry and listened to other artists and scholars discuss humanism and classical antiquity. In 1504, Michelangelo revealed his sculpture of *David*, which city authorities wanted on display outside of the government building for all to see rather than be placed up high on top of a cathedral. Being outside of the government building made *David* a symbol of Florence.

Leonardo da Vinci was another artist and brilliant thinker that came to fame during Lorenzo's time as well. In the nature of Lorenzo's renaissance, with taking risks and exploring dangerous territory, Leonardo used corpses to study bodies for artwork, which was heavily against the church. He represented the natural world in his paintings which was a change from the more common heavenly forms of art. Leonardo and Michelangelo would be competitors for the greatest commissions and fame in the heart of the Renaissance.

Commissioned by Pope Julius II, Michelangelo started work on his masterpiece in the Sistine Chapel in 1508. Inspired by the ancient world and classical sculptures, his fresco paintings were a spectacular addition to the Renaissance and would be forever appreciated.

After Lorenzo's death, his son Giovanni de Medici and Giovanni's cousin Giulio de Medici ordered Michelangelo to build tombs for the Medici family. During the time that Giulio was pope, when he was known as Pope Clement VII, riots in Florence caused a part of Michelangelo's *David* to break. These riots were in defiance of the Medici's, and Michelangelo



went into hiding. Michelangelo created one of his last works for the Medici's, under the commission of Pope Clement VII, *The Last Judgement*, which provides a dramatic background above the altar of the Sistine Chapel.

In 1543, under Cosimo I, a fourth cousin of the Medici's who inherited their power and became a duke, commissioned Giorgio Vasari to repair the broken arm of *David*. The rise of Michelangelo's sculpture symbolized the Medici's ability to regain power where it may have gotten lost. Michelangelo resented Cosimo I's dictatorial style of leadership and remained in Rome for the rest of his life, refusing to return to Florence. It was in Rome that Michelangelo worked on his final sculpture and one of his most famous, *La Pieta*. Michelangelo died in 1564, and the government of Florence managed to sneak his body out of Rome and bring it back to Florence for an enormous ceremonial funeral.

Cosimo I, one of the last leaders of the Medici name, continued the legacy of the Medici's in the world of art. He founded a new school of art and design to encourage young artists to go to Florence to study. Additionally, Cosimo I made sure that all of the Medici generations had their place in artwork that represented courage and achievement. The culmination of Cosimo I's efforts was a book written by Giorgio Vasari, dedicated to Cosimo I, that was about the lives of the artists who he claimed brought light to a dark world. This was the first work of art history.

During the time of the Medici dukes, the scientific revolution was culminating against the authority of the church. Galileo Galilei was a mentor and private tutor of the young Medici princes. In 1610, he was appointed the Royal Professor of Mathematics and Philosophy because the Medici's supported him and his boldness, which would not have been allowed at a university. Galileo discovered buoyancy and the theory of gravity that all objects fall at the same rate of acceleration; he used a telescope to study the moon and what he observed about the universe went against what everyone had been taught including that the earth revolved around the sun; he was the first to see that the moon was not purely smooth but covered in mountains and valleys; and he identified the moons of Jupiter, the unusual shape of Saturn and the Milky Way. His findings threatened the authority of the church and his celebrity grew all over Europe that the Medici's granted him protection as long as his discoveries were first revealed in the Medici court.

MEDICI POWER AND RIVALRIES

Giovanni de Medici warned his son Cosimo to stay hidden from the public eye and to be modest in order to avoid being attacked. However, there were families in Florence who felt the power of the Medici's was illegitimate and were determined to replace them.

The Albizzi's were a family that governed Florence for generations, and as Cosimo increased the wealth and influence of the Medici family, the Albizzi's became consumed with resentment. They organized a plot charging Cosimo with treason of which he was found guilty. As a result of this plot, Cosimo faced execution, but he was able to get out of it with money by negotiating a deal. Cosimo managed to escape execution, but he and his family were still banished, and the Albizzi family took charge in Florence where no friend of



Cosimo's was safe. Brunelleschi, the architect commissioned by the Medici's to finish the cathedral's dome, was thrown into jail and his work was stopped. Businesses began to suffer in the absence of the Medici's, and although they begged Cosimo to take the city back by force, he took the advice of his late father to always wait until one is summoned.

Within one year, the Albizzi lost control of the city. With the support of loyal friends, and agents of the pope, Cosimo's exile was over and he humbly accepted control of Florence. Now, wealth flowed through the streets of Florence; Brunelleschi was back to work, and the Medici Bank continued to flourish.

Still, rival families were determined to remove the Medici's from power and influence over Florence. During the age of Cosimo's son, Piero, and Piero's children, Lorenzo and Giuliano, the Pazzi family vied for control. The Pazzi's were a rival banking family with much older and noble lineage, which they felt justified their right to control. With a constant threat, the Medici's knew they needed the support of military families outside of Florence. Lorenzo was set up to marry Clarice, the daughter of one of the most powerful Roman aristocrats, and niece of a cardinal. Clarice brought connections, class, and military might to the Medici family.

When Lorenzo "the Magnificent" was the leader of the Medici family, he was the most powerful man in Florence. He was powerful through the loyalty of the people of Florence, not through any type of law. As a leader, Lorenzo was helpful to all people, including ordinary Florentines who sought him for favors which he did for them for whatever they could afford in return. Lorenzo invested his money and time in the people who gifted Florence with incredible contributions.

Like the Albizzi's in earlier generations, the Pazzi's planned to eradicate the Medici family through another plot; however, their plot was far deadlier. They planned on assassinating both Lorenzo and his brother Giuliano at the same time. On Easter Day in 1478, while the Medici's and all of Florence gathered to celebrate, Giuliano was stabbed 19 times during the mass and died instantly. Lorenzo was wounded and the Pazzi's plot ultimately failed to achieve their goal of taking over Florence. Lorenzo showed himself to the crowd, and his supporters were enraged and ready to seek vengeance on the Pazzi's and those who supported them.

Soon after, Lorenzo heard the pope had ordered troops to eradicate the Medici's from power. Lorenzo risked his own life to go meet with the pope and negotiate to save his city. His negotiation was successful, and Lorenzo saved Florence from destruction, thus he was hailed "Lorenzo the Magnificent" by Florence.

After the murder of his brother, Giuliano, Lorenzo adjusted the style of his leadership to be more cautious. He adopted the illegitimate son of Giuliano, thus protecting the future of the Medici family. Still, Lorenzo brought freedom to the people of Florence through the risks he took to modernize society. However, with Lorenzo captivated by the splendors of the Renaissance, he began to lose hold of his family business; some branches of the bank closed down and the Medici's were not able to do as many favors for their friends, whose loyalty supported their power.



One of the greatest threats to the power of the Medici's came from the Dominican monk, Savonarola, who warned Florence of their radicalism and decadence. Savonarola gained followers who feared they had gotten too far off track in their religious life. Lorenzo, worried for his heirs, turned to the church as a new base of power. With his financial influence, Lorenzo's son, Giovanni de Medici, became a cardinal at a young age.

After Lorenzo died, Savonarola took power and punished those who went against his ideals. He held public burnings of books, jewelry, wigs, cosmetics, and even artwork. Botticelli himself is said to have thrown some of his own works into the fire, and from then on, he embraced Christianity in his paintings. The fear that Lorenzo faced a horrible fate after death forced many to abandon the excitement of the Renaissance. Florence was seeking salvation and thought that eradicating the city of any Medici influence was a way to get it. The heirs of the Medici's, including Lorenzo's son Giovanni and Giovanni's cousin Giulio, were cast into exile. Prepared for life in the church by Lorenzo, Giovanni being a cardinal and Giulio being a priest, they sought friends who could help them regain their power. Unfortunately, without the power base of Florence, the task was not easy. Their exile lasted for nine years until they decided to go to Rome to seek help from Pope Julius II. The Pope, being from a powerful family himself, had sympathy towards the plight of the Medici's and helped them put together an army to take back Florence.

In 1512, when the Medici's arrived in Florence with the papal soldiers, Florence knew that they were outnumbered. Nicolo Machiavelli, the chief advisor of Florence since the Medici's left, was determined to defend Florence from their power and assembled an army to stop them. With Giovanni and Giulio's fierce push through cities to get to Florence, Florence surrendered and while the Medici's won control of the city, they had not won the loyalty of the people. However, when Giovanni de Medici became Pope Leo X in 1513, the people were keen to get on his good side. Even Machiavelli tried hard to get a position, but found himself thrown in prison instead for anti-government conspiracy. Machiavelli was exiled from the city, and while he was, he wrote his most famous handbook, *The Prince*. This handbook described a world in which politics lacked morality. He dedicated the book to the Medici's, but his plan backfired as they still refused to give him a position, and his name became associated with ruthless and cynical politics instead.

Giovanni's cousin, Giulio de Medici, became Pope Clement VII in 1524, but when he died nearly one decade later, the Medici family and Florence once again needed new leadership. The illegitimate son of Giulio de Medici, Alessandra de Medici, was killed by enemies of the Medici's who wanted them removed from Florence completely. However, supporters of the Medici were still eager to continue their legacy.

Cosimo I was only seventeen years old when he was summoned to Florence. As a fourth cousin to the murdered Alessandra de Medici, he was the closest person who could claim power under the Medici name, although he was not in the main Medici bloodline.



CHURCH

Much of the world at this time was dominated by the church. The Medici's knew the importance of a connection to the papacy in Rome with the supreme power of the pope. Not only were the Medici's be interested in maintaining a financial relationship with the papacy, but they wanted to seat popes who supported their relationship.

Baldassare Cossa, a former pirate, changed his journey for one that could give him a career in the church. His goal was to enter the Vatican and possibly become pope one day, but he needed funding. Knowing that the church was in chaos and the papacy was open to fill, Giovanni de Medici agreed to fund Cossa in return for his loyalty. Giovanni supported Cossa from priesthood, to cardinal, and finally to his elected position of pope in 1410 when Cossa became Pope John XXIII. Out of loyalty to his patrons, Pope John XXIII used the Medici Bank for papal funds. With control over the papal account, Giovanni and his son, Cosimo, significantly raised their status.

A few generations later, Cosimo's great grandson, the son of Lorenzo the Magnificent, Giovanni de Medici became Pope Leo X. After the Medici's had been eradicated from Florence out of the fear that their Renaissance was getting the city off of their holy track, they welcomed them back to Florence. Pope Leo X used his position to advance that of his cousin Giulio de Medici who he appointed archbishop of Florence and soon after became a cardinal.

Pope Leo X hosted elaborated dinners and lived an extravagant lifestyle, fully enjoying the splendors of his powerful position. Within one year, however, he emptied the papal accounts and soon owed money to every bank. He turned to "papal indulgences," the sale of forgiveness to people who were concerned about their salvation. Although the sale of indulgences was not new, the Medici pope took it took the next level.

In 1516, a group of cardinals conspired to assassinate Pope Leo X, but he was warned and had the conspirators killed instead. This led the Medici's to take critical steps in securing their safety. Pope Leo X created hundreds of jobs in the Vatican and sold them to people he could trust while placing family members in the higher positions.

In 1517, a German monk named Martin Luther, who was fed up with the pope and his sale of indulgences, published the Ninety-Five Theses. He wanted to reform the church, but he was excommunicated by Pope Leo X when he refused to apologize. Thus, began the Protestant Reformation, started by Martin Luther, which split the church into two.

Giulio de Medici was crowned Pope Clement VII, two years after Pope Leo X's death. As pope, Giulio faced difficult circumstances. Soldiers who supported Luther attacked Rome and devastated the city; thousands of people died. After several months of being under siege, Pope Clement VII bribed his way out of Rome with jewels, and headed back to Florence where he was less than welcome.

Now, the ideals of the Renaissance, along with the humiliation of the protestant revolt, offended the catholic church and they used their supreme power to punish those who acted separate from their authority. Determined to maintain their supreme rule, the church created an agency of obedience which brought about the Roman Inquisition. The Inquisition



brought under harsh scrutiny and fear of a tortured life those who supported the Renaissance and individual freedom. The church censored many works, including forbidden books, that were owned by the Medici's.

In later years, the Inquisition would attack scientists who went against church teachings. This included Galileo Galilei, the scientist funded by the Medici's and a tutor to the family, who came under threat of execution for his discoveries. Among his many revelations, was that the earth revolved around the sun, a teaching that undermined the authority of the church. Galileo was promised protection from the Medici's, but in the end, what saved Galileo from execution was his denial of what he knew to be true.

Source: <https://www.pbs.org/empires/medici/show/index.html>

Source: Zophy, Jonathan W. *A Short History of Renaissance and Reformation Europe Dances over Fire and Water*. 4th ed., Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009.



INDIVIDUAL ARGUMENT

Were the Medici's exemplary role models for building a city's wealth?

Positive Attributes	Negative Attributes
Claim After Individual Research:	



GROUP ARGUMENT

Were the Medici's exemplary role models for building a city's wealth?

Group Claim:

TOP 5 ARGUMENTS

Attribute	Explanation

Highlight the one argument that you will present to the class after arriving at a group consensus. (Rank the rest of the arguments in case your best is already presented.)



DISCUSSION NOTES FROM PRESENTED ARGUMENTS

Were the Medici's exemplary role models for building a city's wealth?

Counterarguments and Rebuttal	Arguments Agreed Upon and How to Strengthen

