

Leonardo Da Vinci

(1452-1519)

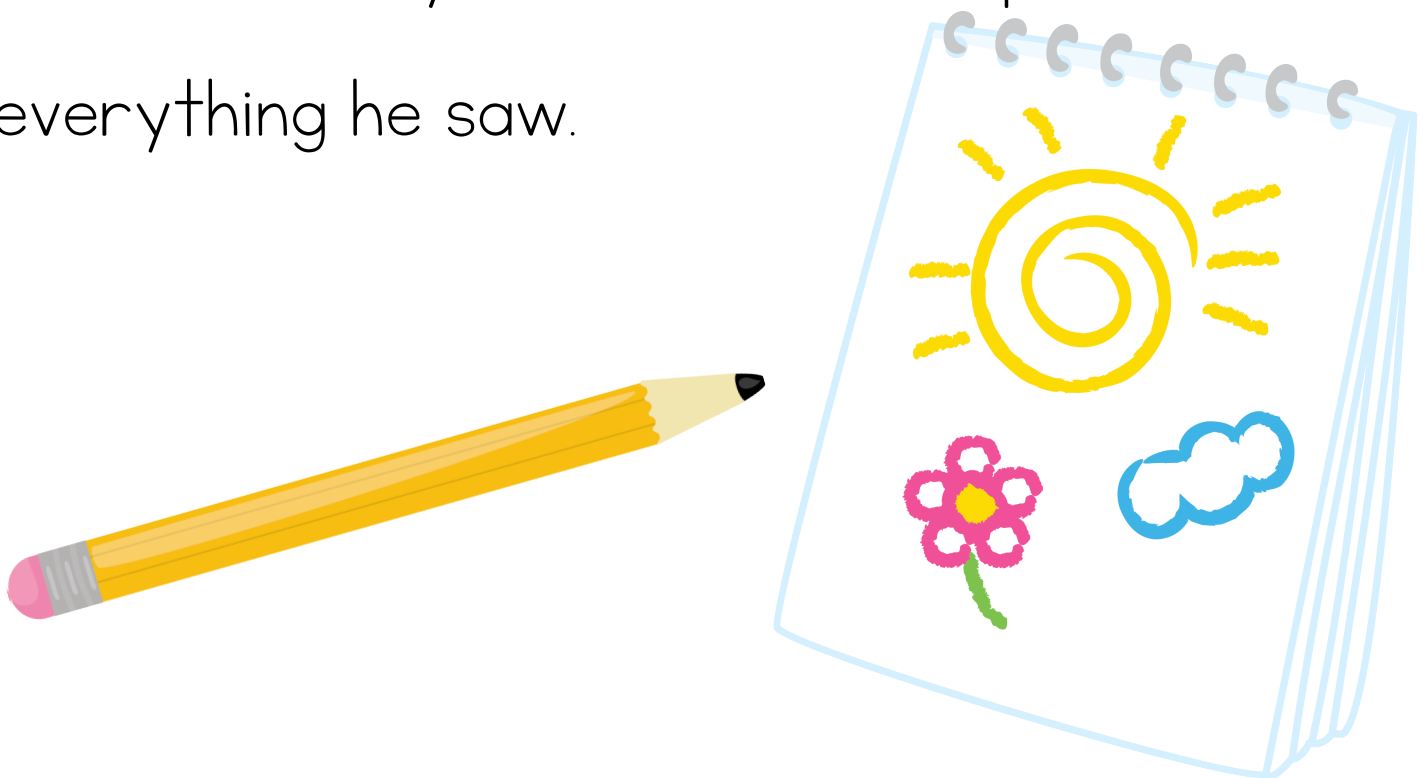
By Lynne Chandler
and Britelle Smith



A river had formed a narrow gorge on a hillside above the Arno Valley. People formed a little town there named Vinci. Vinci was only about 20 miles west of the big city of Florence in Italy. In this town Leonardo da Vinci was born on April 15, 1452. His name means Leonardo of Vinci. Leonardo loved animals and nature, so this was the perfect place for him to grow up.

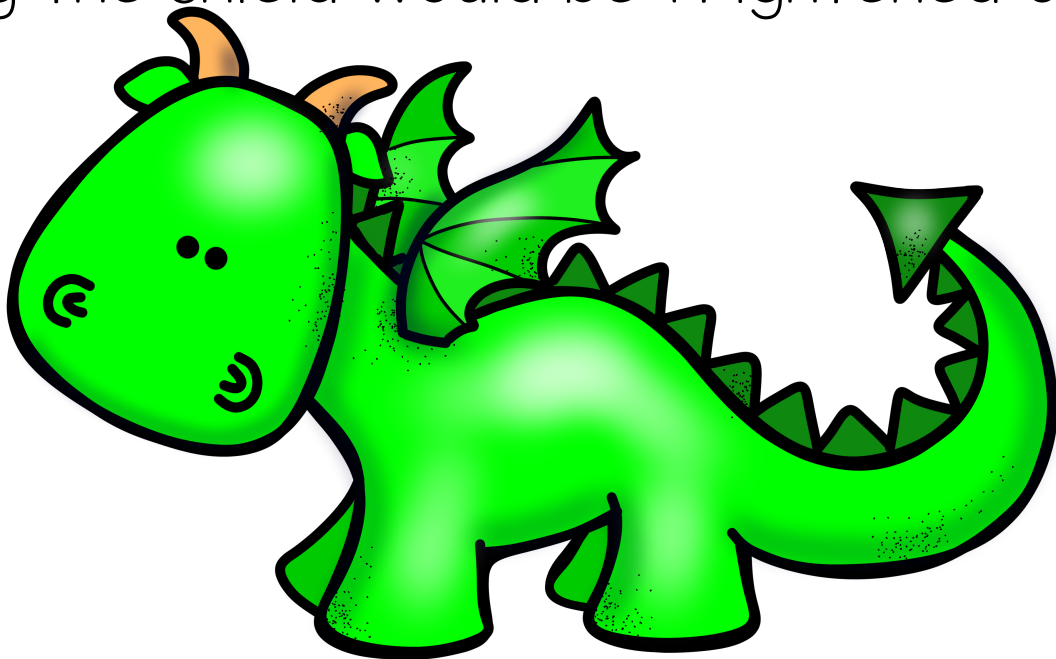


Leonardo's father worked for the governor as a notary. A notary was someone who made sure that business agreements were done correctly. Leonardo's real mother did not help raise him, so we don't know much about her. Leonardo was a very curious boy. He was always exploring and learning something new. Whenever he took trips through the countryside with his family, Leonardo drew pictures of everything he saw.



One day a friend gave Leonardo's father a big round piece of wood.

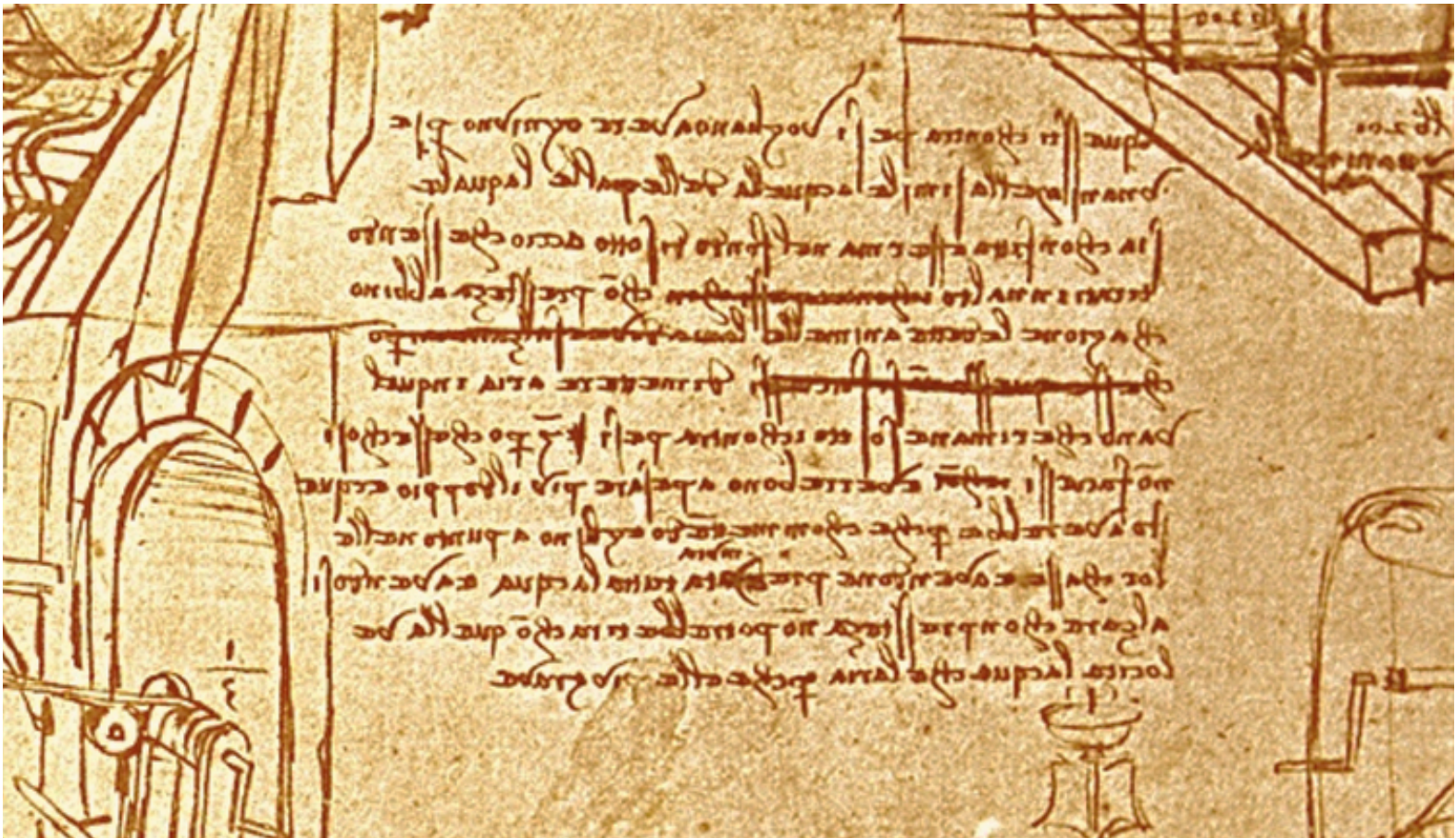
The friend asked Leonardo's father to decorate it. He wanted to use it for a shield. Instead of decorating it himself, his father asked Leonardo to decorate it. When Leonardo brought the decorated shield back, it frightened his father. Leonardo has painted a scary picture on it so that whoever was fighting the person holding the shield would be frightened off.

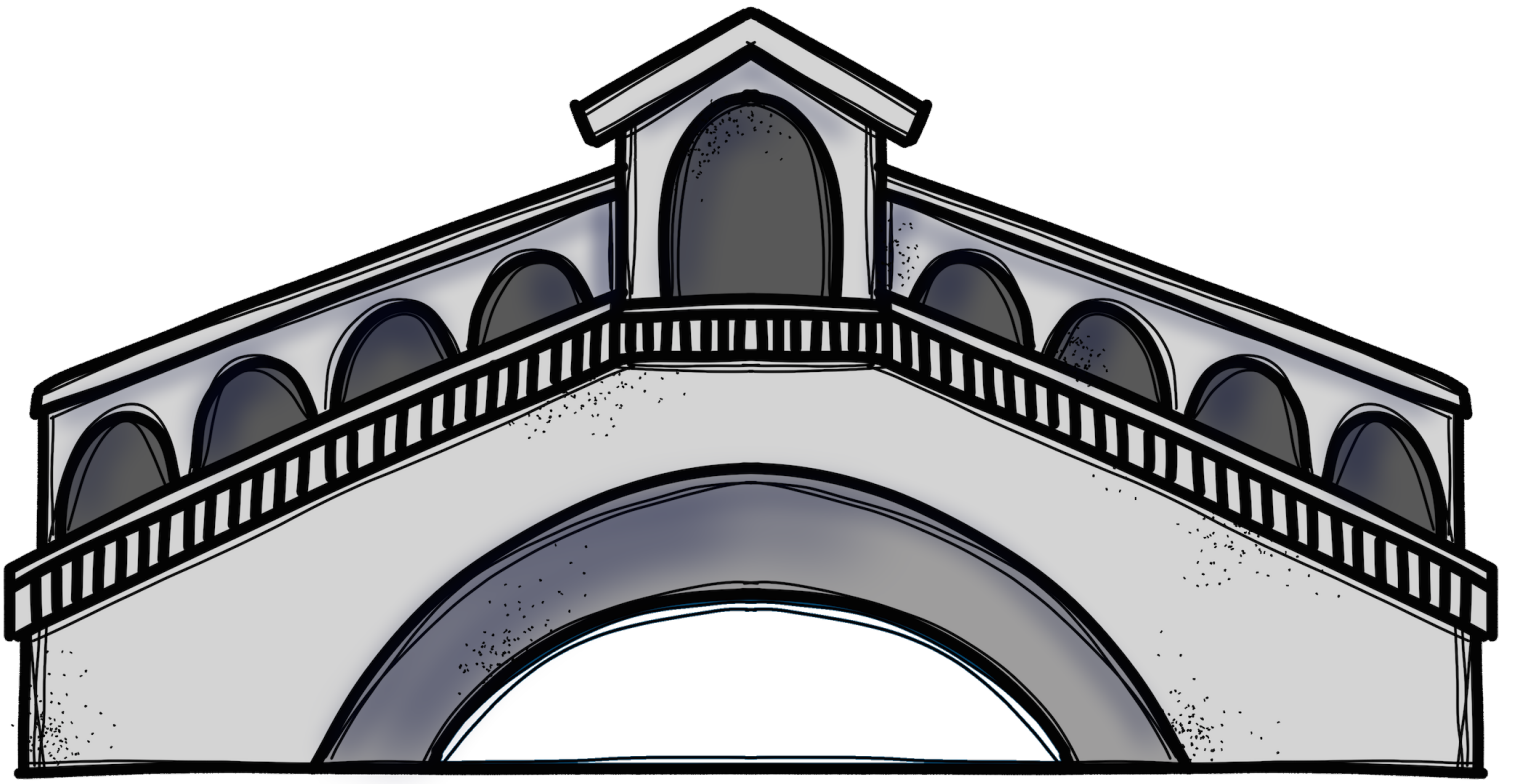




When he saw the shield, Leonardo's father realized that his son had a great talent. He decided to give his friend back a different shield. Then he sold the shield Leonardo had decorated in Florence for 100 ducats. A ducat was a gold coin used in trade throughout Europe. The person who bought Leonardo's shield then sold it for 300 ducats to the Duke of Milan.

Leonardo was a very kind boy. He was also very interesting. He was a vegetarian, which means he never ate meat. He wrote left-handed. And in his secret experiments and drawings he wrote backward. The only way you could read his writing was to hold it up to a mirror.





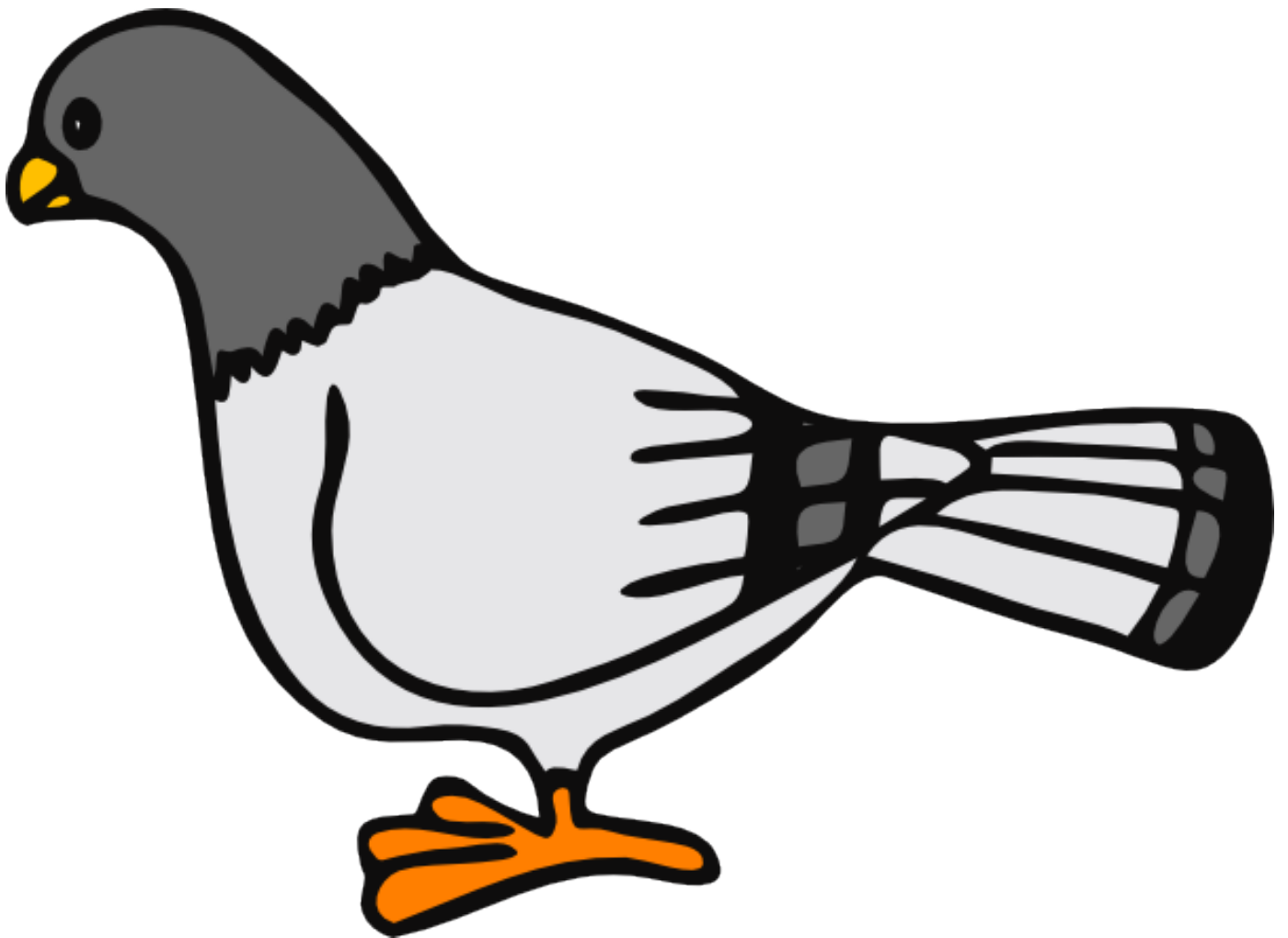
When Leonardo was 14 years old his father moved to the big city of Florence. There his father became friends with a famous painter and sculptor named Andrea del Verrocchio. Verrocchio taught Leonardo about painting. Leonardo became his assistant. Later Leonardo got to have his own art studio.

As Leonardo learned to paint, his pictures showed movement and feeling. His style became famous in Italy. It was called the “High Renaissance” style of painting.

All his life Leonardo helped teach others to paint. He often said, “I never tire of being useful.” Leonardo always taught his students that the highest purpose of painting was to show “the intention of man’s soul,” which means a person’s deepest thoughts and feelings.



There was a big marketplace in Florence that Leonardo like to go to. People sold all kinds of things there, from vegetables to pigeons. Many times Leonardo went to the marketplace and bought a couple of pigeons just so he could set them free.





Leonardo loved to learn. His curiosity and many questions helped him discover many fascinating things. He did not just learn how to paint well. He followed his dreams and learned about many different areas that interested him.

He learned about:

Sculpture (carving figures from stone)

Architecture (building)

Engineering (designing)

Military science

Botany (plants)

Anatomy (human body)

Geology (rocks)

Geography (the world)

Hydraulics (movement of water)

Aerodynamics (flying, wind)

Optics (eyes)

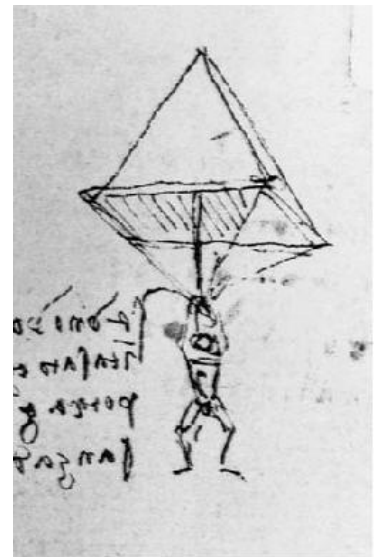
Out of all these areas he explored, some of his most famous discoveries were:

- * He found that you can know how old a tree is by counting its rings in the trunk.



- * He experimented some with inventing submarines and parachutes.

- * He was one of the first people to say that the sun does not move around the earth. He said that the earth moves around the sun instead.

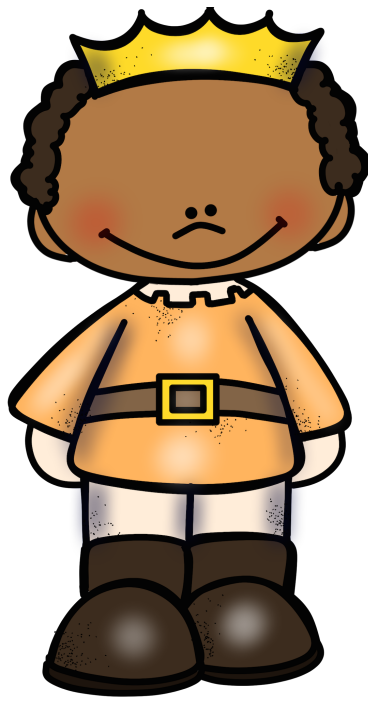


Leonardo lived in Florence for quite awhile.

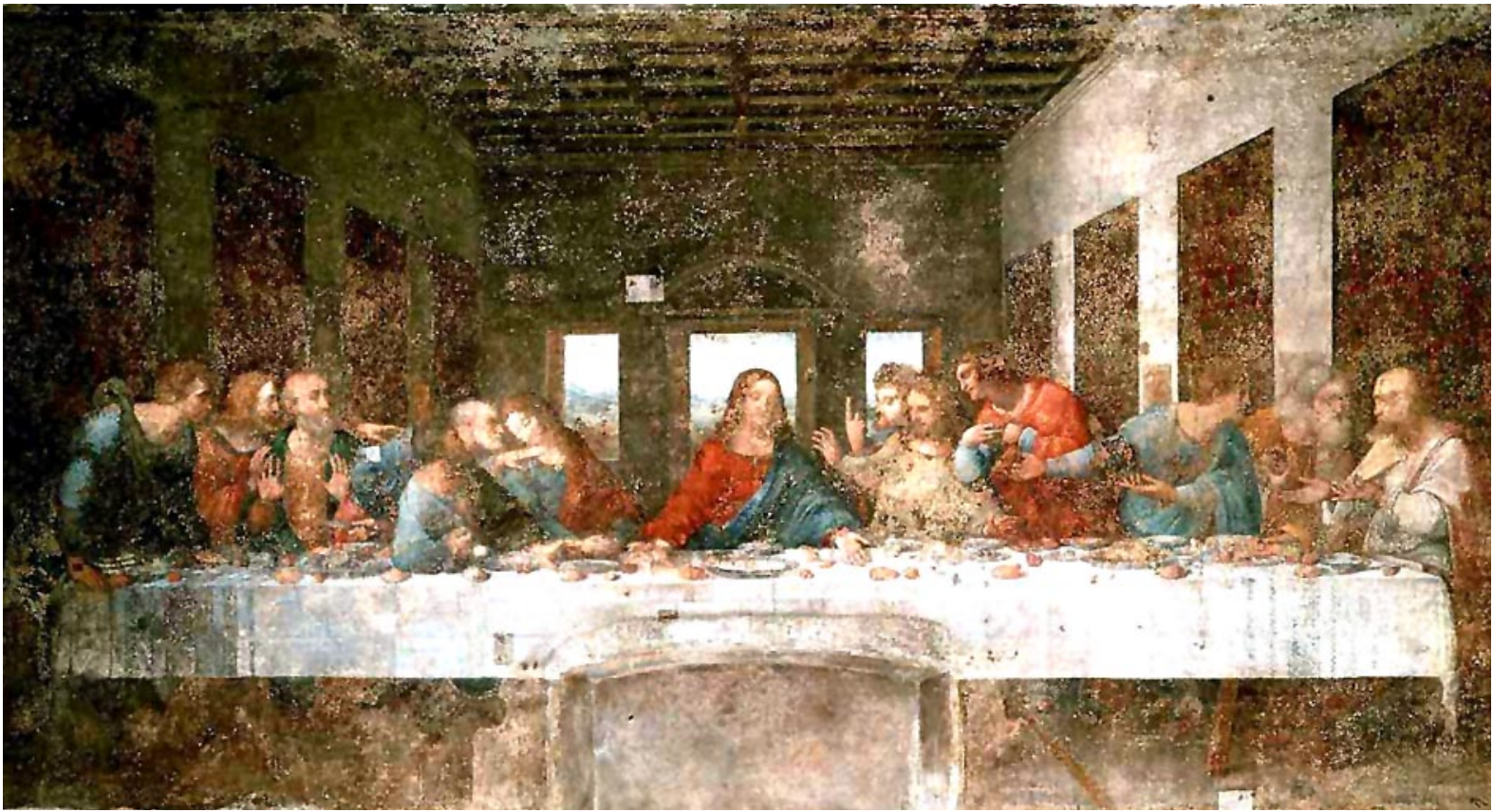
Then he moved to another big city in Italy called Milan. He worked there for the Duke of Milan.

The duke really liked Leonardo. He loved to hear him play his lute for the court. A lute is a long-necked stringed instrument. You play it by plucking the strings.





One day the duke asked Leonardo if he would paint a picture of the Last Supper. You can read about the Last Supper in the Bible. It was the last meal that Jesus ate with his disciples before his death. The duke wanted Leonardo to paint it on a big wall in a monastery where the religious monks lived. It took Leonardo three years to paint *The Last Supper*. It became very famous.



The Last Supper is a very interesting painting. Not only did he like to show action in his paintings, but also the inner feelings of people. So he decided to have his painting show the moment when Jesus said to his disciples, "One of you will betray me."

If you look closely at the painting, you can tell which person is Judas, the disciple who betrayed Jesus. Judas is the only one in the painting trying to move away from Jesus. His face is not in the light. Leonardo had a hard time finding people whose faces he could draw to represent both Judas and Jesus. Many people say Leonardo did not finish painting the head of Jesus because he believed he could not paint it to look right.



Leonardo loved math. When he painted *The Last Supper*, he divided it up perfectly so that Jesus is in the exact center of the light and space of the painting. He painted the picture with oil paints. The dampness of the monastery soon began to ruin it. Later on someone made a door in the wall.



General Napoleon's French army used the room as a stable. And during World War II the monastery was bombed.

The painting, which is really a part of the wall, is now restored so that it looks like it did when Leonardo first painted it. Before they started to restore the painting, no buses were allowed near it because they would shake the wall. And only 15 people at a time were allowed to come see it.



After Leonardo had lived in Milan for almost 20 years, the Duke of Milan was forced to leave the city. So Leonardo decided to move back to Florence. He was welcomed back like a hero because of his style of painting. Other people who became famous painters, like Botticelli, Raphael, and Michelangelo, were learning from his style.



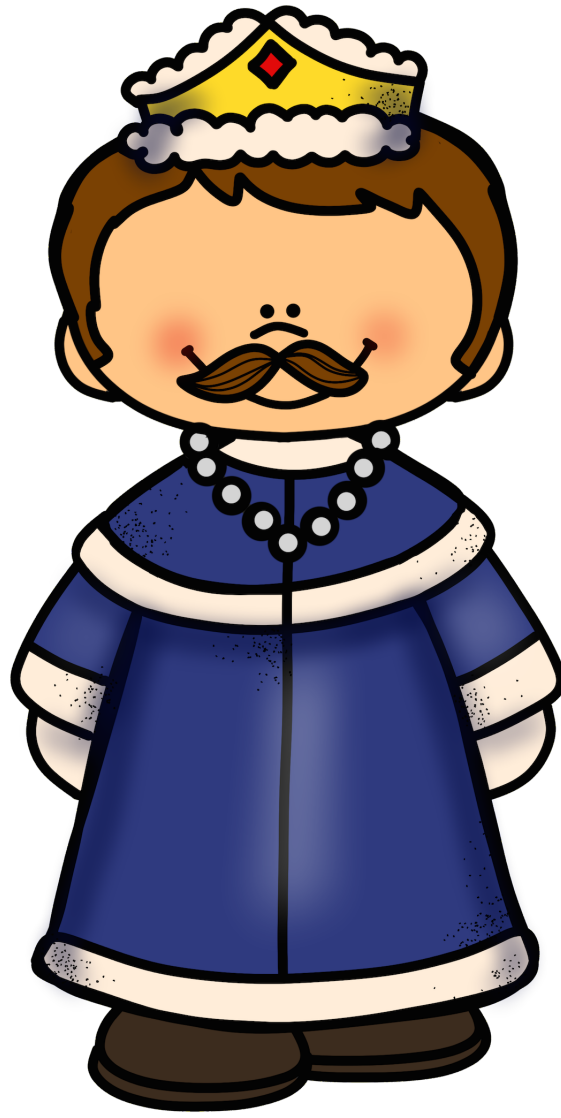
While he was living in Florence, Leonardo painted the famous *Mona Lisa*. This painting also took him three years. You can visit and see it in Paris, France, at the Louvre Art Museum. It is protected in a bulletproof, air-conditioned case. Most paintings before this time only showed a person's head and shoulders and a very serious-looking face. The *Mona Lisa* was very unusual during this time because Leonardo painted more than just the woman's head and shoulders. And he also painted her smiling.

The real Mona Lisa was the wife of a merchant in Florence. She was very beautiful. Whenever she posed for

Leonardo to paint her, he had someone sing or play music or tell her jokes so she would keep smiling. The smile in the painting does not just show a happy face. It also



shows she is thinking about something, but no one knows what.



King Francis I of France invited Leonardo to live near him in the city of Tours, France. The king even gave him a big house to live in.

So Leonardo lived there for the last two years of his life.

Leonardo died on May 2, 1519. He was 67 years old. His death was sad for everyone who knew him. He was remembered for his great energy, his love of learning, and his generous ways.

