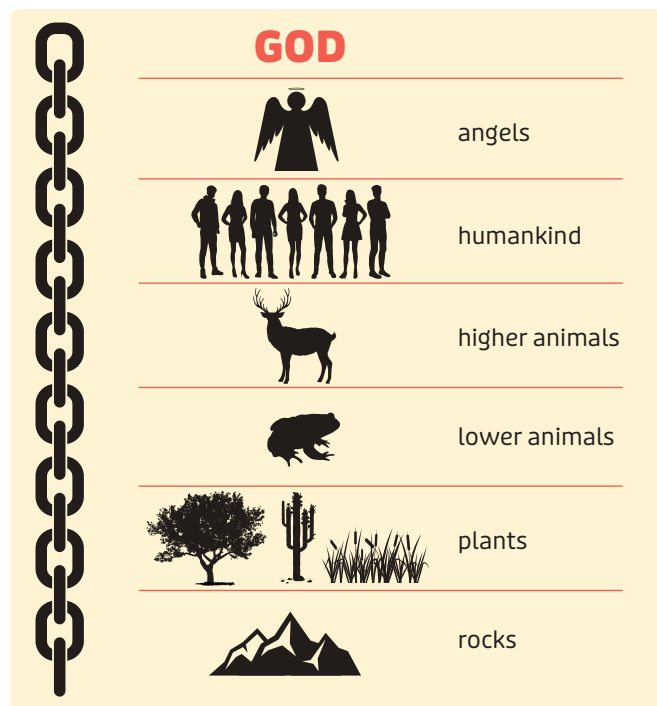


THE ENGLISH RENAISSANCE



LEAD IN

1 Look at the picture and answer the following questions.

1. What does this picture show?
2. What position do human beings occupy in this scheme?
3. Why do you think there is a 'chain'?

Share your ideas with the rest of the class.

VOCABULARY Lab

2 Read the paragraphs below. Then match the following words (1-5) with their definitions (a-e).

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. <input type="checkbox"/> ancient | a. referring to what is good or bad, right or wrong |
| 2. <input type="checkbox"/> neglected | b. happened or arrived at a later time/date |
| 3. <input type="checkbox"/> flourished | c. not considered, not paid any attention |
| 4. <input type="checkbox"/> delayed | d. became more successful or abundant |
| 5. <input type="checkbox"/> ethical | e. from the distant past before the end of the Roman empire |

What are the main ideas of Humanism? What happened during the Renaissance?

Humanism and the Renaissance. The **Renaissance** is a European cultural and intellectual phenomenon that took place between the 15th and the 16th centuries. It started in Italy, where a group of artists and intellectuals called '**Humanists**' began rediscovering ancient texts from the classical age that had been neglected during the Middle Ages. Humanists believed that human beings are at the centre of the universe and are supposed to live in harmony with it. They are also the 'measure' of all things, as human experience, understanding, and perceptions play a fundamental role in shaping and comprehending the world. They are characterised by superior thinking skills, which they can use to discover new things and produce beautiful works. **Italian artists and intellectuals** explored the infinite possibilities of human creativity: supported by the political leaders of some of the most powerful **city-states** in Italy, they promoted an incredible cultural awakening that produced some of the most refined artworks of all times. During the Renaissance, old truths were rediscovered, new scientific theories were developed, literature, visual arts and architecture flourished, and new technologies – such as the press – allowed ideas to circulate and grow.

What are the peculiarities of the 'English Renaissance'?

The 'English Renaissance'. In England, the Renaissance acquired some characteristics that made it different from the Italian model. Propelled by the ideas of the so-called 'New Learning' (this is what Humanism was called in England), the 'English Renaissance' was characterised by three main aspects: **1. It was delayed:** due to the break with Rome, internal dynastic fights, and religious persecutions, the 'English Renaissance' flourished mainly during Elizabeth I's reign. **2. It focused mainly on philosophical and ethical topics:** rather than focusing on art or architecture, English humanists such as Thomas More were more engaged in philosophical and intellectual debates about ethical issues, religion and education. **3. Its main genre was drama:** differently from what happened in Italy, where poetry, visual arts, and architecture represented the peak of the Renaissance, the genre that represented the climax of the 'English Renaissance' was drama.

FIRST Reading and Use of English | Part 3

3 For questions (1-8), read the text below. Use the word given in capitals at the end of some of the lines to form a word that fits in the gap in the same line. There is an example at the beginning (0 = artists).

The great chain of being. The ‘great chain of being’ is one of the most popular ideas of the English Renaissance and was used by **0***artists*..... and intellectuals to explain both the structure of the universe and the nature of human society.

Inspired by the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle, the concept of the ‘chain of being’ is based on the idea that all creatures in the universe are **1**..... and occupy a specific position in the hierarchy of the universe. The idea of ‘interconnectedness’ is why the concept is **2**..... by the image of a ‘chain’.

In the ‘great chain of being’, God occupies the **3**..... position and is followed by the Angels.

Animals, plants and minerals occupy the lowest position because they are made of pure matter. Humans stand in the middle: they are connected with the **4**..... elements because of their material nature but also connected with God and the Angels due to their spiritual nature. This concept is reflected in the **5**..... structure of human society, where each individual occupies a specific fixed position and is interconnected with all its other members from the top (king) to the bottom (servants).

The ‘great chain of being’ concept is based on the idea that the universe is **6**..... and dominated by reciprocal **7**..... among its members. Still, it also indicates that everyone is assigned a specific position or ‘role’ that cannot be modified. Humanists embraced the concept of the ‘great chain of being’ but greatly challenged its fixed structure thanks to their emphasis on the importance of individual **8**.....

ART

CONNECT

SYMBOL

HIGH

LOW

HIERARCHY

HARMONY

CONNECT

FREE

CHECKPOINT

4 Answer the following questions.

1. Where did the Renaissance start?
2. What ideas characterised Humanism?
3. What forms of art flourished during the Renaissance?
4. What delayed the start of the Renaissance in England?
5. Who influenced the development of the idea of the ‘great chain of being’?
6. What vision of society does the ‘great chain of being’ generate?

WRITING Lab SHORT ESSAY

5 Focus on the main ideas of Humanism (e.g. humans are supposed to live in harmony with the universe; humans are the measure of all things; humans use their cognitive skills to produce amazing things). Which of them are still modern? Explain your opinion in a short text (max. 200 words).

→ *The great chain of being* by Robert Fludd, engraving, Library of Congress, Washington.

