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## Activity Two – Reading Comprehension

### Unit 5 – Reading

The Early Modern period, which lasted from approximately 1450 to 1800, was one of the most important periods in world history. During these centuries, Europe experienced major political, cultural, religious and scientific changes that transformed society and influenced many parts of the world. Historians often describe this period as the beginning of the modern age because many ideas and institutions that exist today developed during these years.

One of the most significant movements of the Early Modern period was the Renaissance. It began in the Italian city-states during the fifteenth century before spreading across Europe. The word *Renaissance* means "rebirth" because people became interested again in the ideas, literature and art of Ancient Greece and Rome. Humanism, an intellectual movement, encouraged people to study history, philosophy, languages and the arts. Humanists believed that education could improve both individuals and society.

The Renaissance also produced some of the greatest artists in history. Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and Raphael created paintings, sculptures and buildings that are still admired today. At the same time, the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg around 1450 made books cheaper and more widely available. As a result, knowledge spread much faster than before, allowing more people to read, learn and exchange ideas.

Another important development was the Age of Exploration. European countries such as Portugal and Spain searched for new sea routes to Asia in order to trade spices, silk and other valuable goods. Improvements in navigation, including the magnetic compass, better maps and more advanced ships such as the caravel, made long-distance voyages possible.

In 1492, Christopher Columbus reached the Americas while trying to find a western route to Asia. Although he did not realise he had discovered a new continent, his voyage changed world history forever. A few years later, Vasco da Gama reached India by sailing around Africa, opening a direct sea route between Europe and Asia. Ferdinand Magellan's expedition later completed the first journey around the world, proving that the Earth could be circumnavigated by sea.

European exploration increased trade between continents but also had serious consequences. European powers established colonies in America, Africa and Asia, often taking control of local populations and resources. Indigenous peoples suffered from war, forced labour and diseases brought by Europeans. At the same time, goods such as potatoes, tomatoes, maize and chocolate were introduced into Europe, while horses, wheat and other products were taken to the Americas. Historians refer to this exchange of plants, animals, people and ideas as the Columbian Exchange.

Religion also changed dramatically during the Early Modern period. In 1517, the German monk Martin Luther criticised certain practices of the Catholic Church and published his famous *Ninety-five Theses*. His ideas quickly spread across Europe thanks to the printing press. This movement became known as the Protestant Reformation and led to the creation of new Christian churches. In response, the Catholic Church introduced reforms of its own during the Counter-Reformation, aiming to strengthen religious education and correct abuses within the Church.

The final major transformation of this period was the Scientific Revolution. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, scientists began to question traditional beliefs and relied increasingly on observation, experimentation and mathematics. Instead of accepting old ideas without evidence, they searched for explanations based on careful investigation.

Important scientists made discoveries that changed people's understanding of the universe. Nicolaus Copernicus proposed that the Earth moved around the Sun rather than the opposite. Galileo Galilei improved the telescope and provided observations that supported this theory. Later, Isaac Newton explained the laws of motion and gravity, establishing principles that remain fundamental to science today. Their work encouraged a new way of thinking based on reason and scientific evidence.

The Early Modern period also witnessed the growth of stronger national governments. Many European monarchs centralised their power, creating more organised states with professional armies and efficient systems of taxation. Trade expanded, cities grew and a wealthy merchant class became increasingly influential. These economic and political developments helped prepare Europe for the Industrial Revolution, which would begin during the late eighteenth century.

Today, historians consider the Early Modern period a turning point in history. The Renaissance transformed culture and education, the Age of Exploration connected continents, the Reformation changed religion and the Scientific Revolution revolutionised

knowledge. Together, these developments shaped the political, economic and cultural foundations of the modern world and continue to influence societies today.

## **Questions**

### **1. What was one of the main characteristics of the Early Modern period?**

- A. Europe became isolated from the rest of the world.
- B. There were few cultural or scientific changes.
- C. Europe experienced important political, cultural and scientific transformations.
- D. The feudal system became stronger than ever.

### **2. What was the main goal of the Renaissance?**

- A. To expand European colonies.
- B. To recover and develop the ideas of Classical Greece and Rome.
- C. To replace science with religion.
- D. To strengthen the feudal system.

### **3. Why did European explorers travel to new lands?**

- A. To escape from wars in Europe.
- B. To discover new trade routes and valuable resources.
- C. To study ancient civilisations.
- D. To build new universities.

### **4. Which invention helped sailors during the Age of Exploration?**

- A. The steam engine.
- B. The telescope.
- C. The magnetic compass.
- D. The printing press.

**5. What was one important consequence of European exploration?**

- A. Trade between continents increased.
- B. Castles became the main centres of government.
- C. The Roman Empire was restored.
- D. Europe stopped trading with Asia

**6. What was the Reformation?**

- A. A movement to improve agriculture.
- B. A political alliance between European kingdoms.
- C. A religious movement that challenged the Catholic Church.
- D. A military campaign against the Ottoman Empire.

**7. How did the printing press contribute to the Reformation?**

- A. It made books more expensive.
- B. It helped spread religious ideas more quickly.
- C. It replaced handwritten letters completely.
- D. It prevented people from reading different opinions.

**8. What was one important feature of the Scientific Revolution?**

- A. People accepted traditional beliefs without questioning them.
- B. Scientists based their conclusions on observation and experimentation.
- C. Science was controlled only by kings.
- D. Universities stopped teaching mathematics.

**9. According to the text, why is the Early Modern period important?**

- A. Because very little changed during these centuries.
- B. Because it marked the end of all international trade.
- C. Because many developments shaped the modern world.
- D. Because Europe returned to medieval traditions.

**10. Which statement best summarises the unit?**

- A. The Early Modern period was a time of stability with few changes.
- B. The period was characterised by exploration, new ideas, religious change and scientific progress.
- C. The Renaissance only influenced artists.
- D. The Scientific Revolution only affected astronomy.

## **Answer Key**

1. C
2. B
3. B
4. C
5. A
6. C
7. B
8. B
9. C
10. B