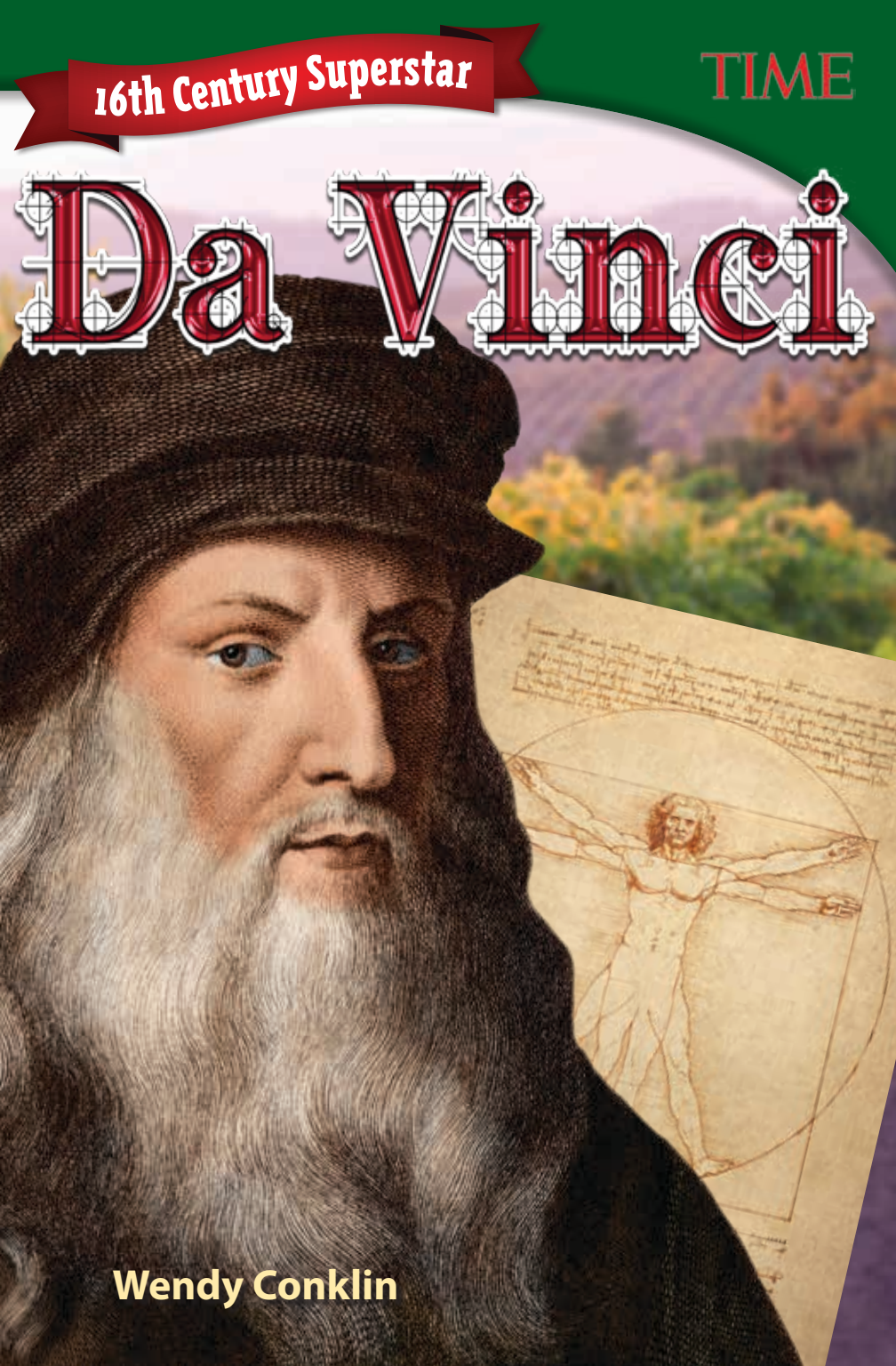
16th Century Superstar

TIME

Da Vinci



Wendy Conklin

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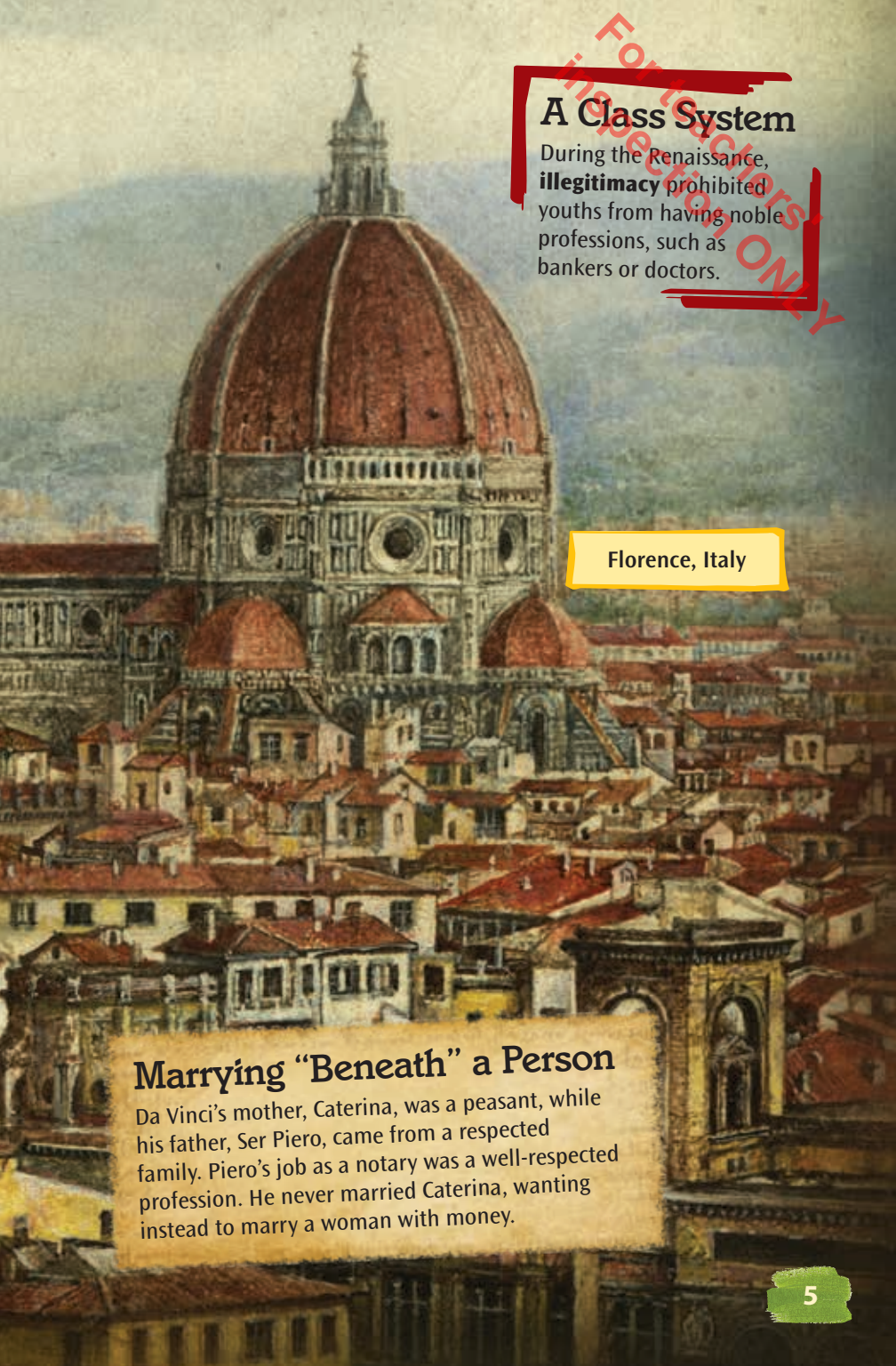
A Superstar Is Born



Every now and then, a superstar comes along and the world takes notice. By definition, superstars stand out. This is certainly true of Leonardo da Vinci. He was born in Vinci, Italy, in 1452. Had his mother not been a peasant, things might have turned out differently for da Vinci. He most likely would have attended the university in Florence and studied to be a **notary** like his well-to-do father. Instead of painting and inventing ways to solve problems, his days would have been busy filling out legal documents.

But his parents never married. So the **guild** of the magistrates and notaries would not accept da Vinci as an **apprentice**. Instead, his father had to look for another profession for him. As a young child, da Vinci showed a talent for drawing. So his father sent him to Florence to become an apprentice to the famous artist, Andrea del Verrocchio. And that is where the road to superstardom began for da Vinci.

Da Vinci was continually striving to improve and perfect his work and the world around him. Along the path to becoming a superstar, da Vinci came into contact with many different types of people. They played important roles in his life as he developed not only as an artist but also as a scientist and inventor.



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A Class System

During the Renaissance, **illegitimacy** prohibited youths from having noble professions, such as bankers or doctors.

Florence, Italy

Marrying "Beneath" a Person

Da Vinci's mother, Caterina, was a peasant, while his father, Ser Piero, came from a respected family. Piero's job as a notary was a well-respected profession. He never married Caterina, wanting instead to marry a woman with money.

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A Superior Apprentice

From the very beginning, da Vinci stood out in Andrea del Verrocchio's workshop. Even though he was an illegitimate child, he was one of the wealthiest apprentices at the workshop. He came from his father's "respectable" family. This was rare for Verrocchio's apprentices in 1467. Most boys came from homes where the fathers were typical **tradesmen**.

Verrocchio designed sets and costumes for pageants. The artists in his workshop painted banners, carpets, and **tapestries** for festivals. **Patrons** often commissioned paintings. And, everyone worked together. As the master painter and sculptor, Verrocchio directed the work.

Students were craftsmen. They learned by practicing their master's style of artistry. This made it all the more remarkable when da Vinci began practicing his own painting techniques. Da Vinci's skills are obvious in the 1475 work *Baptism of Christ*. The monks of San Salvi near Florence commissioned this painting. Verrocchio asked da Vinci to paint the angel on the far left. The result amazed everyone. Da Vinci's style stands out as superior. Verrocchio realized that his student, at just 23 years old, had surpassed him.

Not a Finisher

Throughout his life, many of da Vinci's paintings and projects went unfinished. There are different theories as to why. Some investigations reveal that he had such varied interests that is was difficult for him to complete one task before moving on to the next. Other historians believe he left works unfinished because he was a perfectionist. If his work could not achieve perfection, he abandoned it.

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A Man without Education

When asked, da Vinci described himself as "*omo sanza lettere*." This means that he was a man without an education. The local priests taught him to read, write, and solve basic arithmetic, but that was the extent of his formal education.



Baptism of Christ

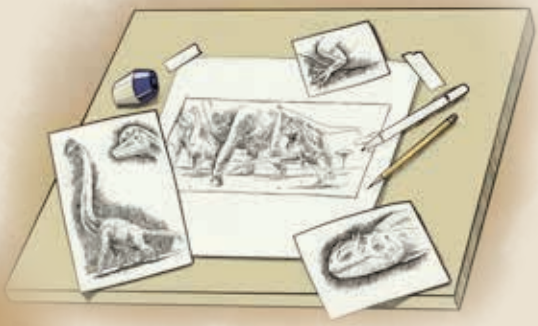
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DIG DEEPER!

How to Paint like Leonardo

Some artists today still follow da Vinci's process. Here are the steps they take to create masterpieces and experience the rewards of creating works of art.

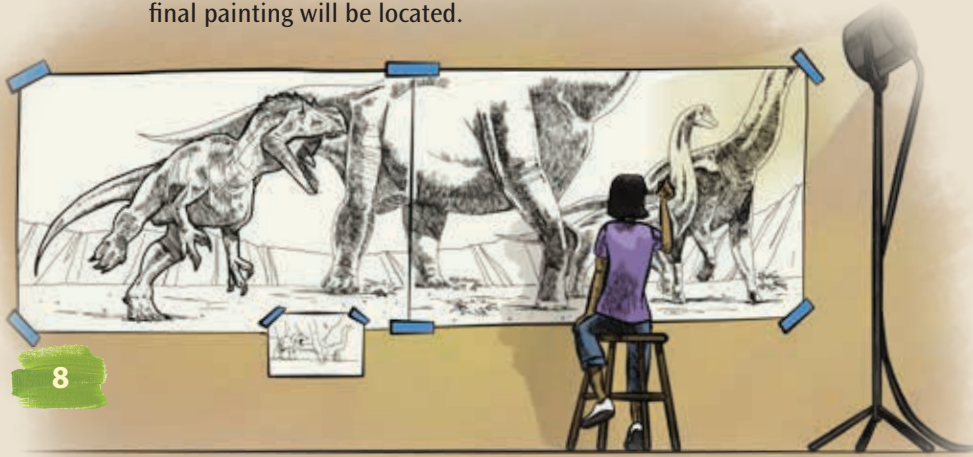
1. Artists sketch and plan the composition that will become the painting. This can take months to complete.





2. They make the **cartoon**, which is the finished sketch of the painting. It will be as large as the painting, so they might connect several papers together to make it as large as it needs to be.

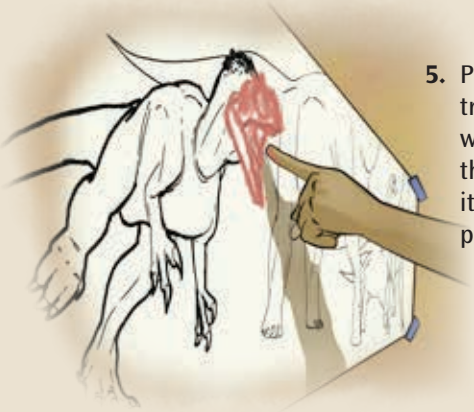
3. Next, they attach the cartoon to a wall or other spot where the final painting will be located.



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4. Following the outlines of the cartoon, artists poke small holes in the paper.





5. Pressing chalk into the holes transfers the chalk onto the wall. When they remove the cartoon from the wall, it leaves the outline of the painting.

6. Artists then lay the **underpainting** by using neutral earth tones. These tones create the shadows that give the painting a three-dimensional look.





7. Finally, they add the color to the painting by applying layers of oil paints until the painting is complete.

Reader's Guide

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1. Why did Leonardo da Vinci keep notebooks filled with ideas?
2. For what reasons did da Vinci continually get work from some of the wealthiest and most famous patrons of his time?
3. Look back through da Vinci's sketches and paintings. Which do you think has had the most influence on later societies? Defend your answer.
4. A Renaissance man is someone who is good at many things. Why is it fitting to call da Vinci a Renaissance man?

