

Great Books: *The Prince*

Teacher's Guide

Grade Level: 9-12

Curriculum Focus: World History

Lesson Duration: One class period

Program Description

Machiavelli's masterpiece of manipulation and political intrigue was written more than 500 years ago, but its principles still live. Politician Gary Hart and statesman Henry Kissinger, among others, discuss how *The Prince* has influenced world leaders and the course of history from medieval times until the present.

Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- People may differ in what they identify as the qualities of a good leader.
- Machiavelli's list of leadership qualities for a prince has always been controversial.

Materials

- *Great Books: The Prince* video

Procedures

1. You may wish to carry out the first part of this activity before students read *The Prince*, read about *The Prince*, or view the video about it. Tell students that they will have an opportunity in the first part of this activity to describe a good leader in their own words. In the second part of the activity, they will compare and contrast their own description of a good leader with the description put forth by Machiavelli in *The Prince*.
2. Begin by having students identify positions that call for leadership. Some of the positions they may think of include the following:
 - Leader of a country
 - Leader of a service organization
 - Spiritual leader of a group of people; leader of spiritual leaders
 - Captain of an athletic team
 - Teacher of a class of students

- Principal of a school
 - Superintendent of a school district
 - President of the student body
 - General of an army
 - President of a college
 - CEO of a corporation
 - Leader of a labor union
 - Conductor of an orchestra
 - Mayor of a city
 - Governor of a state
3. Given that there is such a broad range of leadership roles, what generalizations can students make about the skills that leaders should have? Keep a running list of important skills or traits that students mention. Some commonly mentioned skills or traits that followers say they think are important include these:
- Decisiveness
 - Fairness
 - Ability to bring out the best in people
 - Willingness to work as hard as the followers
 - Strong speaking and public relations skills
 - Honesty
4. Now keep a running list of skills, traits, or powers that students think help a leader get ahead or get things done. Are some of the skills, traits, or powers on this list the same as on the preceding list or not? Some commonly mentioned skills, traits, and powers that help a leader get ahead or get things done include the following:
- Control of followers' grades, promotions, or financial situation
 - A threatening personality
 - Good connections with others in positions of leadership
 - Powers of persuasion
 - Trickery
 - Competitiveness
5. Conduct a class discussion on the differences between the items on the first list and the items on the second list. Talk about how the skills, traits, or powers they may value in a leader are not necessarily the same that a leader thinks he or she needs in order to survive.

6. Next, have students consider Machiavelli and *The Prince*. What principles does Machiavelli feel are important for a state leader?
7. Have each student prepare a Venn diagram that shows the following:
 - In the overlapping area, what both the student and Machiavelli think of as essential traits, skills, or powers of a *leader of a nation*
 - On the left, what the student looks for in a *leader of a nation* but Machiavelli doesn't
 - On the right, what Machiavelli wants in a *leader of a nation* but the student doesn'tEmphasize that the activity is moving from a discussion of leaders in general to a discussion of leaders of a nation.
8. Using the finished Venn diagram as a prewriting device, direct students to write a compare-and-contrast essay in which they discuss their views of what makes an ideal state leader and Machiavelli's views.
9. Ask the class why they think Machiavelli's list of leadership qualities for a prince has always been controversial.

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- 3 points: Student's essay provides a very well organized presentation of similarities and differences; highly unified and coherent paragraphs; absence of errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics.
- 2 points: Student's essay provides well-organized presentation of similarities and differences; unified and coherent paragraphs; some errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics.
- 1 point: Student's essay provides poorly organized presentation of similarities and differences; paragraphs lacking unity and coherence; many errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics.

Vocabulary

mercenary

Definition: A soldier hired and paid to serve in a foreign army

Context: Machiavelli warned that a mercenary army can be unreliable.

republic

Definition: A government in which ultimate power resides in the citizens who can elect people to represent them

Context: Traditionally, a republic does not have a monarch as a head of state.

steadfast

Definition: Not subject to change

Context: Machiavelli wrote, "Appear steadfast, but remain flexible."



strategist

Definition: One who plans how to use the political, economic, or military forces of a nation

Context: Machiavelli gives us the inner discipline of the strategist.

totalitarians

Definition: Leaders who subordinate and strictly control all others in a state or regime

Context: For some, *The Prince* is a guidebook for tyrants and totalitarians.

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- World History – Global Expansion and Encounter: Understands how European society experienced political, economic, and cultural transformations in an age of global intercommunication between 1450 and 1750.
-

Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>
-

DVD Content

This program is available in an interactive DVD format. The following information and activities are specific to the DVD version.

How To Use the DVD

The DVD starting screen has the following options:

Play Video – This plays the video from start to finish. There are no programmed stops, except by using a remote control. With a computer, depending on the particular software player, a pause button is included with the other video controls.

Video Index – Here the video is divided into sections, indicated by video thumbnail icons. Watching all parts in sequence is similar to watching the video from start to finish. Brief descriptions and total running times are noted for each part. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the remote for TV playback; on a computer, click once to highlight a thumbnail and read the accompanying text description and click again to start the video.

Curriculum Units – These are specially edited video segments pulled from different sections of the video (see below). These nonlinear segments align with key ideas in the unit of instruction. They include onscreen pre- and post-viewing questions, reproduced below in this Teacher's Guide. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the TV remote or click once on the Curriculum Unit title on a computer.

Standards Link – Selecting this option displays a single screen that lists the national academic standards the video addresses.

Teacher Resources – This screen gives the technical support number and Web site address.

Video Index

I. Introduction (12 min.)

An introduction to the political ideas set forth in *The Prince*. Background information on Niccolò Machiavelli, the Middle Ages, and some of the great thinkers of Machiavelli's time.

II. A Machiavellian Tale (14 min.)

Imprisoned and later released, Machiavelli writes *The Prince* as a way to reenter the political arena. A discussion of Machiavelli's ideas about religion, politics, and the need for civic militaries.

III. A Prince Among Men (12 min.)

Machiavelli's interpretation of what makes a good ruler. A closer look at the United States and the role its "princes" have played in the foreign arena.

IV. Machiavelli's Legacy and Influence (12 min.)

Machiavelli dies without returning to politics, and without knowing the influence his ideas would have on politics for centuries to come. A discussion of the many interpretations of Machiavelli's writings.

Curriculum Units

Segment 1. Introduction: *The Prince*

Pre-viewing question

Q: Is there such a thing as a perfect leader?

A: Answers will vary.



Post-viewing question

Q: What are some similarities between nature and fortune?

A: According to Machiavelli, both nature and fortune can be unpredictable and hard to control. He says that both can be controlled during times of peace with dams and dikes, and that these same controls might help steer nature or fortune in the right direction during times of turmoil.

Segment 2. A Career Cut Short

Pre-viewing question

Q: Which offers better defense, a mercenary or civic army?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Why did people in the Middle Ages need protectors?

A: The medieval system was collapsing, and new ideas were gaining force in Europe. Italy was a mess of anarchistic city-states, and the entire continent seemed to be in turmoil. Rulers and laws changed constantly, and safety was hard to come by without having protection from a wealthy noble or politician.

Segment 3. The Makings of a Prince

Pre-viewing question

Q: Should religion play a part in politics and vice versa?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: According to Machiavelli, what is the price of being a good prince?

A: A prince must love his country more than his soul and be ready to go to hell in exchange for his country's well being.

Segment 4. Machiavelli's Return

Pre-viewing question

Q: Should a government be judged by its actions or by the outcome of those actions?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Why did Machiavelli write *The Prince*?

A: He thought it would help him return to politics.

Segment 5. The Role of a Super Power

Pre-viewing question

Q: Should super powers involve themselves in all major international crises?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Why is it impossible for a government to always adopt a safe course?

A: Because life and events are not always predictable; what looks safe today might make for a dangerous situation tomorrow.

Segment 6. Legacy of a Demon

Pre-viewing question

Q: Can overwhelming feelings of distrust destroy a person?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Why was Machiavelli demonized?

A: His ideas were said to have inspired the 16th-century massacre of 50,000 French Protestants. Machiavelli was held up as an example of villainous Catholicism and labeled an immoral scoundrel.