

*History*  
UNFOLDING

# MARTIN LUTHER AND THE REFORMATION



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**MindSparks**  
CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO THINK HISTORICALLY

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	.....	2
<b>Lesson 1</b>	The Troubled Church .....	4
<b>Lesson 2</b>	Martin Luther's Revolt .....	8
<b>Lesson 3</b>	The Spreading Spirit of Protest .....	12
<b>Lesson 4</b>	Church and State After the Reformation .....	16
<b>Appendix</b>	Image Close-ups .....	21

# Introduction

## Martin Luther and the Reformation

The Reformation was not just a turning point for Europe. True, it was of immediate concern only to people in Europe, and to those Europeans settling other parts of the world. Yet it was also a key event in world history. Why? The Reformation was a huge experiment, one that in time would affect every other society on earth. It was an experiment in which the basic values and beliefs of an entire civilization were challenged from within that same civilization. Could such a self-critical perspective settle down to become the norm without tearing that civilization apart? During a century of bitter religious warfare, that question definitely remained open to debate. Perhaps it still has not been entirely settled. But out of the Reformation, new conceptions of religion, belief, the individual, and the state emerged. So too did the idea of tolerance and pluralism. These are concepts of importance to the entire world. And in this sense, that world still lives in the shadow of the European Reformation.

The 12 illustrations in this booklet focus on a number of central themes in the history of the Protestant Reformation launched by Martin Luther in the year 1517. The illustrations are presented in four lessons. Each lesson uses three of the illustrations to explore one broad topic in the overall story. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

### **The Troubled Church**

The illustrations in this lesson focus on the crisis of the Roman Catholic Church, a crisis that had been building for two centuries by the time Martin Luther nailed his famous 95 Theses to the church door in Wittenberg.

### **Martin Luther's Revolt**

Luther was a man driven by his own sense of sin. Yet he was also a man of iron will and confidence. He was a supreme individualist who defended liberty of conscience in ringing terms. Yet he was also quite authoritarian, ready to use the power of the princes to enforce his views. The illustrations for this lesson highlight these contradictory traits in Luther's personality.

### **The Spreading Spirit of Protest**

The movement Luther launched exhibited many of the same contradictory traits. The new printing presses made ideas available to masses of people as never before. In doing so, they encouraged open debate and a wider participation in public affairs. Yet many religious reformers feared this new reality and sought to contain it. As a result, Protestants fought one another as often as they fought their Catholic opponents.

### **Church and State After the Reformation**

At first, Catholics were unable to act or change in the face of Luther's challenge. But soon, Catholic reformers launched a vigorous Counter-Reformation. In doing so, they adopted the same crusading spirit as their opponents. And yet, they and the Protestants together slowly came to terms with a new reality. Neither side was going to eliminate the other. They would have to learn to live together within a new and constantly shifting balance between church and state.

## Using Photos, Cartoons, and Other Visuals to Teach History

Many textbooks are full of colorful visuals. However, all too often these visuals function primarily as window dressing. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable. Only occasionally do the visuals in textbooks do more than offer simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, they pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help young people master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as historical documents. The lessons in this booklet focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power, and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general, as well as their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

## How to Use This Booklet

The booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

**A BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET** This page provides brief summaries explaining the three illustrations on which the lesson is based and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

**DIGITAL IMAGES** The booklet's PDF allows you to project the images for use in your class discussions.

### **DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY SHEETS**

Each sheet displays one illustration. It includes a sequence of questions to help you plan an all-class discussion while using the projected images. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the illustration. If you wish, you may reproduce these pages and hand them out. In addition to the discussion questions on the illustration itself, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. Some of these can be made into individual assignments. Others will work best as small-group or all-class activities.

*Martin Luther and the Reformation***OBJECTIVES**

1. Students will understand why many Europeans were unhappy with the Catholic Church in the early 1500s.
2. Students will better understand Luther's ideas about faith and the need to reform the Church.

# The Troubled Church

*Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.*

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION****Illustration 1**

By 1500, trouble had been building in the Catholic Church for centuries. In the 1300s, the Popes lived at Avignon, where the king of France could more easily control them. Then for a time, two Popes at once claimed to be the true head of the Catholic Church. By the late 1400s, a single Pope again ruled the Church from Rome. But the great wealth and power of the Renaissance Popes shocked many ordinary priests and other Christians who were paying high church taxes. One such Pope was Julius II, shown here. He was Pope from 1503 to 1513. He began construction of the beautiful St. Peter's Basilica, patronized famous artists and was as involved in political matters as spiritual ones.

**Illustration 2**

One issue sparked the "explosion" we call the Reformation—the sale of indulgences to raise funds for the Church. An indulgence was an official Church pardon that allowed a Christian to avoid some punishment in the next life for his sins. In 1517, a man passed through Wittenberg, Germany, selling indulgences, just as the monks in this drawing are doing. Martin Luther was a monk and a theology teacher there. He believed that only a strong and true faith in Christ could give a soul any hope of salvation. The sale of indulgences seemed like a cruel hoax to him. To protest it, Luther nailed his *95 Theses* to the door of the church in Wittenberg. It was this act that set off the Reformation.

**Illustration 3**

Protests against Church practices had arisen in the past. Why did Luther's protest spark one of the most important upheavals in history? One reason is suggested by this page from the Gutenberg Bible, the first book known to have been printed on Johannes Gutenberg's new printing press with movable type. The Gutenberg Bible was printed between 1450 and 1456. Luther's ideas stressed direct knowledge of Scripture and personal faith. Only printing gave the masses access to the Bible. It also allowed Luther and his supporters to voice their views in hundreds of tracts and pamphlets printed in large quantities. The printed word helped weaken religious authority by giving ordinary people a means to learn and develop ideas on their own.

## Lesson 1—The Troubled Church

# Illustration 1



The Granger Collection, New York

### ***Discussing the Illustration***

1. Starting in the 1300s, people in Europe began to get very upset about the great power and wealth under the control of the leader of the Catholic Church. What name is used for the leader of the Catholic Church?
2. One Catholic Pope, Julius II, is shown here. He was Pope from 1503 to 1513. He is known as one of the Renaissance Popes of the 15th and 16th centuries. What was the Renaissance?
3. Many Renaissance Popes were great patrons of Renaissance artists. They built magnificent buildings in Rome. They were often wealthy aristocrats, as involved with politics and military affairs as with spiritual and church matters. Why might this have upset many devout Christians elsewhere in Europe?
4. Does this portrait of Julius II fit with Question 3's description of the Renaissance Popes? Answer by referring to various aspects of the portrait, such as color, composition, clothing, mannerisms, etc.

### ***Follow-up Activities***

1. Pope Julius II was born Giuliano della Rovere in 1443. Both his early church career and his reign as Pope involved him in a good deal of political conflict and intrigue. Read more about this Renaissance Pope and the political battles he engaged in beginning in the 1480s and lasting the rest of his life. Create a timeline of key events in his life. Use this timeline as a guide in a presentation to the class about the political aspects of this Renaissance Pope's life and his reign.
2. Pope Julius II began the construction of St. Peter's Basilica and he patronized several artists, including Michelangelo. Michelangelo painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel at Julius's request. Find several photos of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Share them in class and discuss them as works of art. As a class, discuss how you think Martin Luther might have reacted to Michelangelo's work had he seen it when he visited Rome in 1510.