



Name: _____

Date: _____

The Mystery of Leonardo's Notebooks

Five hundred years ago a young boy went to Florence to study art. At that time many of the world's great artists lived in that Italian city. The boy was handsome and strong, and he did many things well. He could paint, draw and make statues. He sang and played instruments. He also knew how to use all kinds of tools with skill. The boy was Leonardo da Vinci. Before long, people were talking about him.

"He will grow up to be the greatest painter in Florence," they said. They looked forward to seeing the beautiful pictures he would make. When Leonardo became a young man, people heard that he had started a painting for a church. They waited for him to finish it, but the painting went slowly. The reason was that Leonardo kept stopping his work. If he wanted to draw a man or a horse, a plant or a rock or a cloud, Leonardo had to know everything about it. He had to know what a man's muscles were like under the skin. He had to know what the bones were like under the muscles, so he would stop to learn such things.

Leonardo liked to sketch the world around him. He made hundreds of drawings in notebooks. He went to mountains and to swamps. There he drew the plants and the rocks that he saw. He went to the seashore and drew the ocean. He looked at the sky and drew the sun and the stars. People began to shake their heads and wonder. "Leonardo can do everything," they said. "He will never do anything. He never gets started. He is always making notes in his notebooks."

Leonardo lived to be an old man. He was 67 years old when he died in 1519. He left only a few paintings, and most of them were not finished. Two of the finished ones - Mona Lisa and the Last Supper - are very famous. Many people go to see them to this day.

Leonardo also left his notebooks - a great many notebooks. They were filled with pages of drawings and notes, but the notes seemed to be in a language that no one could read. There were some drawings of birds, plants, faces, arms and legs, but there were many strange drawings that no one could understand. Some people thought that Leonardo had not amounted to much. They thought he had wasted his talent.

Then someone made a discovery about Leonardo's curious notes. They had not been written in a strange language after all. The writing was backward! The notes had to be read with the help of a mirror. When people read Leonardo's notes, they were amazed at what he had written. He had not wasted his time making notes and sketches during his life. The drawings of birds were not just pretty sketches. These drawings showed how birds could fly. Leonardo's drawings explained how birds moved their wings and used their tails to guide them in flying. His sketches showed, too, how birds cut their speed to land smoothly and safely.

The strange drawings that were in the notebooks were for inventions. Leonardo had thought of many new things. He had made drawings of an aircraft and parachutes. They were ideas that had come to him as he watched birds in flight.

Leonardo had many ideas for new things 500 years ago. He was a man who thought of the future. His notebooks have drawings of a machine to cool the air, cars and diving snorkels to help swimmers breathe underwater. He also made drawings for machine guns and tanks. Today, many of the things that were found in Leonardo's notebooks are part of the world we live in.