

Renaissance women – Catherine de Medici

Catherine de Medici was born in Florence, Italy, 1519. She had a very troubled childhood. At only the young age of one, both of Catherine's parents died from a disease. The nuns where she lived, trained and disciplined her and as she grew older she became very well-educated. Catherine filled her library with numerous rare manuscripts. In 1533 her uncle, the Pope, arranged her marriage. For the first ten years of her marriage, Catherine was unable to produce children but finally she was able to. At the age of ten, one of her children became the King of France so she became the King's Regent, which enabled her to be Queen Regent. In January of the year, 1589, Catherine died at the age of seventy. Catherine de Medici was a major force in French politics, especially during the thirty years of the Roman Catholic-Huguenot wars. She ruled as a regent to her son and when he reached majority in 1563, Catherine dominated him. Catherine was a Roman Catholic but when trying to create a balance with religions she sometimes agreed with the Huguenots. By doing this she created a policy of peace between the Catholics and the Protestants.

Under her influence, three of Catherine's sons became kings and she also arranged for her daughter to be married to the King of Spain in 1560. Catherine had a great interest in architecture and she demonstrated this with her authority over the building of the new wing of the Louvre Museum, the construction of the Tuilleries Gardens, and the building of the Chateau Monceau.

1. What was Catherine's childhood like? Describe it.
2. Due to what did she become well-educated?
3. What historical and political affairs was she involved in?
4. In what way was she a patron of art?