

## **Renaissance women - Isabella d'Este**

In the Renaissance times a Renaissance Woman was supposed to marry well, be loyal to her husband and give birth to boys. A Renaissance Man, on the other hand, had to be well-educated, have cultural grace, be a gentleman and understand the arts and sciences. He also had to have refinement, be of noble birth and have courage. Many women did not fit the mold of what they called a "Renaissance Woman." Many of them would fit in as more of a "Renaissance Man" or what we would call a "Renaissance Woman" in our day and age. A prime example of this exception is Isabella d'Este. Isabella was born in 1474 into the ruling family of Ferrara. At the age of sixteen Isabella married Francesco Gonzaga. She then became the Marchioness of Mantua because Francesco was the Prince. After the death of her husband, Isabella ruled Mantua alone. Isabella's father believed in the equality of men and women and so Isabella and her siblings were very well-educated. Isabella died at the age of sixty-four in 1539. At the age of sixteen, Isabella d'Este was able to speak Greek and Latin as well as play the lute, sing, dance and debate with people much older than her. She was very well-educated and her political talent benefited Mantua while she was ruling. When her husband left, Isabella governed the city on her own, and after he died she took over his whole job. She showed great leadership skills in 1509 when she became Chief of State in Mantua. At this time she also founded a school for young women where they had to observe a strict code of morals. She was a patron of the Arts and she also set artistic fashions and standards. Isabella collected many paintings and statues. She also wrote over two thousand letters and in these she commented on everything from politics to war. That was the closest that any woman at that time ever got to writing history. Isabella patronized and promoted the arts. She allowed writers, artists and poets to exchange their ideas in her home. While she was ruling, she set an example for women to break away from the traditional role of what women were supposed to be like. By doing this and many other things she was known as the "First Lady of the Renaissance."

1. What were a Renaissance woman and a Renaissance man supposed to do in life?
2. What was the role of Isabella's father in her becoming an outstanding woman?
3. What kind of education did she receive?
4. In what way was she a true „Renaissance“ woman?