

Name _____



Even Leonardo Made Mistakes

By Sharon Fabian

Leonardo da Vinci is often considered one of the greatest creative geniuses of all time. He painted some of the most beautiful and accomplished paintings in the world. He designed machines that the world wasn't ready for yet; some of them would finally be built hundreds of years later. He explained ideas in science, art, architecture, and engineering in ways that no one had thought of before.



Could someone as talented as Leonardo da Vinci ever make mistakes? You might think the answer is no. With all of his talent, it must have been easy for Leonardo to get everything right. A brief look at his biography gives the impression that he was just about perfect, but the truth is - even Leonardo made mistakes.

Maybe some of his mistakes were made on purpose. Some people believe that this is the only explanation for mistakes like the one in Leonardo's sketch of his famous tank.

The drawing of his tank shows that it would be powered by four soldiers inside who would turn cranks to move the vehicle forward. The problem is that, if the tank were built just as it is drawn, two of the wheels would move forward and two would move backwards. Was this a "mistake" that Leonardo drew into the design on purpose to fool his enemies? Many people think so.

His most famous mistake occurred when he decided to paint his famous fresco, *The Last Supper*, using a new painting technique that he developed. The traditional technique for painting frescoes could only be done by painting rapidly on damp plaster. It would not work for Leonardo's painting style. So, he decided to use oil based paints on a base that he applied to the wall. This new method allowed him to create the masterpiece that everyone knows of today. However,

problems began to show up soon after the painting was finished. The base began to separate from the wall. Leonardo's masterpiece was in danger of falling into ruin.

Over the years, there have been many attempts to restore *The Last Supper*. Although his beautiful design has been preserved, much of the original painting done by Leonardo himself is now gone. Still, it remains one of the most admired works of art in the world. Not bad at all for a mistake.

Some of his mistakes were ideas that turned out to be so big that they were not practical. Maybe the most famous one was his plan to divert the Arno River. The Arno River connected Leonardo's city of Florence to the sea by way of Pisa, which sat at the mouth of the river. Since Florence and Pisa were enemies at the time, Leonardo and some other leaders in Florence worked on a plan to reroute the river and make it bypass Pisa altogether. Not only would Pisa lose its seaport, it would lose its source of fresh water as well! If the plan worked, it would mean certain victory for Florence.

Unfortunately, the plan didn't work. Despite Leonardo's precise maps of the terrain and his detailed drawings of equipment for use on the project, the whole thing proved to be too much. The Arno River stayed where it was.

Some of Leonardo's other ideas must have seemed like mistakes to many people of his time. Maybe when they looked at his plan for a machine that flew like a bird, they saw "mistake" written all over it. Of course, Leonardo's flying machines were not mistakes at all; they were just hundreds of years ahead of their time.

Leonardo da Vinci's paintings, drawings, and writings have taught us many things - about creativity, about science, and about many other topics. Leonardo taught us something else too; he taught us that making mistakes is OK. It can even be a good thing. We can all learn new things the way Leonardo did, by trial and error - by making mistakes.

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Questions

- _____ 1. Leonardo da Vinci only ever made one mistake.
A. false
B. true
- _____ 2. If Leonardo's tank were built exactly as shown in his drawing, it would probably _____.
A. move fast
B. move backwards only
C. not move at all
D. move in circles
- _____ 3. Leonardo's tank was designed to be powered by _____.
A. wind
B. men turning cranks
C. water power
D. electricity
- _____ 4. Leonardo's famous painting *The Last Supper* _____.
A. is greatly admired
B. has been greatly damaged
C. both
D. neither
- _____ 5. When he painted *The Last Supper*, Leonardo used a traditional painting technique.
A. true
B. false

- _____ 6. The word _____ means to repair a painting that has been damaged.
A. recover
B. revive
C. reinvent
D. restore
- _____ 7. The Arno River is in _____.
A. Italy
B. England
C. France
D. the United States
- _____ 8. Trial and error can be a good way to learn something new.
A. false
B. true

Write about a mistake that you made. If it had any good effects, be sure to include them too.
