**Niccolo Machiavelli and *The Prince***

**Background**

Niccolo Machiavelli was a diplomat and philosopher in Florence during a chaotic time. Italy and all of Europe was divided up into city-states and little kingdoms. The Pope had an army and fought wars against many of these kingdoms. The leaders of these kingdoms fought the Pope and each other for control of larger parts of Europe. Such leaders rose to power quickly, and were replaced just as quickly.

Many city-states formed alliances and had small armies of mercenaries to protect themselves. The alliances broke up and mercenaries changed sides without warning, often working for the highest bidder.

*Niccolò Machiavelli* by Santi di Tito, c. 1500.

**Machiavelli’s Career**

Machiavelli was part of an aristocratic family in Florence, the unofficial capital of the Renaissance. Florence had been run by a powerful family called the Medici’s for 60 years. In 1494, when Machiavelli was 25, the citizens of Florence revolted against the Medici and established a republic. Machiavelli joined the republic and represented Florence to other Italian city-states and to France and other European kingdoms. Machiavelli was also a leader of the citizen-army that protected Florence (he did not trust the mercenaries, so Florence did not hire them).

**The Mystery Behind the Book**

Machiavelli wrote the book quickly. Some historians think he was trying to get his job back in the government of Florence because he dedicated the book to members of the Medici family. On the other hand, Machiavelli wrote a great many other works including comedies, which leads some to think that he was actually ridiculing the Medici when he wrote *The Prince*.

In 1512, Florence was attacked and defeated by members of the Medici (helped by mercenaries and Pope Julius II who used Spanish troops). Machiavelli was imprisoned and tortured for a time – but was eventually released. He retired to his estate and began writing.

***The Prince***

Machiavelli wrote his best-known book *The Prince* after being imprisoned and released by the Medicis. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli discusses ideas about how to govern. It is a book about leadership. Most writers and philosophers during the Middle Ages and Renaissance thought that power should only be used by people who were good. Young princes were taught that if they wanted to rule a long time and pass their power down to their children, they must behave in a moral way. "Rulers do well when they do good" was the idea.

**Reaction to *The Prince***

The Catholic Church officially banned it, but many political leaders throughout Europe read it anyway (thanks to the new technology of the printing press). For example, Henry the VIII of England was partly influenced to turn his back on the Catholic Church and start the Church of England.

As you will see, Machiavelli had very different advice.

**Excerpts from Niccolo Machiavelli's Il Principe (*The Prince)***

*Directions: Read the excerpts from Machiavelli’s famous text using the Close Reading strategies (terms should be looked up and passages should be paraphrased). Then address the separate questions about Machiavelli’s advice for a ruler. Highlight the text that provides answers.*

Chapter 17

"...Whether it be better to be loved than feared or feared than loved? …One should wish to be both, but, because it is difficult to unite them in one person, [it] is much safer to be feared than loved...."

Chapter 18

"[To survive, a leader’s actions might be compared to an animal, and if so], the prince...ought to choose the fox and the lion…The lion cannot defend himself against snares and the fox cannot defend himself against wolves. Therefore, it is necessary to be a fox to discover the snares and a lion to terrify the wolves. Those [leaders] who rely simply on the lion do not understand what they are about. Therefore a wise lord cannot… keep faith (speak truth) when [doing so] may be turned against him, and when the reasons that caused him to pledge it exist no longer. If men were entirely good this [rule] would not hold, but because they are bad, and will not keep faith with you, you too are not bound to observe it with them. Nor will there ever be [a shortage of] legitimate reasons to excuse this non-observance. Of this endless modern examples could be given, showing how many treaties… have been made void… through the faithlessness of princes; and he who has known best how to employ the fox has succeeded best."

....

"For that reason, [if a prince can take] the credit of conquering and holding his state, the means will always be considered honest, and he will be praised by everybody; because the vulgar are always taken by [appearances and results]….”

"One prince of the present time… never preaches anything else but peace and good faith, and to both he is most hostile, and either, if he had kept it, would have deprived him of reputation and kingdom many a time."

Directions: Use the following questions to guide your presentation.

**2**

*Address these items in complete sentences using evidence from the excerpts.*

1. Explain Machiavelli’s advice about being feared or loved?
2. What two animals should a leader be similar to? What does each represent?
3. Why is “keeping faith” not required of a leader?
4. How might the expression “people get the leader they deserve” be applied to Machiavelli’s ideas?
5. Machiavelli often gets credit for the idea “the ends justifies the means.” How could this idea be found in these passages?
6. How does this collection of excerpts help you address the essential question (you will find the essential question at the top of lesson packet)

**Excerpts from Niccolo Machiavelli's Il Principe (*The Prince)***

*Directions: Read the excerpts from Machiavelli’s famous text using the Close Reading strategies (terms should be looked up and passages should be paraphrased). Then address the separate questions about Machiavelli’s advice for a ruler. Highlight the text that provides answers.*

Chapter 17

"...Whether it be better to be loved than feared or feared than loved? …One should wish to be both, but, because it is difficult to unite them in one person, [it] is much safer to be feared than loved...."

Chapter 18

"[To survive, a leader’s actions might be compared to an animal, and if so], the prince...ought to choose the fox and the lion…The lion cannot defend himself against [traps] and the fox cannot defend himself against wolves. Therefore, it is necessary to be a fox to discover the [traps] and a lion to terrify the wolves. Those [leaders] who rely simply on the lion do not understand what they are about. Therefore a wise lord cannot… [speak the truth] when [doing so] may be turned against him, and when the reasons that caused him to pledge it exist no longer. If men were entirely good this [rule] would not [be true], but because they are bad, and will not [speak the truth], you too are not bound to [do so] with them.… [H]e who has known best how to employ the fox has succeeded best."

....

"For that reason, [if a prince can conquer and control a kingdom, how he succeeded will not be important], and he will be praised by everybody; because the [ordinary people] are always [fooled by appearances and results]….”