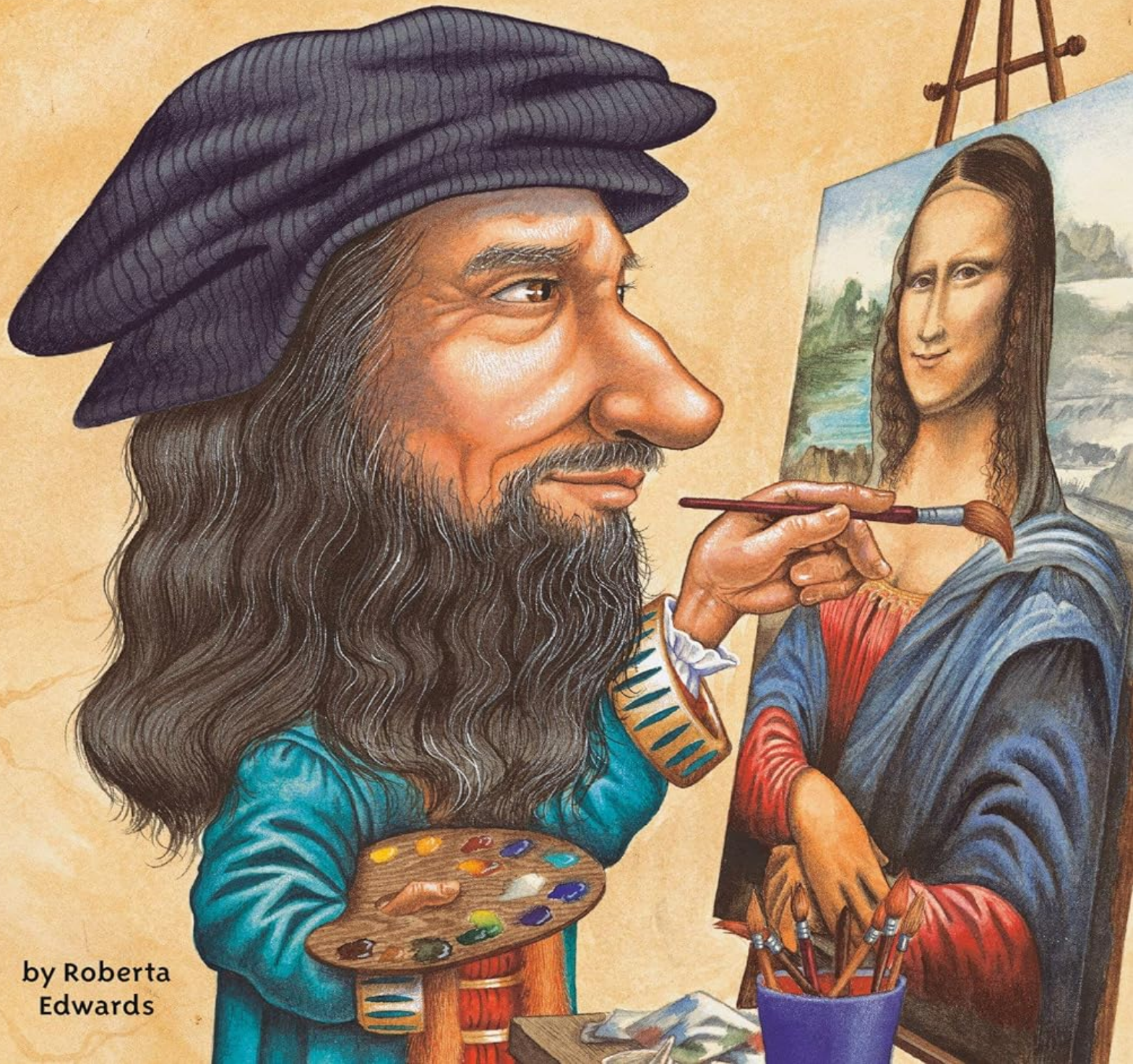


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Who Was Leonardo da Vinci?



by Roberta
Edwards

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By Roberta Edwards
Illustrated by True Kelley
Grosset & Dunlap

For Tanni Tytel—R.E.
For Eloise and Charlotte Lindblom—T.K.

GROSSET & DUNLAP

Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, U.S.A.

Penguin Group (Canada), 10 Alcorn Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4V 3B2

(a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)

Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd)

Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia (a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)

Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi—110 017, India

Penguin Group (NZ), Cnr Airborne and Rosedale Roads, Albany, Auckland 1310, New Zealand (a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)

Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.

ISBN: 978-1-101-63990-0

20 19 18 17 16

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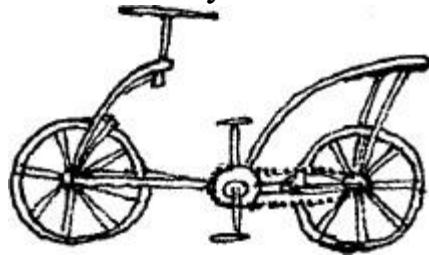
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Who Was Leonardo da Vinci?

Some people are enormously talented ... and then there is Leonardo da Vinci. He lived at a time when there were many extremely talented people all around him. Even so, he stood out.

He could draw and paint better than anyone. One of his paintings, the *Mona Lisa*, is the most famous painting in the world. He was a scientist hoping to unlock the secrets of the natural world. He was an engineer and inventor. He designed a bicycle that would have worked—three hundred years before the first bike was actually built.



He was an excellent athlete. A fine musician. *And* he was handsome. (Although there are no known paintings of him, whenever people of the day described him, they always mentioned his good looks.)



“I want to work miracles,” he stated. Yet he often met with failure. And while he could be charming, he mistrusted almost everyone. He was a loner. He had no family of his own. For sixteen years, he didn’t even have a home of his own.

By his own standards, Leonardo was a disappointment. He never reached the goals he set for himself. His greatest works were left unfinished. Nevertheless, what he did achieve in sixty-seven years still sets the standard for human excellence. It is hard to imagine someone doing better.

Chapter 1

An Unwanted Boy



On April 15, 1452, in a tiny hill town in Italy, a baby boy was born. His father was a well-to-do businessman, Ser Piero. His mother, Caterina, was a poor young peasant girl. We don't even know her last name. Their baby was named Leonardo. Because the town he came from was called Vinci, he was known as Leonardo da Vinci. That means Leonardo from Vinci.



Leonardo's parents weren't married. His father was ashamed of the baby and left him with his mother. Ser Piero married another woman, someone more respectable, and started a new family. He moved nearby to

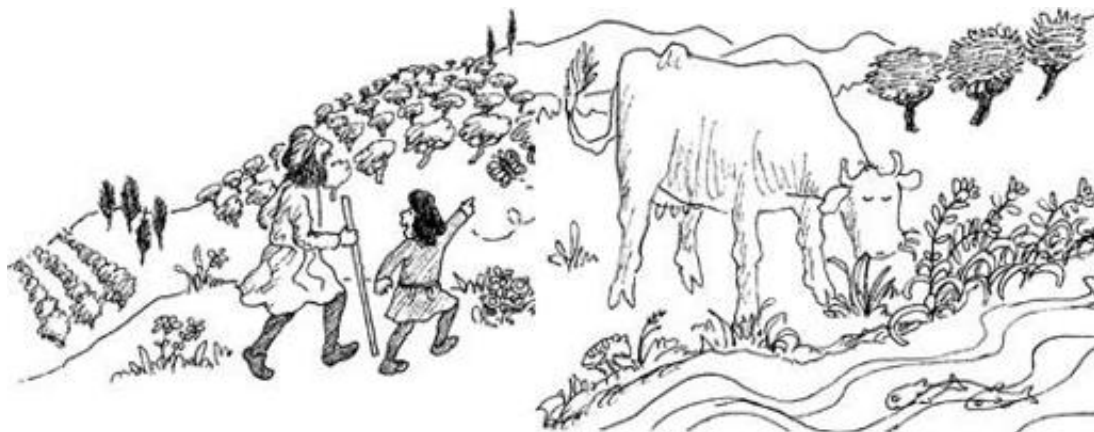
the busy city of Florence. Caterina did not want to keep her baby, either. She cared for him for only a year or two. Then she, too, married someone else and began a new family.

So what was to become of little Leonardo?

Ser Piero's answer was to leave the baby with his parents. But Leonardo's grandparents were old—his grandfather was eighty-five at the time. At their age, what did they want with a toddler? Still, they took him in. They fed him, clothed him, and gave him a home. But little else. No one loved the little boy. The only person who showed interest in him was an uncle named Francesco.



Francesco was a farmer and he loved the beautiful countryside around Vinci. He would take long walks in the hills, which were covered with olive trees.



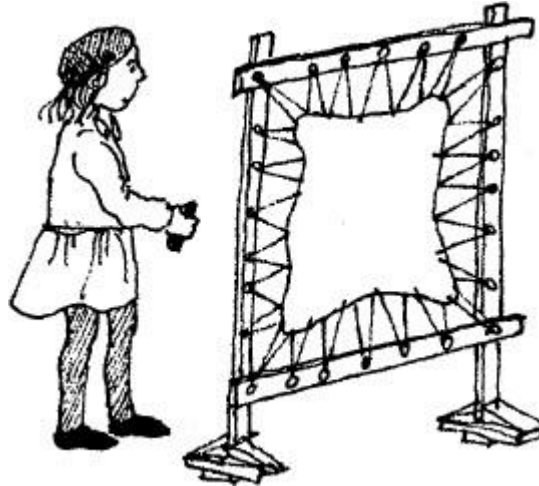
Leonardo would go with him. It was there on these walks that Leonardo grew to love the natural world. The rolling shapes of the hills. The silvery leaves of the olive trees. The flight of birds. And the soft misty sunlight.

Everywhere he went, Leonardo took a little notebook with him. He made drawings of anything that interested him. A plant. Ducks in a stream. Flowers. An insect. Some cows. Paper was very valuable, but Leonardo was lucky. Because of his father's business, there was always a supply. It was one of the most important things Ser Piero ever gave his son.



PARCHMENT AND PAPER

PARCHMENT IS MADE FROM THE SKINS OF ANIMALS SUCH AS SHEEP, CALVES, OR GOATS. THE SKIN IS DRIED AND TREATED UNTIL IT BECOMES FLAT AND PAPERLIKE.



PARCHMENT IS MUCH STRONGER THAN PAPER. IT IS MORE EXPENSIVE, TOO. THE BEAUTIFUL PRAYER BOOKS AND BIBLES COPIED BY HAND IN THE MIDDLE AGES WERE ON PARCHMENT. PARCHMENT IS RARELY USED TODAY.



PAPER WAS FIRST MADE IN CHINA ALMOST TWO THOUSAND YEARS AGO BY USING BARK FROM THE MULBERRY TREE. (TODAY, THE FINEST PAPER IS MADE FROM CLOTH RAGS.) PAPER WAS MADE BY WETTING AND POUNDING THE MATERIAL UNTIL IT SEPARATED INTO FIBERS OR STRANDS. THESE WERE THEN BROKEN DOWN INTO A LIQUIDLIKE SUBSTANCE THAT WAS Poured ONTO A MESH MOLD. AFTER THE SUBSTANCE DRAINED ON THE

MOLD, IT COULD BE LIFTED OFF AS A SHEET OF PAPER. IN EUROPE, PAPER WAS INTRODUCED BY THE MOORS OF NORTHERN AFRICA. THE FIRST PAPERMAKING MILL WAS BUILT IN SPAIN AROUND 1150.



Mulberry Tree

Even when he was a young boy, Leonardo had an amazing talent for drawing. Drawings seemed to flow out of his fingers onto the paper. His rabbits and birds didn't look like drawings. They looked *alive*.

He understood the beauty of nature. He also knew its dangers. When he was only four years old, a terrible hurricane struck the countryside. Farms were destroyed, and many people were killed. Then when he was ten, the Arno River flooded Florence. Leonardo watched the storm and saw the flood; he never forgot either. All his life, he drew pictures of moving water.