**Themes Across Cultures**

*from The Prince*

Treatise by Niccolò Machiavelli

**Meet the Author**

During the Renaissance, Sir Thomas More and other scholars assumed that morality had a central role in politics. Italy’s Niccolò Machiavelli broke with this tradition, arguing that rulers should ignore moral concerns that interfere with their ability to govern. Machiavelli’s political treatise *The Prince* earned him such notoriety that the term *Machiavellian* was coined to refer to a ruthless drive for power. Today he is considered the founder of the modern field of political science.

**Political Rise and Fall** Niccolò Machiavelli was born into a prominent but impoverished family in Florence, Italy. In 1498, when he was only 29, Machiavelli landed an important job in the Florentine government that required considerable travel. His travels provided him with an insider’s view of various rulers’ strategies and policies.

In 1512, the republic of Florence fell, and the Medici, a wealthy family that had once ruled Florence, returned to power. Machiavelli attempted to curry favor with the Medici but was instead relieved of his post. In 1513, Machiavelli’s political career effectively ended when he was accused of being an accomplice in a conspiracy against the Medici and was briefly imprisoned.

**A Second Chance** Although Machiavelli was eventually released from prison, there was no place for him in the Medici government. He spent much of his remaining years writing. During this period, he composed *The Prince*, detailing how a principality should be ruled, and a companion work, *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Livy*, focusing on how a republic should be ruled.

Machiavelli dedicated *The Prince* to Lorenzo de’ Medici, hoping to regain political favor. Finally, in 1519, he succeeded in partly reconciling with the family when they appointed him Florence’s official historian. He worked on a history of Florence and on several other commissions until he died.

**The Power of The Prince** Because *The Prince* was published in 1532, after Machiavelli’s death, he never experienced the controversy surrounding his work. Most early readers of *The Prince* were scandalized by its message and by its disregard of morality and ethical rules. But over time, the treatise changed people’s perception of government. For hundreds of years, leaders have used *The Prince* as a guide to wielding political power.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Niccolò Machiavelli . . .

- always changed into his finest clothing before sitting down to write.
- dedicated *The Prince* to Lorenzo de’ Medici, who probably never read it.
- enjoyed pranks and jokes.

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KEYWORD: HML12-452
Would you rather be loved or respected?

Most people want to be loved as well as respected. But as Machiavelli points out in *The Prince*, these two needs sometimes come into conflict. If you were in a position of power, would you want people to consider you their best friend, or would you prefer them to admire you for your abilities—perhaps even feel intimidated by you?

**DISCUSS** With a partner, identify a position of authority, such as a sports coach. Then discuss whether love or respect would be more important for someone who holds that position.

### Literary Analysis: Argument

An **argument** is speech or writing that expresses a position on an issue or problem and supports it with reasons and evidence. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli presents his revolutionary argument on what it takes to be an effective ruler. Machiavelli uses these rhetorical elements to build his argument:

- **Irony**: a contrast between expectation and reality
  
  *(Therefore, it is necessary for a prince, who wishes to maintain himself, to learn how not to be good . . . )*

- **Paradox**: an apparent contradiction that is actually true
  
  *(Is it) better to be loved more than feared or feared more than loved? The reply is one ought to be both feared and loved.)*

- **Subtlety**: making an argument using skillful distinctions
  
  *(. . . He must not deviate from what is good if possible, but be able to do evil if [forced].)*

### Reading Skill: Analyze Author’s Perspective

An **author’s perspective** is the set of beliefs, values, and feelings through which a writer views a subject. Machiavelli’s view of power was strongly influenced by his observations of politicians of his era. Unlike most political writers of his time, Machiavelli based his beliefs on first-hand knowledge rather than on ideas found in books. As you read, use a chart like the one below to identify how Machiavelli’s perspective is revealed in his statements, tone, and descriptions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement, Tone, or Description</th>
<th>What It Reveals About Author’s Perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“He who abandons what is done for what ought to be done, will . . . bring about his own ruin . . .”</td>
<td>Machiavelli believes a leader benefits from practical results, not ideals.</td>
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</tbody>
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### Vocabulary in Context

Machiavelli uses these words to help convey the qualities of an effective king. For each numbered item, choose a word from the list that has the same definition.

**Word List**

- astute
- constrain
- laudable
- pusillanimous
- venerated
- voluble
- dissension
- rapacious

1. opposition 3. shrewd
2. cowardly 4. praiseworthy

Complete the activities in your Reader/Writer Notebook.
It now remains to be seen what are the methods and rules for a prince as regards his subjects and friends. And as I know that many have written of this, I fear that my writing about it may be deemed presumptuous, differing as I do, especially in this matter, from the opinions of others. But my intention being to write something of use to those who understand, it appears to me more proper to go to the real truth of the matter than to its imagination; and many have imagined republics and principalities which have never been seen or known to exist in reality; for how we live is so far removed from how we ought to live, that he who abandons what is done for what ought to be done, will rather learn to bring about his own ruin than his preservation.

A man who wishes to make a profession of goodness in everything must necessarily come to grief among so many who are not good. Therefore it is necessary for a prince, who wishes to maintain himself, to learn how not to be good, and to use this knowledge and not use it, according to the necessity of the case.

Leaving on one side, then, those things which concern only an imaginary prince, and speaking of those that are real, I state that all men, and especially princes, who are placed at a greater height, are reputed for certain qualities which bring them either praise or blame. Thus one is considered liberal, another . . . miserly; . . . one a free giver, another rapacious; one cruel, another merciful; one

**BACKGROUND** In the 15th and 16th centuries, Italy was a collection of city-states. Some were republics, and some were principalities under the control of one person or family. During this period of political turmoil, Machiavelli wrote *The Prince*, a work in which he outlines the means by which a state can achieve peace and stability.

**Analyze Visuals**
What details in this painting help give the impression that the subject is a powerful person?

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1. **principalities** (prin’sə-pəl’tēz): monarchies. Throughout the treatise, Machiavelli uses *prince*—and related words—in a general sense, meaning any inherited ruler, not in the strict sense of the son of a king.

**ARGUMENT**
Why is the statement Machiavelli makes in lines 11-14 ironic? How does this help his argument?

**rapacious** (rā-pə’shās) adj. greedy; grasping
a breaker of his word, another trustworthy; one effeminate and *pusillanimous*, another fierce and high-spirited; one humane, another haughty; one lascivious, another chaste; one frank, another *astute*: one hard, another easy; one serious, another frivolous; one religious, another an unbeliever, and so on. I know that every one will admit that it would be highly praiseworthy in a prince to possess all the above-named qualities that are reputed good, but as they cannot all be possessed or observed, human conditions not permitting of it, it is necessary that he should be prudent enough to avoid the scandal of those vices which would lose him the state, and guard himself if possible against those which will not lose it [for] him, but if not able to, he can indulge them with less scruple. And yet he must not mind incurring the scandal of those vices, without which it would be difficult to save the state, for if one considers well, it will be found that some things which seem virtues would, if followed, lead to one’s ruin, and some others which appear vices result in one’s greater security and wellbeing.

... I say that every prince must desire to be considered merciful and not cruel. He must, however, take care not to misuse this mercifulness. Cesare Borgia was considered cruel, but his cruelty had brought order to the Romagna, united it, and reduced it to peace and fealty. If this is considered well, it will be seen that he was really much more merciful than the Florentine people, who, to avoid the name of cruelty, allowed Pistoia to be destroyed. A prince, therefore, must not mind incurring the charge of cruelty for the purpose of keeping his subjects united and faithful; for, with a very few examples, he will be more merciful than those who, from excess of tenderness, allow disorders to arise, from whence spring bloodshed and rapine; for these as a rule injure the whole community, while the executions carried out by the prince injure only individuals.

From this arises the question whether it is better to be loved more than feared, or feared more than loved. The reply is, that one ought to be both feared and loved, but as it is difficult for the two to go together, it is much safer to be feared than loved, if one of the two has to be wanting. For it may be said of men in general that they are ungrateful, *voluble*, dissemblers, anxious to avoid danger, and covetous of gain; as long as you benefit them, they are entirely yours; they offer you their blood, their goods, their life, and their children, as I have before said, when the necessity is remote; but when it approaches, they revolt. And the prince who has relied solely on their words, without making other preparations, is ruined; for the friendship which is gained by purchase and not through grandeur and nobility of spirit is bought but not secured, and at a pinch is not to be expended in your service. And men have less scruple in offending one who makes

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2. *with less scruple*: with less hesitancy about what is right or ethical.
3. *Cesare Borgia* (chä’zär-ä’ bôr’ja) ... Romagna (rō-mán’yə): The military leader Cesare Borgia (c. 1476–1507) temporarily made himself ruler of a region of north-central Italy known as Romagna and used cruelty and violence to bring the population into line.
4. *Florentine people ... destroyed*: The small Italian city of Pistoia (pī-stō’ə) was technically under the control of Florence when a small but violent civil war broke out there in 1501. Florentine authorities sent Machiavelli himself to investigate, but in the end those authorities feared intervening, and the two rival factions in Pistoia hacked one another to death.
himself loved than one who makes himself feared; for love is held by a chain of obligation which, men being selfish, is broken whenever it serves their purpose; but fear is maintained by a dread of punishment which never fails.

Still, a prince should make himself feared in such a way that if he does not gain love, he at any rate avoids hatred; for fear and the absence of hatred may well go together, and will be always attained by one who abstains from interfering with the property of his citizens and subjects or with their women. And when he is obliged to take the life of any one, let him do so when there is a proper justification and manifest reason for it; but above all he must abstain from taking the property of others, for men forget more easily the death of their father than the loss of their patrimony. Then also pretexts for seizing property are never wanting, and one who begins to live by rapine will always find some reason for taking the goods of others, whereas causes for taking life are rarer and more fleeting.

But when the prince is with his army and has a large number of soldiers under his control, then it is extremely necessary that he should not mind being thought cruel; for without this reputation he could not keep an army united or disposed to any duty. Among the noteworthy actions of Hannibal is numbered this, that although he had an enormous army, composed of men of all nations and fighting in foreign countries, there never arose any dissension either among them or against the prince, either in good fortune or in bad. This could not be due to anything but his inhuman cruelty, which together with his infinite other virtues, made him always venerated and terrible in the sight of his soldiers, and without it his other virtues would not have sufficed to produce that effect. Thoughtless writers admire on the one hand his actions, and on the other blame the principal cause of them. . . .

How laudable it is for a prince to keep good faith and live with integrity, and not with astuteness, every one knows. Still the experience of our times shows those princes to have done great things who have had little regard for good faith, and have been able by astuteness to confuse men’s brains, and who have ultimately overcome those who have made loyalty their foundation. . . .

You must know, then, that there are two methods of fighting, the one by law, the other by force: the first method is that of men, the second of beasts; but as the first method is often insufficient, one must have recourse to the second. It is therefore necessary for a prince to know well how to use both the beast and the man. . . .

A prince being thus obliged to know well how to act as a beast must imitate the fox and the lion, for the lion cannot protect himself from traps, and the fox cannot defend himself from wolves. One must therefore be a fox to recognize traps, and a lion to frighten wolves. Those that wish to be only lions do not understand this. Therefore, a prudent ruler ought not to keep faith when by so

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5. Hannibal . . . inhuman cruelty: Hannibal (247–183 B.C.) led the forces of the North African city-state of Carthage against Rome in the Second Punic War. A brilliant general whose military victories almost destroyed Roman power, Hannibal was criticized for his cruelty by the Roman historian Livy, whom Machiavelli had read.
doing it would be against his interest, and when the reasons which made him
bind himself no longer exist. If men were all good, this precept would not be a
good one; but as they are bad, and would not observe their faith with you, so you
are not bound to keep faith with them. Nor have legitimate grounds ever failed
a prince who wished to show [plausible] excuse for the non-fulfilment of his
promise. Of this one could furnish an infinite number of modern examples, and
show how many times peace has been broken, and how many promises rendered
worthless, by the faithlessness of princes, and those that have been best able to
imitate the fox have succeeded best. But it is necessary to be able to disguise this
character well, and to be a great feigner and dissembler; and men are so simple
and so ready to obey present necessities, that one who deceives will always find
those who allow themselves to be deceived. . . .

Thus it is well to seem merciful, faithful, humane, sincere, religious, and
also to be so; but you must have the mind so disposed that when it is needful to
be otherwise you may be able to change to the opposite qualities. And it must
be understood that a prince, and especially a new prince, cannot observe all
those things which are considered good in men, being often obliged, in order
to maintain the state, to act against faith, against charity, against humanity,
and against religion. And, therefore, he must have a mind disposed to adapt
itself according to the wind, and as the variations of fortune dictate, and, as
I said before, not deviate from what is good, if possible, but be able to do evil
if constrained.

A prince must take great care that nothing goes out of his mouth which is
not full of the above-named five qualities, and, to see and hear him, he should
seem to be all mercy, faith, integrity, humanity, and religion. And nothing is
more necessary than to seem to have this last quality, for men in general judge
more by the eyes than by the hands, for every one can see, but very few have to
feel. Everybody sees what you appear to be, few feel what you are, and those few
will not dare to oppose themselves to the many, who have the majesty of the
state to defend them; and in the actions of men, and especially of princes, from
which there is no appeal, the end justifies the means. Let a prince therefore aim
at conquering and maintaining the state, and the means will always be judged
honorable and praised by every one, for the vulgar is always taken by appearances
and the issue of the event; and the world consists only of the vulgar, and the few
who are not vulgar are isolated when the many have a rallying point in the prince.
A certain prince of the present time, whom it is well not to name, never does
anything but preach peace and good faith, but he is really a great enemy to both,
and either of them, had he observed them, would have lost him state or reputation
on many occasions.

Constrain (kan-strän’) v. to
force; to compel

Argument
Reread lines 124–131. In what way does the statement “The end
justifies the means” support Machiavelli’s claim about morality
and power?
Comprehension

1. Recall According to Machiavelli, how does his writing about the methods and rules for a prince differ from the writings of others?

2. Clarify What attitude does Machiavelli have toward Hannibal's cruelty?

3. Summarize What advice does Machiavelli give princes regarding religion?

Literary Analysis

4. Interpret a Statement Reread lines 23–29. What is the main standard that Machiavelli uses to judge the personal behavior of a prince?

5. Analyze Author's Perspective Review the chart you created as you read. What beliefs and values influenced the author's perspective on what it takes to be an effective ruler?

6. Evaluate an Argument Do you think that Machiavelli presents a convincing argument? What evidence is most compelling? Decide what additional points, if any, might have strengthened his argument. Cite details in your answer.

7. Compare Texts Compare Machiavelli’s ideas with those expressed by Sir Thomas More in Utopia. In what ways do their views of the relationship between rulers and subjects differ? What do these two writers have in common?

8. Analyze Rhetorical Devices Machiavelli uses irony, paradox, and subtlety to support his argument about how a prince can fortify his power. Why are these devices especially useful for Machiavelli’s argument?

Literary Criticism

9. Critical Interpretations Some critics have argued that Machiavelli intended The Prince as a work of satire. They believe that the author deliberately ridiculed the idea of cruel and ruthless rulers in his treatise for the purpose of exposing tyranny and promoting a republic. Do you agree or disagree with this opinion? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

Would you rather be LOVED or RESPECTED?

Machiavelli suggests that “love is held by a chain of obligation, which, men being selfish, is broken whenever it serves their purpose; but fear is maintained by a dread of punishment which never fails.” What are some recent examples of “maintaining a dread of punishment” in order to control of a group of people? Do you think that using “dread of punishment” is an effective leadership strategy?
Vocabulary in Context

**VOCABULARY PRACTICE**
Identify the antonym of each of the following words.

1. **voluble**: (a) outgoing, (b) tiny, (c) quiet
2. **laudable**: (a) noteworthy, (b) blameworthy, (c) silent
3. **astute**: (a) stupid, (b) practical, (c) scholarly
4. **pusillanimous**: (a) courageous, (b) fragrant, (c) shy
5. **rapacious**: (a) violent, (b) generous, (c) miserly
6. **constrained**: (a) untested, (b) unsupported, (c) unforced
7. **venerated**: (a) scorned, (b) cured, (c) donated
8. **dissension**: (a) conflict, (b) harmony, (c) adaptability

**ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN WRITING**

- attribute
- feature
- monitor
- phase
- primary

Machiavelli’s *The Prince* advises rulers on how to monitor and maintain their political power by adopting ruthless attributes, including the belief that “the end justifies the means.” Write a paragraph, using at least one of the Academic Vocabulary words, about why you do or do not believe this is the case.

**VOCABULARY STRATEGY: USING CONTEXT CLUES**
You can sometimes figure out the meaning of an unfamiliar word, including its nuances, or shades of meaning, by examining its context—the text surrounding it. Consider this example: “The king was an astute ruler. No trick, it seemed, was too low for him to achieve this end.” The sentence “No trick, it seemed, was too low for him to achieve his end” gives you an important clue suggesting that *astute* means “cunning” and that the king is a clever, but disreputable, ruler.

**PRACTICE** Each boldfaced word in the following paragraph comes from *The Prince*. Use context to match each boldfaced word to a synonym below. Then tell what nuance, or shade of meaning, distinguishes each word from its synonym.

- stingy
- cowardly
- greedy
- uneasiness
- disguising

The king of Wellandia was despised by his subjects. A covetous rogue, he took not only his share of his tenants’ crops but the shares that were rightfully theirs. He put up a threadbare front for visiting royalty, but his subjects were not fooled by his dissembling. They knew his miserly strategy was meant to keep his fellow noblemen from asking him for loans. His pusillanimous behavior during an outbreak of plague shocked even his loyal subjects: While citizens within the city were dying, he fled without scruple to the safety of his country manor.
Themes Across Cultures

Conventions in Writing

◆ Grammar and Style: Use Appropriate Language

Review the Grammar and Style note on page 457. To convey the serious nature of his topic, Machiavelli uses formal language to discuss strategies for maintaining power. Here is an example from the treatise:

Thus it is well to seem merciful, faithful, humane, sincere, religious, and also to be so; but you must have the mind so disposed that when it is needful to be otherwise you may be able to change to the opposite qualities. (lines 109–111)

Notice that the passage contains key elements of formal language, including sophisticated vocabulary and complex sentence structure. Note that it does not contain slang or contractions.

Practice Write down each of the following lines. Then rewrite the sentences using the kind of formal language Machiavelli might have used.

Example

The outsiders who wanted to bring our nation to its knees won’t be giving us any more trouble.

The infiltrators who threatened to bring this great nation to ruin have been vanquished.

1. We caught them red-handed—plotting with foreign powers who were just itching to invade and trash the countryside.

2. I didn’t enjoy ordering those banishments, but I did it for the good of the nation.

3. Any other folks who are thinking about rebellion should know that we’ll come down on them like a ton of bricks.

Reading-Writing Connection

Expand your understanding of The Prince by responding to this prompt. Then, use the revising tips to improve the speech you write.

Writing Prompt

Write a speech Are Machiavelli’s ideas immoral or simply realistic? Write a one-page speech in which you take a position in response to this question and defend it. You will present your speech to your classmates and teacher.

Revising Tips

• Briefly address the opposing point of view.
• Present your position concisely and clearly.
• Use formal language appropriate to a speech.

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