LEONARDO daVINCI

"One of the greatest painters of all time, and perhaps the most diversely talented person ever to have lived."

- **Leonardo daVinci** was a famous artist that lived and painted over 500 years ago. He was born in Italy in 1452! Not only was he an artist, he was also an architect, an engineer, an inventor, a scientist, a sculptor and a mathematician. As a young boy he was always drawing things he saw in nature... birds, trees, and eventually buildings and people too. And **he was fascinated by how things worked**. As he got older he kept notebooks with all his drawings and ideas for inventions. He made drawings of plants, buildings, the human bone structure, ideas for helicopters, tanks and many more inventions. What's interesting about his notes is that he wrote them backwards (in Italian) which is sometimes called '**mirror writing**.' They're not sure if he did this because he was left-handed or because he did not want people to read his notes that easily (like a secret code).

- As he continued to learn about drawing and painting **he became very good at painting portraits**. A **portrait is any image of a person's face**. It could be a painting, a drawing or even a photograph. Today, if we want a picture of a loved one, we usually have a photograph taken and many copies can be made to give to all of our relatives. But **500 years ago, there were no cameras**. So if you wanted a picture of a loved one you had to **hire an artist to paint a portrait**. Different from a photograph, there would only be one original copy that the artist actually painted. The person being painted, the model, would have to sit for the artist for many hours while they drew or painted their image on paper or canvas. Sometimes the model had to sit still for a very long time. Leonardo da Vinci became so famous for his portraits because of how **life-like his paintings were**. They almost looked like photographs or like the person in the painting is sitting right there with you. At the time most portraits by other artists looked like statues. But Leonardo had spent so much time practicing his drawing and studying his subjects that he became very good at painting very **realistic images**.

- **One of his most famous portraits is the *Mona Lisa***. This was a painting he did of a woman named Lisa. She was the wife of a farmer in town. And daVinci was hired to paint her portrait. So Lisa, the model had to come and 'sit' while he painted her portrait. He painted it between 1502 - 1506. (**It took him 4 years!**) It was **one of his favorites** and he probably spent a lot of time reworking certain areas. He actually never gave it to the family. He kept it until he died and it now hangs in a very famous museum in **Paris, France** called the **Louvre**. We can look at prints made of the painting but there is only one original, the actual painting Leonardo daVinci painted that hangs in this museum. People from all over the world go to France to see the original *Mona LIsa*.

- This painting became **so famous because of how life-like the portrait is**. Leonardo spent a lot of time working on all the details of her face to make it look as though **she is actually looking at you**. If you look at **her eyes**, it almost looks as if she's following you. Does it look like she's looking at you?... at you? And it almost looks like **she's smiling at you**. Why? She spent a lot of time sitting for the artist. Maybe he just told her a funny joke, ... maybe she's thinking about lunch?... What is she thinking about?

- The other interesting thing about this painting is the beautiful background behind *Mona Lisa*. (Explain difference between **foreground and background**). She was probably not sitting in front of a beautiful landscape but actually in the artist's studio. As an artist, you can add whatever background you want. If I were to take a photograph of you right now, you would be my foreground and the room around you would be the background. But if I paint or draw a portrait of you, as the artist, I can add any background I want.