



Section 1

PRIMARY SOURCE *from The Prince*  
by Niccolò Machiavelli

*Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) was an Italian political philosopher, historian, poet, and playwright from Florence. Serving in public office for 14 years, he went on almost 30 diplomatic missions for the Florentine city-state. During his diplomatic career, he traveled around Italy and to the courts of France and Germany, gaining insight into the world of Renaissance politics. In 1513 Machiavelli wrote The Prince, a book of advice to rulers on how to found a state and how to stay in power. The following excerpt shows Machiavelli's views on how a ruler should build his reputation.*

**How a Prince Should Conduct Himself so as to Gain Renown**

Nothing makes a prince so much esteemed as great enterprises and setting a fine example. We have in our time Ferdinand of Aragon, the present King of Spain. He can almost be called a new prince, because he has risen, by fame and glory, from being an insignificant king to be the foremost king in Christendom; and if you will consider his deeds you will find them all great and some of them extraordinary. In the beginning of his reign he attacked Granada, and this enterprise was the foundation of his dominions. He did this quietly at first and without any fear of hindrance, for he held the minds of the barons of Castile occupied in thinking of the war and not anticipating any innovations; thus they did not perceive that by these means he was acquiring power and authority over them. He was able with the money of the Church and of the people to sustain his armies, and by that long war to lay the foundation for the military skill which has since distinguished him. Further, always using religion as a plea, so as to undertake greater schemes, he devoted himself with a pious cruelty to driving out and clearing his kingdom of the Moors; nor could there be a more admirable example, nor one more rare. Under this same cloak he assailed Africa, he came down on Italy, he has finally attacked France; and thus his achievements and designs have always been great, and have kept the minds of his people in suspense and admiration and occupied with the issue of them. And his actions have arisen in such a way, one out of the other, that men have never been given time to work steadily against him. . . .

Never let any Government imagine that it can choose perfectly safe courses; rather let it expect to have to take very doubtful ones, because it is found

in ordinary affairs that one never seeks to avoid one trouble without running into another; but prudence consists in knowing how to distinguish the character of troubles, and for choice to take the lesser evil.

A prince ought also to show himself a patron of ability, and to honour the proficient in every art. At the same time he should encourage his citizens to practise their callings peaceably, both in commerce and agriculture, and in every other following, so that the one should not be deterred from improving his possessions for fear lest they be taken away from him or another from opening up trade for fear of taxes; but the prince ought to offer rewards to whoever wishes to do these things and designs in any way to honour his city or state.

Further, he ought to entertain the people with festivals and spectacles at convenient seasons of the year; and as every city is divided into guilds or into societies, he ought to hold such bodies in esteem, and associate with them sometimes, and show himself an example of courtesy and liberality; nevertheless, always maintaining the majesty of his rank, for this he must never consent to abate in anything.

*from Niccolò Machiavelli, The Prince. Reprinted in Robert Maynard Hutchins, ed., Great Books of the Western World (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1952), 31–33.*

**Activity Options**

- 2. **Determining Main Ideas** Write a numbered list of tips for princes who want to gain fame and public approval. Share your list with a group of ~~classmates and discuss which tips political leaders today might use.~~

(5)

- Get tips from reading  
i put in your own  
words underneath  
original tip



CHAPTER  
17

## Section 1

PRIMARY SOURCE *from The Courtier*  
by Baldassare Castiglione

*Baldassare Castiglione was a well-known Venetian diplomat who served under the Duke of Urbino. Sent to the courts of Henry VIII in London and Louis XII in Milan, Castiglione observed court life firsthand. His book of manners and polite society, The Courtier, was published in 1528 and was translated into several languages. A whole generation of young courtiers diligently followed his advice. As you read this excerpt from his book, consider what characteristics the perfect courtier should possess.*

“To come, therefore, to the quality of the person, I say he is well if he be neither of the least nor of the greatest size. For both the one and the other hath with it a certain spiteful wonder, and such men are marveled at, almost as much as men marvel to behold monstrous things. Yet if there must needs be a default in one of the two extremities, it shall be less hurtful to be somewhat of the least than to exceed the common stature in height. For men so shot up of body, beside that many times they are of a dull wit, they are also inapt for all exercises of nimbleness, which I much desire to have in the Courtier. And therefore will I have him to be of a good shape, and well proportioned in his limbs, and to show strength, lightness, and quickness, and to have understanding in all exercises of the body that belong to a man of war. And herein I think the chief point is to handle well all kind of weapon both for footman and horseman, and to know the vantages in it. And especially to be skilful on those weapons that are used ordinarily among gentlemen, for beside the use that he shall have of them in war, where peradventure needeth no great cunning, there happen oftentimes variances between one gentleman and another, whereupon ensueth a combat. And many times it shall stand him in stead to use the weapon which he hath at that instant by his side. . . .

“There be also many other exercises, the which, though they depend not thoroughly upon arms, yet have they a great agreement with them, and have in them much manly activity. And of them methink hunting is one of the chiefest, for it hath a certain likeness with war, and truly a pastime for great men, and fit for one living in court. And it is found that it hath also been much used among them of old time. It is meet for him also to have the art of swimming, to leap, to run, to cast the stone; for besides the profit that he may receive of this in the

wars, it happeneth to him many times to make proof of himself in such things, whereby he getteth him a reputation, especially among the multitude, unto whom a man must sometime apply himself. Also it is a noble exercise and meet for one living in court to play at tennis, where the disposition of the body, the quickness and nimbleness of every member, is much perceived, and almost whatsoever a man can see in all other exercises. . . .

“But because we cannot always endure among these so painful doings, besides that the continuance goeth nigh to give a man his fill, and taketh away the admiration that men have of things seldom seen, we must continually alter our life with practising sundry matters. Therefore will I have our Courtier to descend many times to more easy and pleasant exercises. And to avoid envy and to keep company pleasantly with every man, let him do whatsoever other men do; so he decline not at any time from commendable deeds, but governeth himself with that good judgment that will not suffer him to enter into any folly; but let him laugh, dally, jest, and dance, yet in such wise that he may always declare himself to be witty and discreet, and everything that he doeth or speaketh, let him do it with a grace.”

*from Baldassare Castiglione, The Courtier, Thomas Hoby, trans. (The National Alumni, 1907), 30–35.*

## Discussion Questions

### Determining Main Ideas

1. According to Castiglione, what physical attributes befitted a courtier?
2. Why did a courtier need to handle different kinds of weapons skillfully?
3. **Analyzing Issues** Why did Castiglione feel a courtier should engage in such activities as hunting, swimming, and tennis?