

Skaneateles Library
Books by the Stack
Discussion Questions

Leonardo da Vinci
by **Walter Isaacson**

1. How would you describe Leonardo da Vinci as presented by Walter Isaacson? Does the author do an adequate job of making da Vinci accessible to 21st-century readers? Does he bring him to life as a living, breathing human being?
2. Isaacson believes "genius" is too easily applied to people but that Leonardo was "one of the few people in history who indisputably deserved — or, to be more precise, earned — that appellation." Do you agree with Isaacson about our overuse of the term "genius"? Can you think of someone, in either today's world or in history, who you think would qualify as a genius?
3. According to Isaacson, da Vinci was self-taught and "willed his way to his genius." What does he mean by that statement? What are some of the factors Isaacson identifies as key to da Vinci's path to becoming a genius?
4. Having read Isaacson's book, what parts of Leonardo's life, personality, or his abilities surprise you most?
5. Isaacson writes about Leonardo's astonishing curiosity. Consider the vast number and variety of objects and pursuits found in the 72,000 pages of the artist's notebooks — what the author refers to as the "greatest record of curiosity ever created." How does Isaacson suggest that his inquisitiveness set da Vinci apart from his contemporaries?
6. Talk about another aspect of Leonardo's mental process: his ability to recognize patterns — the curls in water, hair, or wind. Why does the author believe that pattern recognition was important for da Vinci?
7. Isaacson is particularly insightful in writing about da Vinci's great paintings — especially The Last Supper and Mona Lisa. Does the author enable you to better understand the significance of those works and how they furthered the development of art?
8. Isaacson says we can all learn from Leonardo. What is it we could learn?
9. Have you read other books or watched documentaries about Leonardo d Vinci? Did Isaacson's book change your ideas about da Vinci?
10. Would you recommend others read this book?

