

THE ROMAN EMPIRE

IN THE FIRST CENTURY

Rome Lesson Plan 1: When in Rome....

Introduction:

The focus of this lesson is to help students gain an understanding of the Roman lifestyle – what did they wear, eat, and do for fun? Where did they live, work, and relax? What were the common customs and traditions, religious beliefs, and culture like? Students will participate in fact-finding and experiential activities that will teach them about various aspects of Roman life.

Subject Areas:

World History, Social Studies, Theatre, and Communication Arts

Grade Level: 6-12

Lesson Objectives:

Students will:

1. Participate in brainstorming what they already know about life in ancient Rome and what they think would be interesting to learn.
2. Take part in a discussion about Roman social classes and create a graphic organizer illustrating each social class and its characteristics.
3. View video clips illustrating aspects of daily life in ancient Rome and use these to discuss differences between the social classes.
4. Conduct group research to learn about specific aspects of ancient Rome and use creative, interactive, experiential learning activities to teach classmates about given topics on “Rome Day.”
5. Dress in costumes representative of their social classes as part of a Rome Day experience.
6. Participate in a class discussion that summarizes what was learned about Roman society and lifestyles of the various social classes.

Relevant National Standards:

McRel Compendium of K-12 Standards Addressed:

World History

Standard 9: Understands how major religious and large-scale empires arose in the Mediterranean Basin, China, and Indian from 500 BCE to 300 CE.

Standard 11: Understands major global trends from 1000 BCE to 300 CE.

Historical Understanding

THE ROMAN EMPIRE

IN THE FIRST CENTURY

Standard 2: Understands the historical perspective.

Theatre

Standard 1: Uses acting skills.

Language Arts

Writing

Standard 4: Gathers and uses information for research purposes.

Reading

Standard 5: Uses the general skills and strategies of the reading process.

Standard 7: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts.

Listening and Speaking

Standard 8: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes.

Working with Others

Standard 1: Contributes to the overall effort of a group.

Standard 4: Displays effective interpersonal communication skills.

Estimated Time:

This should take three 90-minute class periods or five 50-minute class periods, plus additional time for extension activities.

Materials Needed:

- Video clips necessary to complete the lesson plan are available on The Roman Empire in the First Century Web site [<http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/index.html>]. If you wish to purchase a copy of the program, visit the PBS Shop for Teachers [[Purchase DVD or Video](#)].
- Colored index cards, post-it notes, or ¼ sheets of paper.
- Rome Day handout [[Download PDF here \(220k\)](#)], part of this lesson plan.
- Internet access necessary for conducting research.
- Assorted art and craft supplies.
- Access to props and costumes/costume materials necessary for Rome Day experiences.

Procedures:

THE ROMAN EMPIRE

IN THE FIRST CENTURY

1. Before students enter the classroom, label a bulletin board, the blackboard, or some wall space with “Already Know” and “Want to Know.” Be sure there is ample space below each label to post 25-30 index cards/post-it notes/¼ sheets of paper.
2. As students enter the classroom, hand each of them two different colored index cards, post-it notes, or ¼ sheets of paper. When all are seated, have them complete the following steps:
 - On the (name the color) card/paper, write one thing you know about life in ancient Rome.
 - On the (name the color) card/paper, write one thing you would like to learn about life in ancient Rome.
3. When students have finished writing, have each one share his/her response by reading what they have written. Ask them to post the card/paper under the correct column. This will get students thinking about what they already know about life in ancient Rome and things that would be interesting to find out.
4. Using information from The Roman Empire in the First Century Web site’s Social Order feature [<http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/empire/order.html>], read about the various social classes in Rome. As a class, use chart paper or the overhead or board to create a color-coded pyramid or other graphic organizer that names the classes and briefly describes the social structure. Keep this posted for students to see.
5. Facilitate a short discussion about the fact that one’s social class determined the lifestyle of the person. Be sure to discuss the four major factors affecting social class: heredity, property, wealth, citizenship, and freedom. Give examples of how each of these factors was used to determine one’s social class. End the discussion by talking about mobility between the classes and the factors that could move a person from one class to another.
6. Explain to students that as a class you will be working together to create a Rome Day in the classroom. For this activity, students will be split into groups and will take on the roles of people from a particular social class. During Rome Day, students will interact with one another the way they would have in ancient Rome. Begin this journey by viewing the video clips Episode 1: Urban Life [insert pbs video link <http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/resources/video.html>] and Episode 4: Entertainment Roman Style [<http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/resources/video.html>]. Discuss the content of the clips in terms of the social classes represented and how the clips illustrate the differences between the social classes.

THE ROMAN EMPIRE

IN THE FIRST CENTURY

7. Create a slip of paper that lists each group of people in Roman society: the emperor, patricians, senators, equestrians, plebeians, and slaves and freemen. Divide the class into six groups so that each group can represent one of the classes listed. Ask one person from each group to choose a slip of paper. That will be the social class the group represents on Rome Day.
8. Create six more slips of paper and include the following topics together on each slip:
 - Games: gladiators and chariot races, holidays, and entertainment
 - Baths and bath rituals
 - Family life
 - Weddings, marriages, and divorce
 - Housing and food and mealtime customs for the various classes
 - Education, funerals, and theatre
9. Have each group draw one of the slips mentioned in step eight. For Rome Day, their group will be responsible for teaching the rest of the class about the topic(s) listed. Ideas for ways to teach the topics are listed on the Rome Day handout [[Download PDF here \(220k\)](#)], part of this lesson plan.
10. Once all students have been assigned a social class and topics for Rome Day, they should use the Web site's Life in Roman Times feature [<http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/empire/life.html>] and the Social Order feature [<http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/empire/order.html>], to learn as much as they can about their assigned topics.
11. Once research is completed, the group should work on planning what activities or experiences they will provide to teach other students about their topic(s).
12. On Rome Day, all students should dress according to their social class as described in the Rome Day handout. They should also have all the necessary items to teach their topic(s). As students interact, they should keep in mind what social class they are representing and act accordingly.
13. After all groups have had a chance to share their topic(s), have a final discussion about life in ancient Rome using questions such as:
 - What did you find most interesting in your research about Rome and about the things you learned in the Rome Day experience?
 - How did you feel about the particular social class you represented and the way they were treated by other members of Roman society?
 - What do you think you would have liked about living in ancient Rome? Disliked?
 - What is your view of the ancient Romans as a people? How would you describe them and their society? Why?

THE ROMAN EMPIRE

IN THE FIRST CENTURY

Assessment Suggestions:

1. Students could receive participation grades for class discussion and brainstorming activities and for wearing an appropriate costume.
2. Students could receive completion or accuracy grades for gathering information needed to teach others about their assigned topic(s).
3. Students could receive accuracy grades or a scoring guide could be used to evaluate the content of their Rome Day presentations.

Extension Activities:

1. Expand on Rome Day by making it a larger scale activity for other students. Invite other classes to attend your exhibit. All students should be dressed according to their social classes. Guests at the event should be offered food appropriate to the time and should experience it in a traditional setting that would reflect the way one of the social classes dined. Act out scenes related to family life, weddings, education, entertainment, and other important aspects of life. Teach guests about the significance of the daily bath rituals. Guests should leave with a greater understanding of life in Rome and the Roman social classes.
2. The class could work together to write and act out a short play that shows a day in the life of ancient Rome. Using costumes and what they learned through their research, each group could adapt the way they taught their topic(s) and create a scene in the play. The play could then be performed for another group or class or made into a videotape that could be shared as part of a school presentation.

Related Resources:

Roman Society, Roman Life [<http://www.roman-empire.net/society/society.html>] presents detailed information about all facets of life in ancient Rome including some diagrams and charts.

The Romans Web pages [<http://www.iol.ie/~coolmine/typ/romans/intro.html>] provides information about typical Roman pastimes and important aspects of Roman life. Some pictures are also included.