

THE ROMAN EMPIRE

IN THE FIRST CENTURY

Rome Lesson Plan 3: Religion in Politics and Daily Life

Introduction:

In this lesson, students will examine various aspects of religion in ancient Rome including the role of mythology, polytheism versus monotheism, the treatment of Jews and Christians, and the spread of Christianity. To guide their learning, students will complete a Reading Guide based on the content from the companion Web site and work in small groups to create projects that teach others about various aspects of religious life in ancient Rome. A final discussion about the separation of church and state in today's modern governments will tie what has been learned to present day topics.

Subject Areas:

World History, Social Studies, Religion, Mythology, and Communication Arts

Grade Level: 6-12

Lesson Objectives:

Students will:

1. View three video clips and analyze what they have seen and learned about religion in ancient Rome as they participate in class discussion activities.
2. Complete a Reading Guide, part of this lesson plan, using primary source material available from The Roman Empire in the First Century Web site.
3. Check their Reading Guide for accuracy as questions are reviewed as part of a class discussion.
4. Work in small groups to research a specific topic related to religion in ancient Rome and create a project that can be used to inform others about what they have learned.
5. Make a ten-minute presentation with their group about their assigned topic and answer questions from classmates regarding this topic.
6. Participate in a closing discussion or written response activity where they make comparisons between ancient Rome and today's modern governments and the role of religion in these governments.

Relevant National Standards:

McRel Compendium of K-12 Standards Addressed:

World History

THE ROMAN EMPIRE

IN THE FIRST CENTURY

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

Standard 2: Understands the historical perspective.

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.

Viewing

Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

Thinking and Reasoning

Standard 1: Understands the basic principles of presenting an argument.

Standard 3: Effectively uses mental processes that are based on identifying similarities and differences.

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 to six 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](#)].
- Reading Guide [[Download PDF here \(148k\)](#)], part of this lesson plan.

THE ROMAN EMPIRE

IN THE FIRST CENTURY

- Internet access for completing the Reading Guide and conducting required project research.
- Assorted art and craft supplies (optional).
- Access to word processing and multimedia presentation software such as Power Point (optional).

Procedures:

1. To spark student interest, begin class by playing the following video clips and discussing each one using questions like these listed:
 - Episode 1: Disasters Strike
[\[http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/resources/video.html\]](http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/resources/video.html)
 - In what ways was it helpful for a Roman emperor to proclaim himself a god or an heir to a god?
 - How was religion used to explain the natural disasters that affected the empire?
 - Episode 2: Jesus' Message
[\[http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/resources/video.html\]](http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/resources/video.html)
 - Why were people such as Jews and Christians persecuted by the Romans?
 - Why were religious leaders like Jesus considered politically subversive by Roman leaders?
 - Episode 3: Rome Burns
[\[http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/resources/video.html\]](http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/resources/video.html)
 - How were people with unpopular religious beliefs shunned and persecuted?
 - Even though they risked persecution, why were so many people willing to accept the teachings of Christianity?
2. After discussing each of the clips, spend time talking about each of the following topics as it related to the religion of the Roman Empire:
 - How was religion used by emperors/the state to control the majority of the population?
 - Why were the people of that time so easily influenced by religion?
 - What is the difference between monotheism (one god) and polytheism (many gods)?
 - The ancient Romans practiced cult worship in that they accurately observed and followed religious rituals to please the gods rather than having good moral conduct. How is this different from the beliefs of many modern day religions?
 - In the U.S. and in many countries around the world, we separate church and state issues so that political and lawmaking decisions are not based on religious beliefs, but on the rights guaranteed by the constitution. Why do you think the leaders of the Roman Empire and many other ancient civilizations chose to keep

THE ROMAN EMPIRE

IN THE FIRST CENTURY

a strong connection between the church and the government, often placing priests and church leaders in positions of great power?

3. Explain to students that their next step is to learn more about the power of religion during the Roman Empire by reading about three main topics: Roman Mythology, Jews in Roman Times, and the Early Christians. Students will examine the role of these three very different religions in the daily lives of the Romans as well as how these religions affected the politics of Rome. Distribute the [Reading Guide \[Download PDF here \(148k\)\]](#) and assign students to work in pairs to complete the activities on the guide. Provide class time and Internet access for students to use the Web site links to find answers to their questions.
4. When all students have completed the Reading Guide, take time to discuss the questions on the reading guide as a class.
5. After reviewing the Reading Guide questions, have each group of students randomly select a topic to present more information about. The topics and related assignments are listed below. Please note that based on class size, you may have to assign the same topic and related assignment to more than one group. Most assignments are broad enough to allow for multiple groups to complete the same project.
 - **Roman Mythology:** Create a listing of the major gods and goddesses in Roman mythology. Describe the similarities and differences between the mythological Roman Gods and Greek gods and mythology. Create a graphic organizer that illustrates these similarities and differences for your classmates.
 - **Roman Mythology:** Using at least one of the major Roman gods or goddesses, write a myth that explains an unknown that still puzzles the scientists of today. Be sure the myth contains all of the key elements of a story (plot, setting, characterization, etc.) and follows a format similar to traditional Roman myths. Be prepared to share your story with the class.
 - **Religion in the Roman Home:** Roman households believed in household and family spirits and often made dinnertime offerings to those spirits. Design a larium (shrine) similar to one that would have been present in a Roman home and make a model or high quality color drawing of what this shrine might look like. Be prepared to share your work with classmates and explain it to them.
 - **Religious Holidays and Observances:** The ancient Romans had many religious festivals and celebrations. Learn about one, such as Festival of the Crossroads, and create a display or demonstration that illustrates some of the important aspects of the festival/celebration and explains its religious significance.
 - **Jews in Roman Times:** Jews were protected by law and allowed to worship freely in the Roman Empire, but many Romans disliked the Jews because of their religious beliefs. Learn about how the rebellion in Judea changed the

THE ROMAN EMPIRE

IN THE FIRST CENTURY

Jewish religion to change forever. Summarize the story of this rebellion and the changes that resulted from it by creating a multi-media presentation using software such as Power Point to tell the story of the rebellion, its key historical figures, and the changes that resulted from this historical event. The presentation should include pictures/photos along with a clear explanation of the story.

- **Early Christians:** Jesus brought a message of hope to the masses of poor people in the Roman Empire. Discuss what Jesus told those he preached to and why the Roman leaders/government felt he should be condemned to death. Use a flowchart or timeline of events to describe Jesus work, how the Romans made a martyr out of Jesus, and how these events caused the growth of Christianity. Be prepared to explain this chain of events to your classmates.
 - **Early Christians:** Learn about Paul and his significant contributions to the spread of Christianity. Using a large map, chart the areas where Paul traveled and preached. Make note of major events in his life by marking them clearly on the map with specific signs or symbols. Give your classmates a brief explanation of each significant event.
6. Provide groups with time in class to organize and begin work on their projects. Encourage students to use The Roman Empire in the First Century Web site at [\[http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/index.html\]](http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/index.html), particularly the Religion feature [\[http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/empire/religion.html\]](http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/empire/religion.html) and its subtopics as they work on these projects.
 7. When projects have been completed, provide each group with ten minutes to present the project they have created (according to the guidelines specified on the project list). Encourage students to ask questions about the projects and what the groups learned while conducting their research.
 8. When all projects have been presented, display them in the classroom or another area of the school for others to see. To connect the learning, ask students to respond in writing or through a class discussion to questions such as the following:
 - Why do you think most of the governments in today's world rely less on religious influences than they have in the past?
 - Think of governments in today's world who still have close ties between government and religion. Discuss which countries these are, where they are located in the world, and why they continue to maintain close ties between religion and government.
 - What are the advantages to separating church and state? The disadvantages?

THE ROMAN EMPIRE

IN THE FIRST CENTURY

Assessment Suggestions:

1. Students could earn participation grades for class discussion activities.
2. An accuracy or completion grade could be given for the Reading Guide.
3. A scoring guide, peer evaluation, or self evaluation could be used to assess each group's project and ten-minute presentation. Encourage students to work as a class to develop the scoring guide, peer evaluation form, or self evaluation form based on the project guidelines.
4. If procedure number eight is completed as a written response activity, a completion or accuracy grade could be assigned.

Extension Activities:

1. Have students invent a new god or goddess that could have been part of religion during the Roman Empire. Explain what the god/goddess represents, describe his/her qualities and characteristics, and create drawing or model of the image or statue that is representative of this god. Then create a myth where this god/goddess is the central character.
2. Compare the mythology of the Romans to that of other ancient cultures such as the Greeks or Egyptians. Using a Venn Diagram or other form of graphic organizer, illustrate the similarities and differences between the role of mythology and the mythological gods and goddesses of each culture.

Related Resources:

The Roman Religion section [<http://www.roman-empire.net/religion/religion.html>] of the Roman Empire site [<http://www.roman-empire.net/>] has detailed information about all aspects of Roman religion during the first century.

The Ancient Rome and Religion section [http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/ancient_rome_and_religion.htm] of the History Learning Web site [<http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/>] offers a simple explanation of some of the gods and goddesses worshipped by the Romans. There is also a list of the most important gods/goddesses and what they represented. The site also includes information about home alters and shrines for the gods.

Odyssey Online [<http://carlos.emory.edu/ODYSSEY/ROME/mythology.html>] has basic information about gods and goddesses, religion at home, and foreign gods.