

THE ROMAN EMPIRE

IN THE FIRST CENTURY

Rome Lesson Plan 5: Who's Who in Roman History

Introduction:

In this lesson, students produce a classroom documentary about important historical figures from the Roman Empire. They will also create posters to be part of a classroom timeline showing when each of these people lived and their impact on the empire. As a final activity, students will apply what they have learned by discussing how these ancient Romans have impacted world history and continue to influence us today.

Subject Areas:

World History, Social Studies, Communication Arts, and Theatre/Drama students

Grade Level: 6-12

Lesson Objectives:

Students will:

1. Work in small groups to use their prior history knowledge to answer questions about important historical figures from ancient Rome.
2. Use viewing skills to learn facts about four key Romans and use what they have learned in class discussion.
3. Conduct Internet research about a significant person from the Roman Empire and use this information to write an original script for a scene featuring their historical figure.
4. Create a poster summarizing key details about the person they researched and present this poster to the class as a way to summarize details about their historical figure.
5. Act out their original scene while being recorded as part of a class documentary
6. Use their viewing skills to learn facts about historically significant Romans as they watch the class documentary.
7. Write a written response to questions related to the various historical figures profiled in the class documentary.

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.

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Historical Understanding

Standard 1: Understands and knows how to analyze chronological relationships and patterns.

Standard 2: Understands the historical perspective.

Language Arts

Writing

Standard 2: Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing.

Standard 3: Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions.

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.

Theatre

Standard 1: Demonstrates competency in writing scripts.

Standard 2: Uses acting skills.

Working with Others

Standard 4: Displays effective interpersonal communication skills.

Estimated Time:

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

Note: If all aspects of the project are completed in class, the amount of time needed could vary based on the number of students and their abilities.

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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](#)].
- Who's Who in Roman History Planning Guide [[Download PDF here \(172k\)](#)], part of this lesson plan.
- Internet access to complete research used to prepare documentary scripts.
- Access to word processing programs for writing scripts (optional).
- One poster board for each student.
- Various art and craft supplies for creating timeline materials and backdrops for filming.
- Costumes and props for use in documentary.
- Video camera and tape for recording the documentary.
- Television and VCR for playing documentary for the class.
- Nine banners to be placed above student poster boards. Banners should be labeled: 60-41 BC, 40-21 BC, 20-1 BC, 0-19 AD, 20-39 AD, 40-59 AD, 60-79 AD, 80-99 AD, and 100-180 AD (optional – have students create these banners as part of a class project).

Procedures:

1. To get students interested in learning the who's who of Rome, write the following questions on the board or overhead. Have students work in pairs or small groups to use their prior knowledge of history to help them answer the questions:
 - After defeating Antony and Cleopatra, he became Rome's first emperor.
 - He was arrested and put to death for political subversion. This launched a whole new religion world-wide.
 - He was known as the emperor who "fiddled while Rome burned".
 - He was known as a great scholar and writer and was credited with writing a 37-volume encyclopedia of the natural world.
2. After giving students three to four minutes to answer the questions, re-read each question and provide students with the answer by having them view the video clips listed below and briefly discussing each clip.
 - Episode 1: The Peace of Rome [insert pbs video link [<http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/resources/video.html>]
 - Episode 2: Jesus the Criminal [<http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/resources/video.html>]
 - Episode 3: Rome Burns [<http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/resources/video.html>]

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- Episode 4: Pliny the Elder
[\[http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/resources/video.html\]](http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/resources/video.html)
3. Continue the class discussion by explaining that while certain figures in Roman history are very well known, there are many people who, in addition to the emperors, had a significant impact on Roman History. These include leaders, scholars, military figures, and women.
 4. Explain that as a class, students will be working together to create a documentary entitled Who's Who in Roman History. Distribute the Who's Who in Roman History Planning Guide [[Download PDF here \(172k\)](#)] to each student. Review the specific requirements of the project as a class.
 5. Using the list of names below as well as others you are interested in, randomly assign or ask students to volunteer to play the role of one person to be featured in the documentary.
 - **Emperors:** Julius Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Vespasian, Titus, Domitian, Nerva, Trajan
 - **Roman Enemies:** Marc Antony, Cleopatra, Boudicca, Josephus
 - **Religious Leaders:** Jesus, Paul, Philo
 - **Scholars and Authors:** Virgil, Ovid, Seneca, Petronius, Pliny the Elder, Pliny the Younger, Juvenal
 - **Military Leaders:** Germanicus
 - **Women:** Agrippina the Younger, Messalina, Julia
 6. Using The Roman Empire in the First Century Web site [<http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/index.html>], have students access:
 - Virtual Library [<http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/special/library.html>]
 - Timeline [<http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/special/timeline01.html>],
 - Enemies and Rebels [<http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/empire/enemies.html>]
 - Writers [<http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/empire/writers.html>]
 - Religion [<http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/empire/religion.html>]
 - Emperors [<http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/empire/emperors.html>]and complete the research necessary to write their script for the documentary.
 7. Provide class time to gather props, costumes, and create backdrops for filming purposes. All students should work as a group to accomplish these tasks.
 8. Assign specific times for students to record their portion of the documentary based upon where their character appears in the historical timeline.

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9. After all students have filmed their scenes, air the documentary for all students in the class to see.
10. When the documentary ends, each student should present his/her poster about the historical figure they represent. These should be done in chronological order, as they were in the documentary. Students should take one to two minutes to summarize their person by discussing the content of the poster. Each student should then hang his/her poster under the banner that represents the time when the historical figure lived.
11. As a final follow-up, ask students to respond to questions such as those listed below using one to two paragraphs.
 1. From your research and viewing the Who's Who in Roman History documentary, what did you learn about life in ancient Rome? List and discuss at least three major points.
 2. If you could have been anyone featured in the film, who would you have chosen, and why?
 3. Of the people featured in the documentary, who do you believe contributed the most to ancient Rome and why?
 4. Of all of the people profiled in the documentary, which three have impacted the most historically and continue to have an impact on today's world? Explain your answer.

Assessment Suggestions:

1. Students could receive participation grades for class discussion and group work activities.
2. An accuracy grade could be assigned for the content of the script.
3. Performances could be assessed using a scoring guide or peer and self evaluations as the documentary is being aired.
4. An accuracy and quality grade could be assigned for the poster and the presentation of it to the class.
5. A completion or accuracy grade could be assigned for the written response activity.

Extension Activities:

1. Using the last two questions from the written response activity in Procedures, step 11, conduct a classroom debate about the contributions of the ancient Romans, their historical impact, and their continued influence in today's world. Encourage students to use their research findings to support their opinions.

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2. Learn more about the Roman theater and re-enact your scenes the way it would have been done in ancient Rome using actors with masks and narrators. Perform your scenes for one another or students in other classes.
3. Present the Who's Who in Roman History documentary to another group of students as a way to teach them about the Roman Empire. This could be particularly useful to elementary school students studying similar topics.

Related Resources:

The Famous Romans [<http://www.roman-empire.net/children/famous.html>] section on the Roman Empire Web site [<http://www.roman-empire.net>] has information on some of the military leaders and emperors.

- The About.com Web site [<http://about.com/>] has a section, Famous Men of the Ancient Roman Empire [http://ancienthistory.about.com/library/bl/bl_list_roman.htm], which provides a list of key Roman historical figures.