

THE ROMAN EMPIRE

IN THE FIRST CENTURY

Rome Lesson Plan 6: The Violence of Ancient Rome

Introduction:

This lesson focuses on the extreme violence that permeated Roman society and how that violence may have attributed to the downfall of the Roman Empire. Students will make comparisons between the violence in ancient Rome and the violence that is part of American society today. Students will participate in a number of discussion activities and a research activity before writing an essay that requires comparison and contrast techniques as well as supporting personal opinions about violence in our society.

Subject Areas:

World History, Social Studies, Sociology, Behavioral Studies, Current Events, and Communication Arts

Grade Level: 6-12

Lesson Objectives:

Students will:

1. Form opinions about five questions and support those opinions in class discussion by using reasons, facts, and examples.
2. View a video clip and draw conclusions about Roman society based on the contents of the clip.
3. Complete a research activity using the companion website and related sites to learn more about the prevalence of violence and the way violence was used during the Roman Empire.
4. Work as a class to create a graphic organizer that records the similarities and differences between violence in the Roman Empire and violence in modern America.
5. Write a compare and contrast essay related to a specific type of violence that people experience today. Hypothesize about what the attitudes of ancient Romans would have been and compare these to the attitudes modern day Americans have about this same type of violence.

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.

THE ROMAN EMPIRE

IN THE FIRST CENTURY

Historical Understanding

Standard 2: Understands the historical perspective.

Behavioral Studies

Standard 1: Understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development, identity, and behavior.

Standard 4: Understands conflict, cooperation, and interdependence among individuals, groups, and institutions.

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.

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 4: Displays effective interpersonal communication skills.

Estimated Time:

This should take two 90-minute class periods or three 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](#)].
- Internet access for conducting research activities.

THE ROMAN EMPIRE

IN THE FIRST CENTURY

- Does the Punishment Fit the Crime? [[Download PDF here \(200k\)](#)], activity, which is part of this lesson plan.

Procedures:

1. To get students interested in the lesson, ask students to number a piece of scratch paper from one to five and answer each question by writing the word Agree or Disagree next to the corresponding number. Students should be ready to discuss their answers. Read each of the questions below and give students time to write their response to each question.
 - When people repeatedly view violence in different forms of entertainment, they become hardened to it and are not upset by it.
 - Playing violent video games and watching television programs or movies with extreme violence is just a leisure activity and not something that can desensitize people to violence.
 - We glorify violence in our country.
 - Societies that glorify violence and accept it as a form of entertainment are barbaric and uneducated.
 - Violence begets violence, and if you watch it you will want to behave in a similar manner.
2. Take time to discuss and debate the answers to each of the questions above. Allow students time to voice their opinions about why they agreed or disagreed with each statement, and encourage them to provide specific examples to support their arguments.
3. Close the discussion by introducing what many people considered a very violent society – the ancient Romans. Explain that while the Roman Empire was undoubtedly one of the most powerful and technologically advanced and literate societies of its time, it was also one of the most violent. Bring up the fact that one reason cited for the fall of Rome is the decline of morals and values, among other things. Demonstrate this by having students view the video clip Episode 4: Entertainment Roman Style [insert pbs video link]. Discuss what made this form of entertainment especially violent.
4. Using content from the Timeline [<http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/special/timeline01.html>] and the Virtual Library [<http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/special/library.html>] on The Roman Empire in the First Century Web site [<http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/index.html>], have students complete the Does the Punishment Fit the Crime? [[Download PDF here \(200k\)](#)] activity.
5. Discuss the activity and ask students to explain their answers using reasons, facts, and examples to support what they say.

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6. As a class, discuss violence in the U.S. using questions such as those listed below. A graphic organizer such as a Venn Diagram or T-chart could be used to record similarities and differences between the ancient Romans and modern-day Americans.
 - What type of violence-based leisure activities do Americans participate in and/or support?
 - What does our support of these types of activities say about our country's attitude toward violence?
 - In ancient Rome, the death penalty was common for criminals, prisoners of war, and for people in positions of power. In what ways does our society mirror the ancient Romans when it comes to these three areas? How is our society different?
 - Murder was common in ancient Rome, regardless of social class. Do you think the same could be said about American society? Why or why not?

7. Many lessons can be learned from the behavior of the ancient Romans. While few except the scholars and writers of the time seemed opposed to the level of violence in ancient Rome, it was ultimately a contributing factor in the downfall of the Roman Empire. Examine American culture and the way people in the U.S. view violence against one another. Choose a topic such as:
 - The death penalty
 - The sale of violent video games
 - The sale of violent music
 - Violent television programming (including certain sporting events)
 - The violent crime rate in the U.S.
 - The American prison system
 - Violence in U.S. schools
 - Gang violence

Write a one to two page essay that examines the similarities and differences between American attitudes about this type of violence and what the Roman attitude may have been. In what ways do the two societies seem to share a common belief? How do the two societies differ when it comes to these topics? How do you think American society will be affected in the long term by the violence that is part of our daily lives? What can be done to prevent violence from causing the downfall of America, or is this even a possibility? Discuss your opinions and support them with as many specific reasons, facts, and examples as you can provide.

THE ROMAN EMPIRE

IN THE FIRST CENTURY

Assessment Suggestions:

1. Assign completion grades for the Procedures step one activity.
2. Students could earn points or participation grades for class discussion activities.
3. An accuracy grade could be assigned for completion of the Does the Punishment Fit the Crime? activity.
4. An accuracy grade or scoring guide could be used to evaluate the essays from Procedures step seven.

Extension Activities:

1. Work with students to create a public awareness campaign about the negative effects of violence in your community or school. Work to encourage people to seek peaceful resolutions to their problems through the production of posters and public service announcements that promote a peaceful resolution to conflicts.
2. Invite the school counselor and/or a local youth counselor into the classroom to discuss violence and youth. Have students prepare questions about the topic in advance and provide them with the opportunity to “ask the experts” about the effects of violence on individuals and whole societies.
3. Encourage students to write to their local, state, or national legislators regarding issues related to violence. This could include things such as the death penalty, gun control laws, mandatory sentencing for violence offenders, the regulating of sales of violent entertainment/media products, etc. Have students state their opinions about what legislators should be doing to curb violence in America and make all citizens safer.

Related Resources:

The Games section [<http://www.roman-empire.net/society/soc-games.html>] on the Roman Empire Web Site [<http://www.roman-empire.net/%5D>] describes chariot racing and gladiators in detail.

The Romans Web pages [<http://www.iol.ie/~coolmine/typ/romans/intro.html>] have features on Roman entertainment and the Roman theater. They describe several violent aspects of both.