

Assignment Discovery Online Curriculum The Hidden History of the Roman Empire

Curriculum Focus

World History

Grade level

6-8

Duration

Three class periods

Objectives

Students will

- use library resources and the Internet to research the bread and circuses offered up by the rulers of ancient Rome at two main venues, the Colosseum and the Circus Maximus;
- prepare and give a group report on one of these sites to the rest of the class; and
- compare and contrast these sites and experiences with professional football or other sports.

Materials

- Computer with Internet access
- Library reference materials
- Paper, pens, and pencils

Procedures

1. Begin by asking students about daily life for the common person in ancient Rome. What were some of the hardships the relatively poor endured? Did they have any benefits or entitlements? Given a choice, would students rather have been a rich Roman citizen or a poor one? Why?
2. Ask if any students are familiar with the phrase "bread and circuses." If so, ask them to explain its meaning. Coined by the Roman poet Juvenal, the term refers to entertainment or offerings intended to foil discontent or distract attention from a situation. In ancient Rome, bread and circuses were used to keep the underprivileged poor people quiet.
3. Tell students they will explore the concept of bread and circuses in ancient Rome, specifically the use of public arenas for free entertainment. Explain that the largest and most famous Roman arenas were the Circus Maximus and the Colosseum, which was known to Romans as the Flavian Amphitheater. (Some students may have seen the film *Gladiator*, in which the action took place in the Colosseum. In the classic film *Ben Hur*, the action took place at the Circus Maximus.)

4. Divide the class into two groups; one will research and report on the Circus Maximus, the other on the Colosseum. Students will do most of their research using library materials, but some Web sites (listed below) also offer information and pictures, which students may print for their reports. Explain that groups should address the the following subjects:
 - the arena’s design and architecture
 - activities that took place in the arena
 - the arena’s audience, including its general experience, seating arrangements, behavior, or any other details
5. Direct students to the following Web sites:

Colosseum

 - www.greatbuildings.com/buildings/Roman_Colosseum.html
 - www.kent.k12wa.us/curriculum/soc_studies/rome/Colosseum.html
 - www.eliki.com/ancient/civilizations/roman

Circus Maximus

 - www.kent.k12.wa.us/curriculum/soc_studies/rome/CircusMaximus.html
 - www.historyhouse.com/in_history/circus_maximus/
6. Have the groups present their reports to the class. Allow time for questions and a discussion comparing and contrasting the two arenas as important delivery systems of bread and circuses.
7. Now ask students to consider this questions: If ancient Romans were crazy about sports and games, what about people today? Ask if any students have attended a game or other event in a sports arena. Have them describe the scene, the seating, and the experience.
8. Direct students who have not visited a modern sports arena or would like to learn more about modern stadiums to the Web site <http://www.sfo.com/~csuppes/Ballparks/index.htm>, a s ite set up to explore professional stadiums.
9. Conclude with a class discussion comparing sports and sporting events today to the bread and circuses in ancient Rome. Ask students the following questions:
 - In what ways are modern sports similar to those of the big bread-and-circuses events?
 - In what ways do our modern sports venues resemble those of ancient Rome?
 - Are there signs of class distinction to be found at modern arenas?
 - From the standpoint of modern sports competition, in what ways has society become more civilized?
 - Can students suggest instances where there is still room for improvement?
 - Do students think bread and circuses would be an appropriate term to describe professional sports today? Why or why not?

Evaluation

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate your students’ work.

3 points: Students demonstrated proficiency in using the Internet as a research tool; worked cooperatively in their groups to develop a report on an arena; and actively participated in class discussions.

2 points: Students demonstrated some skill in using the Internet as a research tool; worked somewhat cooperatively in their groups to develop a report on an arena; and participated in class discussions.

1 point: Students had difficulty using the Internet as a research tool; had trouble working cooperatively in their groups to develop a report on an arena; and did not participate in class discussions.

Vocabulary

affront

Definition: A deliberate offense; insult

Context: The emperor's behavior was an affront to the visiting patricians.

cult

Definition: A system of religious beliefs and ritual or a religion regarded as unorthodox or false

Context: Christianity was a cult that threatened the Roman belief in hierarchy and social division.

fester

Definition: To cause increasing poisoning, irritation, or bitterness

Context: Resentment festered among the poor when they saw the excesses of the rich.

hierarchy

Definition: The classification of a group of people according to ability or economic, social, or professional standing

Context: Roman society was built on a rigid social hierarchy.

undermine

Definition: To subvert or weaken insidiously or secretly

Context: Chaos and corruption undermined the Roman Empire from within.

National Standards

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- I. Culture

Credit

Amy Donovan, freelance writer and editor