



The Legacy of the Roman Empire

The focus of this lesson plan is the life of Roman soldiers.

Subject

World History

Grade level

6-8

Duration

Three class periods

Objectives

Students will

- review facts about the Roman Empire and Vindolanda, a Roman fort in northern Britain;
- read excerpts of letters from Roman soldiers at Vindolanda; and
- research the life of Roman soldiers and write fictional letters from the Roman front.

Materials

- Computer with Internet access
- Print and online resources about the Roman Empire and army
- Paper and pencil
- *The Legacy of the Roman Empire* video and VCR (or DVD and DVD player)

Procedures

1. After watching *The Legacy of the Roman Empire*, ask students to discuss what they learned about the Roman Empire. Ask them to describe the government in Rome before the empire was established. (*It was a republic, in which elected senators made laws.*) Who is the general who helped build the empire by conquering Gaul (modern-day France) and became a powerful dictator of Rome? (*Julius Caesar*) Who was the emperor in 27 B.C. at the beginning of the Roman Empire? (*Augustus*) What effect did the growing empire have on Rome? (*It became powerful and wealthy.*) What was Pax Romana? (*The first 200 years of the empire, in which the empire grew, but there were no major wars.*)
2. Show students a map of the Roman Empire at this Web site: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/romans/map.html>. Compare it to your

- classroom map and name some of the modern-day countries included in its farthest borders, such as Britain, Spain, Egypt, Morocco, Israel, and Turkey. Ask students to describe the Roman Empire's army. (*It was a large, powerful army made of paid soldiers.*) Why were the soldiers important? (*It took a large, efficient army to conquer, control, and protect such a vast empire.*)
3. As a class, review Vindolanda. It was a fortress built in Britain, the northern frontier of the Roman Empire. Archaeological excavations have uncovered small wooden writing tablets. They include military documents, lists, and letters to and from the soldiers, officers, slaves, and others staying at the fort.
 4. Share some of the tablets from Vindolanda available online at this Web site: <http://vindolanda.csad.ox.ac.uk/tablets/browse.shtml>. For a good sample of tablets, go to "Browse by Highlights" and select "All highlights." You'll find images of eight tablets, and their English translations. Although most of these tablets are lists or short excerpts from letters, they give a rare insight into life at Vindolanda.
 5. Tell students that they are going to use what they learned from the program and their own research to write a letter as if they are Roman soldiers stationed at Vindolanda. The letters should address different aspects of their life at the fort, from their military responsibilities to daily life. You may want to provide the following questions to guide their research:
 - What challenges does a Roman soldier face?
 - Why did they, as soldiers, join the army?
 - What are some of their responsibilities at Vindolanda?
 - Who are they fighting?
 - What do soldiers wear?
 - What kinds of weapons do they use?
 - Describe the fort and the living quarters.
 - What do they eat?
 - What do they do for entertainment?
 - How much contact do they have with women and children?
 - What kinds of things do they need from home?
 6. Have students use print and online sources. The following Web sites provide information about life at Vindolanda and the Roman army.

Life at Vindolanda

Vindolanda: Forts and Military Life
<http://vindolanda.csad.ox.ac.uk/exhibition/army.shtml>

BBC History: Vindolanda
http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/romans/vindolanda_01.shtml

Vindolanda (See "20 Most Asked Questions")
http://www.vindolanda.com/html/index_ie_non.html

Life in the Roman Army

The Roman Army

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/romans/army.shtml>

Roman Empire: Ancient Voices: Soldiers

<http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/voices/voices3.html>

The Mighty Roman Legions

<http://myron.sjsu.edu/romeweb/ROMARMY/ROMARMY.HTM>

The Roman Army (*advanced*)

<http://www.roman-empire.net/army/army.html>

The Roman Army (*advanced*)

<http://www.vroma.org/~bmcmanus/romanarmy.html>

7. When students have completed their research, allow another class period to write their letters, or assign as homework.
8. Have students exchange letters. After they have read the letters, ask them to share something new or interesting they learned about the life of a Roman soldier.

Evaluation

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

3 points: Students recalled several key details about the Roman empire, its army, and Vindolanda; participated actively in class discussions; showed thorough research on Vindolanda and life in the Roman army; wrote a thoughtful, comprehensive letter with several details; and clearly and accurately shared more than one detail from another letter.

2 points: Students recalled some key details about the Roman empire, its army, and Vindolanda; participated somewhat in class discussions; showed satisfactory research on Vindolanda and life in the Roman army; wrote a satisfactory letter with some details; and shared one detail from another letter with the class.

1 point: Students recalled few or no key details about the Roman empire, its army, and Vindolanda; did not participate in class discussions; showed little research about Vindolanda and life in the Roman army; and wrote an incomplete letter with few or no details.

Extensions

For **"The Rise of Ancient Rome"** segment: Review facts about Rome and its growth as an empire. Describe the republic that began in 509 B.C. Ask students these questions: Who was Julius Caesar? How did he rise to power? What were some of his accomplishments? What happened to him?

Then discuss Augustus, the first official emperor of Rome, and subsequent emperors. Finally, have students research major achievements and influences of the Roman Empire, which include aqueducts, an extensive road system, bridges, style of

architecture (such as the Pantheon and Colosseum), language (Latin, from which Spanish, French, and Italian derive), and its political system.

For the **“Ancient Rome’s Decline”** segment: Ask students to discuss problems that lead to the fall of Rome. What caused Rome’s political turmoil and violence? Why was the leadership so unstable? What was life like for the common people? Why was there a need for such high taxes? Who were some of the “barbarians” that eventually brought down the Roman Empire in Western Europe? (the Huns, Vandals, and Visigoths)

For the **“Inside Byzantium”** segment: Discuss the emergence of the Byzantine Empire. Ask students these questions: When and how did it begin? Where was the capital of the empire? What was the new name of the city once it became the capital? What was the official religion of the empire?

Have students explore Hagia Sophia, the church in Constantinople. Ask how it reflected Greek, Roman, and Eastern styles? How did it influence future architecture in the region? What empire eventually conquered Constantinople? Why did the name of the city change? How did Hagia Sophia change? The following Web site provides a good starting point: <http://www.focusmm.com/civilization/hagia/welcome.htm>

Vocabulary

empire

Definition: A group of territories or people ruled by a single authority

Context: The Roman Empire stretched from North Africa to Britain.

garrison

Definition: A military post or fort where soldiers live

Context: Vindolanda was a Roman garrison in northern Britain.

legion

Definition: A unit of Rome’s army of career soldiers

Context: The well-trained soldiers in the army legions were Roman citizens who volunteered and served for about 20 years.

republic

Definition: A political system in which people elect representatives

Context: The Roman republic had no king, queen, or emperor.

Academic Standards

The National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE) provides 18 national geography standards that the geographically informed person knows and understands. To view the standards online, go to <http://www.ncge.org/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following NCGE standards:

- Human Systems: The process, patterns, and functions of human settlement.

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of

the NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org>.

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Time, Continuity, and Change
- Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- Power, Authority, and Governance

Credit

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