

Title: The Roman Empire – A Day in the Life of

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Subject Area/ Grade: Latin/ 8th Grade

Students will imagine what life was like as a Roman citizen through creative writing incorporating thorough research into the writing.

Goals

- Imagine what life was like as a Roman citizen
- Bring history to life via creative writing
- Incorporate thorough research into writing

Content Area and Standards

Ancient History

There are not set standards that I follow in my school, but I follow the “Learning Target” approach of Expeditionary Learning that presents standards via a set of statements beginning with “I can...” I find it makes it much more clear to the students what exactly we are working on and helps their own metacognition.

- I can structure a piece of narrative writing
- I can research a topic
- I can incorporate my research into narrative writing
- I can give and receive thoughtful feedback on my project and peers’ projects.

Activity

The Roman Empire: A day in the life

1. Students are introduced to a variety of stories of normal people who lived in the ancient Mediterranean. This is done by looking at inscriptions, archaeological evidence, and written records. The goal here is to get a window into the lives of people who were *not* the emperors or famous generals, and to think about the average experiences of people 2000 years ago in comparison to that of ourselves.
2. Students brainstorm ideas for a character and write up a short back story for who they want to role-play as.
3. Based on their character, students develop 3 research questions that will help them shed light on their character’s everyday experience. For example, if a student chooses to play the role of a regular soldier in the Roman army, their

research questions might be: What weapons were common in the Roman infantry? What were the daily routines and responsibilities of Roman soldiers? What were some famous battles in ancient Rome?

4. Using their research and their own creative ideas for their character's backstory, students write a narrative (~1-2 pages) of a day in the life of their character. Using google docs, students are required to comment on various sections of their narrative to explain to their audience how they incorporated their research. For example, if there is a section in their narrative on what the character is eating, the student might select that section and comment on what they learned about food in Roman society and link to the source(s) they found.
5. Students share their narratives in small groups of 4-5. They will look out for any overlap in their research and discuss the similarities/differences between their character's life and that of others' characters.
6. This could be extended afterwards in numerous ways: it could lead to an acting project, an artistic representation of their character, improvisatory role-play in groups. I will be partnering with the art teacher at my school (more on that below!)

Joy2Learn Artists /Videos that Support Project

In terms of fostering both a creative and welcoming environment in the classroom, I have been heavily influenced by [Gregory Hines speaking about his own family history](#). He stresses the importance of having creative partners (his brother, in his case) and feeling supported by his community in his artistic endeavors (he mentions both family and friends supporting him). Especially as students will be building and sharing a unique and personal story I think it is highly important that students learn to be supportive of and interested in the ideas of others.

Art Forms that May Be Included

Some students have chosen to construct their narrative as a graphic novel, but most will use their medium of narrative writing.

Connections to Students Passion Areas and Interests

Students can build their own backstory for their character based on their interests, as in the game Dungeons and Dragons or online role-playing games.

Materials Needed

This is not very material-intensive...

- The internet for research

- Google Docs

Collaborators

I am collaborating with the art teacher: after students have completed their narrative, they will be constructing a “self-portrait” of their character, either via traditional painting or clay sculpture. They will consider various aspects of their character’s background and history to build in visual elements into their portrait.

Assessment

Three main parts of the project will be assessed:

- Research and planning: students will be given lessons on how to find sources and develop research questions. They will be graded on how they seek out information independently and digest it. They will also be graded on how they develop a plan for their narrative using scaffolds provided.
- Their narrative itself will be graded according to how well they incorporated their historical research, how well they created a believable but interesting character, and how well they structured their narrative clearly.
- They will also be assessed on how they both give and receive feedback on other students’ narratives and how they participate in a discussion comparing characters and research.

Timeline

3 weeks: first week planning, second week writing, 3rd week sharing and discussing.