



Ancient Rome & America: Post-visit Activity

Author: National Constitution Center Staff

About this Lesson

This activity is ideal for classes that have experienced the exhibition Ancient Rome & America at the National Constitution Center. This lesson encourages students to recall and examine the themes of the exhibition, namely ancient Rome's influence on America at its founding and today, and to consider the question posed in the final section of exhibition, "Are we Rome?"

Background

The road the Founders traveled led in two directions: ahead to the American future and back to ancient Rome. For generations, the story of Rome's rise and fall has fueled hopes for national greatness and fears for the fate of America's republic.

Rome's influence is with us still. It echoes in the names of political institutions such as capitols and senates; in symbols such as the Statue of Liberty and the American bald eagle; and in America's arts and culture.

The Roman Republic and its empire in Europe and the Mediterranean lasted for almost 1,000 years. Though its power eventually declined, ancient Rome's legacy, like the objects it left behind, still remains.

The United States is now almost 250 years old. At its founding, Americans modeled their new nation on what they admired about ancient Rome, especially the Romans' emphasis on civic virtue and the common good, and their ability to cultivate a national identity among the diverse peoples they ruled. The loss of these attributes is often cited as the reason for the decline of ancient Rome.

Today, Americans see Rome both as a model of republican government and as a warning about what they fear their country may become.

Objectives

Students will:

- Examine the exhibition for connections between ancient Rome and America
- Summarize the attributes the Founders admired about ancient Rome
- Deliberate questions about the attributes of ancient Rome at its peak, and how they apply to American society today

Activity

1. As students enter the classroom, ask them to recall their experience at the National Constitution Center. Pose the following questions for class discussion. Ask students to support their answers with examples from current events.

*You may choose to post the questions for all to see, to facilitate discussion in small groups of three to five students.

- Are Americans today willing to sacrifice their individual interests for the common good? Can you name some examples of Americans helping others or acting selfishly?
- Do Americans have a sense of unity and common purpose? Can you cite some examples of everyday unity or discord among Americans? What brings Americans together? What pulls them apart?
- Has America created a modern-day empire? What evidence can you find of the influence of American culture and military strength around the world? Does this influence make America an empire?

2. You may choose to continue the class discussion with the following question, or ask students to write their response for homework. Provide students with the following information:

- Having considered the previous questions and examined the ways ancient Rome has influenced America from its founding to today, what is your answer to the question: “Are we Rome?” Be sure to support your answer with evidence gathered from your exploration of the exhibition and current events.

Assessment Options

You may choose to assess student participation during class discussion.

You may choose to have students write a response to the questions posed and collect the essays.