

Ancient Rome & America: Pre-visit Activity

Author: National Constitution Center Staff

About this Lesson

This activity is ideal for classes preparing to experience the exhibition Ancient Rome & America at the National Constitution Center. This lesson encourages students to examine the world around them, from architecture to pop culture, to discover the influence of ancient Rome in their communities today.

Background

For generations, the story of ancient Rome's rise and fall has fueled hopes for national greatness and fears for the fate of America's republic. Are we Rome? Will America's rise to world leadership last for a thousand years? Or will our nation come to ruin, like the great Empire of ancient Rome? What lessons does Rome teach us? These questions have haunted Americans since the founding of the new nation in 1776, and they are still with us today.

Visitors to the *Ancient Rome & America* exhibition will discover the many ways in which Americans have imagined ourselves to be a nation built in the image of ancient Rome. Rome's influence still 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 American arts and culture.

Ancient Rome & America views the lost world of ancient Rome through American eyes. The exhibition recovers the classical spirit that inspired Rome's impact on the nation and asks, "What enduring lessons does Rome have for America today?"

Objectives

Students will:

- Examine architecture, symbols and popular culture for evidence of ancient Rome's influence
- Understand the themes of the exhibition, in preparation for deeper exploration during their class visit to the National Constitution Center
- Recognize ancient Rome's enduring influence on America today

Activity

1. In a class period prior to your trip to the National Constitution Center, provide your students with the following information:

During our visit to the National Constitution Center, we will explore how ancient Rome influenced our Founders and continues to influence America. Before our visit, we will brainstorm a list of the ways in which ancient Rome's influence is present in our lives and communities today.

2. Distribute the handout, *Do as the Romans Do*. You may choose to have your students work individually or in pairs to complete the handout. Provide your students with the following information:

This handout encourages you to take three steps: Look, Think, and Write. This is the same process you will use during our visit to the National Constitution Center.

Assessment Options

You may choose to collect the handout from students.

You may ask students to expand on one of their "Look, Think, Write" responses and submit their essay for grading.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Do as the Romans Do

The center of the ancient Roman Republic and empire was the city of Rome. Growing from a tiny village to become the grandest city of the ancient world, Rome was filled with great public buildings and a vibrant civic society, from the temples and basilicas of the Forum to arenas and theaters. These symbols, venues and activities of civic life, commerce, politics and entertainment were often copied in cities throughout the Roman Empire, and in cities throughout America.

Directions: Follow the three steps, Look, Think, Write, in the space provided.

1. Look: Architecture

In addition to the Coliseum, many staples of ancient Roman architecture such as columns, arches and domes can be found in American buildings from the Founding to today. Explore the buildings in your town or city for evidence of Rome's influence.

Think: Can you find any examples of Rome's influence on the buildings you see? Can you think of examples from other cities? (Hint: Think about our nation's capital.)

Write:

2. Look: Symbols

Symbols are used often to transmit messages quickly and to evoke emotional responses from viewers. In ancient Rome and America, coins have been more than just a means of purchasing goods and accumulating wealth. They serve as important symbols of a unified government and convey messages to a wide audience. Ancient Rome and America both used imagery, such as eagles and the goddess Liberty, as the symbols of their new republic.

Think: Can you think of other symbols of freedom or liberty? How would you symbolize these ancient Roman and American ideals?

Write:

3. Look: Popular Culture

Ancient Rome's popular theater, speech-making, fashion, gladiator games and chariot races have influenced America since the birth of our republic.

Think: Can you find examples of ways that ancient Rome influences, fascinates or inspires Americans today? (Hint: Can you think of any sports, TV shows, movies or fashions inspired by ancient Rome?)

Write: