

# Ancient Rome

Grades 4-6

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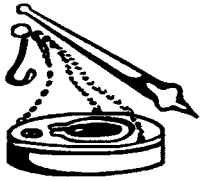
OTM-619 • SSF1-19 Ancient Rome



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# Ancient Rome

## *The History of Rome*

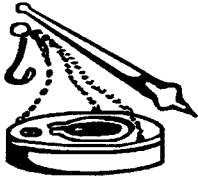
The story about Rome began long ago on the sunny Italian peninsula which juts out from the southern coast of Europe like a big boot. Many years before the birth of Christ several groups of wandering tribesmen came to a flat plain near the muddy Tiber River. This plain is bordered on three sides by hills and mountains. One of the groups called the Latins built several little villages of mud and straw huts on a group of hills near the Tiber. These villages eventually grew into a small city called Rome.

Around 750 B.C., Rome was conquered by the Etruscans, a neighboring tribe. The Romans acquired many new skills from their conquerors. The Etruscans taught them the art of metalworking, better ways to farm and how to build buildings. The Romans were very unhappy during the Etruscan rule. The Etruscan kings were very cruel, and around 500 B.C., the Romans drove them out and organized their own government.

The Romans carefully formed their own government. They made sure that one man would not have complete control or power. Two men, called consuls, were chosen each year to head the government. The laws made by these leaders were voted on by an assembly of all the fighting men in the community. A powerful assembly called the senate gave the consuls advice on how to govern. This form of government was called a republic.

Rome grew to be a strong, powerful and independent republic. The people were proud of their government and of being Roman citizens. They were brave, hard working and eager to fight for their nation. In time the Romans had conquered the people in neighboring cities and eventually controlled the entire Italian peninsula.

The Romans challenged the power of a great city called Carthage, which was located on the northern coast of Africa. Carthage had a strong navy and controlled all the trade in the western part of the Mediterranean Sea. For almost 120 years, Rome and Carthage wanted to rule the ancient world. After many wars, Rome gained control over much of the territory



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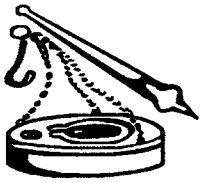
around the Mediterranean Sea. In 146 B.C., Carthage was captured and destroyed by the Romans.

Next, Rome turned her attention to Gaul, sending the Roman armies northward to conquer Gaul. Rome's possessions stretched northward to the North Sea and southward to the Sahara Desert. On the east they touched the Euphrates River and on the west the Atlantic Ocean. For many years, Rome's mighty armies continued to march out conquering new lands.

Although Rome had increased her overseas possessions and had become very powerful, she had many problems at home. It was very difficult to rule fairly and wisely over the vast number of people that she had conquered. Greedy, dishonest Roman governors and tax collectors sent to these different nations made the people very unhappy and angry. These men used their positions to gain wealth for themselves, and cared little about hurting others. The people in the conquered nations became very dissatisfied, and rebellions began to break out. A famous gladiator called Spartacus led a huge slave revolt in 73 B.C. that was cruelly put down by the army. In the city of Rome were large numbers of poor people who did not have jobs, or a place to live, and had to be fed by the government. Many farmers had lost their small farms to wealthy men who had bought them to form large estates. These estates were then farmed by the slaves.

Roman politics was also in a state of chaos at that time. The noblemen had once again managed to gain control of the senate. They made it the most important part of the government. The noblemen did not use this power to help the poor people or the conquered nations.

In time, the people became tired of the senate's selfish rules and tried to take some of its power away. A general named Marius was chosen to be leader. Marius and his army gained control for a short while. The senate also had its own leader, a military leader, named Sulla. Sulla's soldiers marched on Rome and regained the senate's power. For years this quarrel continued with the people and the senate, and at times Rome was a battlefield on which her own people fought.



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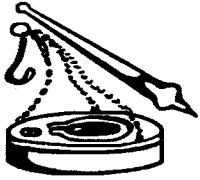
Two powerful generals named Pompey and Julius Caesar tried to control the government. After an early alliance, they became enemies. Pompey was murdered and by 45 B.C., Julius Caesar had become the sole ruler of Rome.

Caesar used his power wisely. He made fair laws and brought back peace and order. The Roman people were happy to have a strong government again and did not object to Caesar having all the power. Noblemen in Rome did not feel the same way as the people and had Caesar murdered in 44 B.C. Caesar's friend, Mark Antony, and his nephew, Octavian fought and defeated the conspirators. Octavian became head of the state and eventually the first Emperor Augustus. The Romans granted him all the power that he wanted. They called him Augustus which means "exalted" and gave him the title of "emperor". Rome was ruled by emperors from then on.

Augustus was a wise, fair ruler. He developed a better way to deal with the daily running of the Empire. He gave jobs to freedmen and slaves. The people loved him and he improved the city by building new temples, libraries, theaters and public baths. His reign was a peaceful one.

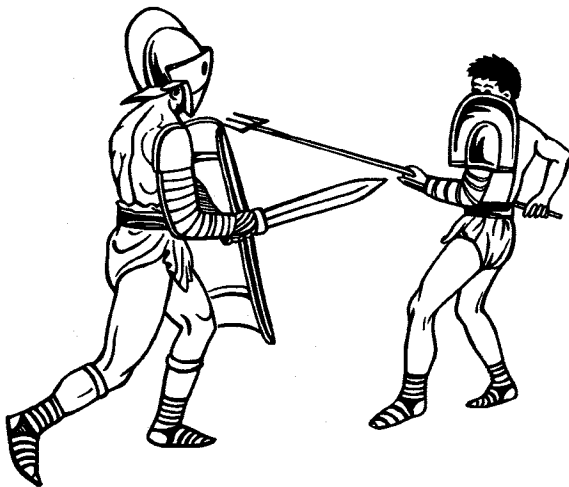
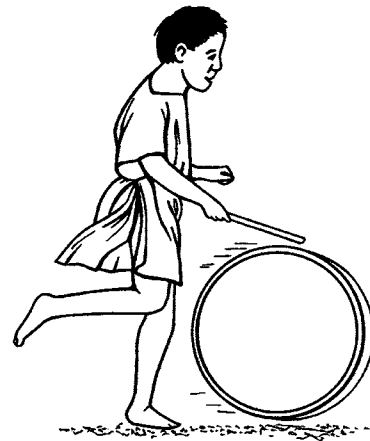
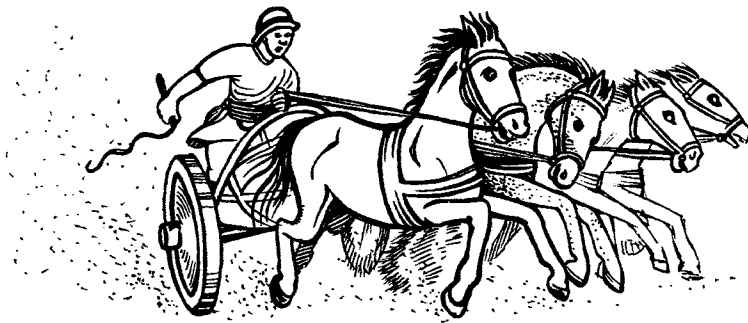
In A.D. 14, Augustus died and was succeeded by his stepson Tiberius. Tiberius was an efficient leader but a cruel one. The Roman government deteriorated during his rule. When Tiberius died, Caligula became Emperor. The people hated his cruel ways and felt that he was a mad man. In A.D. 41, Caligula was murdered by his own guards.

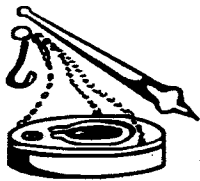
Claudius, Caligula's uncle, succeeded him. Claudius expanded the Roman Empire by invading and conquering Britain. He was poisoned by his wife in A.D. 54 and her son Nero became the next emperor. Nero was also thought to be mad. He is supposed to have played a lyre during a fire which destroyed most of Rome in A.D. 64. Nero was suspected of starting the fire himself, but he chose to lay the blame on the Christians, and had many of them put to death. In A.D. 69, Nero killed himself and after his death, Rome was in another period of chaos.



# Ancient Rome

In the third and fourth centuries, Rome began to lose her power. Many of her emperors were weak rulers. The people were more concerned with their own comforts and safety than in serving their country. Many people preferred to live idly on free bread given out by the government than by doing honest, hard work. Romans were no longer interested in defending their country and foreign soldiers were hired to fill the army. Rome could no longer defend herself when tribes of uncivilized warriors from lands north of the Danube and Rhine Rivers moved southward in search of new homes. Little by little, these barbarians took away Rome's lands. In 476 A.D., the barbarians drove the last Roman emperor from the throne.





# Ancient Rome

## ***The Roman People and Their Lifestyles***

The people living in the Roman Empire differed greatly in their customs and spoke many languages. Government officials and the upper class Romans spoke mainly Latin and Greek.

The people of Ancient Rome were divided into various social classes. The powerful upper class was made up of members of the *Senate* and their families. Most of the people belonged to the middle class called “*plebeians*”. Plebeians were farmers, city workers and soldiers. The lowest class of people were the slaves. Slaves were people captured during warfare. They could eventually buy their freedom and become Roman citizens.

Four hundred years before the birth of Christ, the early Romans were mainly shepherds and farmers. They enjoyed working in the grain fields and vineyards on their small farms. Their homes were small and their farming tools were quite simple.

Farmers belonged to the social class called plebeians. Although they were loyal citizens, they did not have as many rights as the noblemen. Plebeians could not hold important government offices and some of the laws were unfair to them.

Rome was the largest city in the Roman Empire, and the capital. Cities in the Roman Empire were trading and cultural centers. Roman engineers carefully planned these cities. Public buildings were well placed for convenient use. Sewerage and water supply systems were also provided. Wealthy Romans and emperors paid for the construction of large public buildings such as baths, sports arenas and theaters.

The Forum was a large open space surrounded by markets, government buildings and temples. It was usually found in the center of every Roman city. Rich and poor mingled here enjoying the baths, theaters and arenas.

The upper class in Rome was made up of wealthy noblemen, senators and their families. They lived in larger homes that were plainly and simply