The Legacy of the Roman Empire: Teacher’s Guide

Grade Level: 6-8  Curriculum Focus: World History  Lesson Duration: Three class periods

Program Description
Learn about the empire that ruled much of the known world in its time. Segments trace Rome’s growth, downfall, and legacy. This program includes one feature segment and three short segments.

Onscreen Questions
- What were the main differences between the Roman republic and the empire?
- What was life like for a soldier on the Roman front in Britain?
- How did the power within Rome shift during the empire’s final years?
- Why have so many different people been interested in the city that’s alternately been called Byzantium, Constantinople, and Istanbul?

Lesson Plan

Student Objectives
- Review facts about the Roman Empire and Vindolanda, a Roman fort in northern Britain.
- Read excerpts of letters from Roman soldiers at Vindolanda.
- Research the life of Roman soldiers, and write fictional letters from the Roman front.

Materials
- The Legacy of the Roman Empire video and VCR, or DVD and DVD player
- Computer with Internet access
- Print and online resources about the Roman empire and army
- Paper and pencils people
Procedures

1. After watching the program, discuss what students 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.) What general helped build the empire by conquering Gaul (modern-day France) and became a powerful Roman dictator? (Julius Caesar) Who was the emperor in 27 B.C., at the beginning of the Roman Empire? (Augustus) How did the growing empire change Rome? (It became powerful and wealthy.) What was Pax Romana? (The first 200 years of the empire; during it, the empire grew without any 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 ask students to name some of the modern-day countries included in the empire’s farthest borders. (Britain, Spain, Egypt, Morocco, Israel, Turkey) Ask them 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. Students should know that it was a fortress built in Britain, the northern frontier of the Roman Empire. Archaeological excavations have uncovered small wooden writing tablets. These 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 from the perspective of a Roman soldier stationed at Vindolanda. Their 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 you join the army?
   - What are some of your responsibilities at Vindolanda?
   - Who are you fighting?
   - What do soldiers wear?
   - What kinds of weapons do you use?
   - Describe the fort and your living quarters.
   - What do you eat?
   - What do you do for entertainment?
• How much contact do you have with women and children?
• What kinds of things do you need from home?

6. Have students use print and online sources. The following Web sites provide information about life at Vindolanda and in 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”)

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 the letter writing as homework.

8. Have students exchange and read letters. Ask them to share something new or interesting they learned about the life of a Roman soldier from a classmate’s letter.

Assessment

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; wrote an incomplete letter with few or no details.

**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**

**Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)**

McREL’s Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit [http://www.mcrel.org/](http://www.mcrel.org/).

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Geography—Human Systems: Understands the forces of cooperation and conflict that shape the divisions of Earth’s surface
- Language Arts—Viewing: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media; Writing: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process, Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing

**The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)**

NCSS has developed national guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to [http://www.socialstudies.org](http://www.socialstudies.org)

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Time, Continuity, and Change
Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- [http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html](http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html)

DVD Content

This program is available in an interactive DVD format. The following information and activities are specific to the DVD version.

**How To Use the DVD**

The DVD starting screen has the following options:

*Play Video*—This plays the video from start to finish. There are no programmed stops, except by using a remote control. With a computer, depending on the particular software player, a pause button is included with the other video controls.

*Video Index*—Here the video is divided into four parts (see below), indicated by video thumbnail icons. Watching all parts in sequence is similar to watching the video from start to finish. Brief descriptions and total running times are noted for each part. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the remote for TV playback; on a computer, click once to highlight a thumbnail and read the accompanying text description and click again to start the video.

*Curriculum Units*—These are specially edited video segments pulled from different sections of the video (see below). These nonlinear segments align with key ideas in the unit of instruction. They include onscreen pre- and post-viewing questions, reproduced below in this Teacher’s Guide. Total running times for these segments are noted. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the TV remote or click once on the Curriculum Unit title on a computer.

*Standards Link*—Selecting this option displays a single screen that lists the national academic standards the video addresses.

*Teacher Resources*—This screen gives the technical support number and Web site address.
Video Index

I. The Rise of Ancient Rome (8 min.)
Although established as a republic, Rome became an empire shortly after the death of Julius Caesar. Visit ancient Rome to learn about the rise of the Roman Empire.

II. Letters from the Front (26 min.)
Roman soldiers were well-trained fighters. But what were their lives really like? Discover the truths about life on the empire’s frontier from the soldiers’ own letters.

III. Ancient Rome’s Decline (6 min.)
Once the center of Western civilization, the Roman Empire eventually succumbed to political infighting and class struggles. Investigate the reasons behind the empire’s fall.

IV. Inside Byzantium (7 min.)
Built from the ruins of the Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire combined Eastern and Western cultures. See how the Byzantine legacy continues to influence our world to this day.

Curriculum Units

1. Rome Before Caesar

Pre-viewing question
Q: What is a republic?
A: A form of government in which ultimate power rests with the people, and is exercised by representatives elected by them.

Post-viewing question
Q: What sparked the first Roman civil wars?
A: As Rome expanded its power, a great gap grew between the rich and poor. The once-volunteer citizen army became a professional military, with soldiers displaying more loyalty to their commanders than to the Roman people. Amid the chaos, rival Roman generals from across the empire marched their armies into Rome. Civil war ensued.

2. Caesar’s Reign

Pre-viewing question
Q: Would you rather be governed by a humane dictatorship or a corrupt republic?
A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question
Q: What did Caesar do for Rome?
A: Caesar enacted many government reforms to help the poor and strengthen the empire. He planned a road system across Italy, made changes to how provinces were governed, and extended Roman citizenship to many conquered people.
3. The Roman Emperors

Pre-viewing question
Q: Who do you think was the most corrupt Roman emperor?
A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question
Q: How did Rome’s emperors improve living conditions?
A: They erected aqueducts to provide a steady stream of fresh water to the empire, and built new roads to improve trade. They also granted more rights to the people living in the provinces outside the city.

4. An Ancient Battlefield

Pre-viewing question
Q: What can archaeology tell us about the past?
A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question
Q: Do you think Roman soldiers were nothing more than well-trained killers?
A: Answers will vary.

5. The World of Insects

Pre-viewing question
Q: What would you do if a conquering army came to enslave you?
A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question
Q: Why did the Britons destroy their own homes and families?
A: They despised and feared the Roman soldiers more than they feared death, itself. They set fire to their homes and killed their women and children in order to save them from the conquering Romans.

6. Life at Vindolanda

Pre-viewing question
Q: How do you think it felt to be a fresh recruit sent to war?
A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question
Q: Do you think you could have lived the life of a Roman soldier?
A: Answers will vary.

7. Letters Across the Empire

Pre-viewing question
Q: Why are letters such an important archaeological find?
A: Answers will vary.
Post-viewing question
Q: What have we learned about Roman soldiers from the Vindolanda letters?
A: They revealed such things as what Roman soldiers wore under their uniforms, the cash flow problems most foot soldiers experienced, the things generals required for their men, and personal information about some of the soldiers and their families.

8. Free Time at the Fort

Pre-viewing question
Q: What sorts of things do you do in your spare time?
A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question
Q: How did the Roman soldiers spend their time at the fort?
A: Off-duty Roman soldiers often spent time at the bathhouse or gambling. They participated in javelin and sword practice, preparing for battle. Many Roman soldiers also took common-law wives and had families.

9. Death With Honor

Pre-viewing question
Q: Is there such a thing as death with honor?
A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question
Q: How did the Britons eventually overtake the Romans?
A: The Britons used guerrilla tactics to defeat the Romans. Although the Roman soldiers were highly skilled, they were used to organized battle and found it difficult to respond to the quick guerrilla style of warfare.

10. Losing Control of an Empire

Pre-viewing question
Q: What are some things that can destroy a government?
A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question
Q: What were some problems with the Roman system?
A: Political violence and instability became commonplace. There was no clear way of designating a successor when an emperor died or left the throne. There was a huge gap between rich and poor. The cost of supporting the massive army caused extraordinarily high taxes.

11. Western Decline

Pre-viewing question
Q: How can a government avoid class struggles and political infighting?
A: Answers will vary.
Post-viewing question
Q: How did the Western Roman Empire finally fall?
A: It grew weaker as the Eastern Roman Empire grew stronger. Eventually Rome came under attack from Germanic tribes; it finally fell in 476 when the last Roman emperor was overthrown.

12. Cultural Blending in Constantinople

Pre-viewing question
Q: What traditions and artifacts from your culture do you think will live one?
A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question
Q: What were some similarities between the Roman Empire and the Byzantine Empire?
A: Answers will vary.

13. An Empire Declines

Pre-viewing question
Q: What artifacts from the Roman and Byzantine empires have survived to this day?
A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question
Q: What contributed to the decline of the Byzantine Empire?
A: It was weakened by years of fighting with its neighbors and a long-running economic conflict with Venice. Venetians eventually persuaded an army of crusaders to attack and loot Constantinople; the Byzantine Empire never fully recovered from this attack. An attack by Ottoman Turks in 1452 finally destroyed the empire.