

Rome

The Rise of the Roman Empire



The Rise of the Roman Empire

Decline of the Roman Empire

Roman Empire Achievements

Thematic Icons



Economics



Geography



Historical concepts



Government

Icons



Flash activity (these activities are not editable)



Teacher notes included in the Notes page

For more instructions, see the *User Guide*.





Timeline





Where is Rome?





Geography of Rome



Rome is a city on the west coast of Italy. Most of Italy is **mountainous**: in the north of the country are the **Alps**, and the **Apennines** run down the center.

Rome was founded in about 753 BC, built on top of seven hills, on the eastern bank of the **River Tiber**.

Today, it remains the capital of Italy, but in 753 BC, Italy was not a single **unified** country. It was made up of many different tribes and cultures.

Look at the map on the right. At first, there were several key geographical features that allowed Rome to expand.



What do you think these features were?





The following geographical features allowed Rome to flourish in its early years:

- a warm, Mediterranean climate, which was good for growing crops
- fertile land from the ash produced by volcanoes
- access to the **River Tiber** and the sea for trading routes.

This meant that Rome could provide its growing population with a reliable and plentiful food supply. Its proximity to the sea meant that shipping routes could be set up for trade purposes.



Why would trade have been important?





History of Rome



Trade was an important factor in Rome's early commercial and influential growth. Rome produced a **surplus** of crops such as cereals, grains and olives. This surplus meant that merchants could export goods to neighboring countries.

As the Roman Empire grew, it imported goods such as gold, spices and precious stones. It also began to export refined goods such as fish sauce and wine. Liquids were stored in **amphorae**: large pots that were stacked on their side.

Often goods were transported by sea, because it was usually cheaper to travel by ship than by land. However, this meant that there was a danger of piracy or shipwrecks in stormy weather.





The legendary line of kings begun by Romulus came to an end in 509 BC. The people revolted against the last king and set up a new system of government: the **Roman Republic**.

Under the new government, Roman citizens were divided into two social classes:

- **Patricians** were the wealthy members of important families, and they became the ruling class.
- Ordinary people, even wealthy ones, were **plebeians**. They had no say in how their republic was governed.

In 494 BC, the plebeians went on strike. They refused to work or serve in the army until their complaints were heard. The patricians were forced to allow them a political voice.





The Republic and its government



The Roman Republic was ruled by two **consuls**, who oversaw all political decisions. They were only allowed to serve for one year, to prevent them becoming too powerful.

The consuls were elected from within the **Senate**: a group of around four hundred patricians. Unlike the consuls, senators were appointed for life. They could be very powerful.

Under the Senate were the Assemblies. The most well-known was the Council of the Plebs, or **Concilium Plebis**, which allowed plebeian citizens to vote on which senators they wanted to elect to serve as consuls.



How is this similar to the presidency today?

What does *SPQR* mean?

In Rome today, the letters SPQR can be seen on many public buildings and structures:



SPQR stands for **Senatus Populusque Romanus**, which is a Latin phrase. What do you think it means?

Senatus **Populusque** **Romanus**
“the Senate” “and the people” “of Rome”

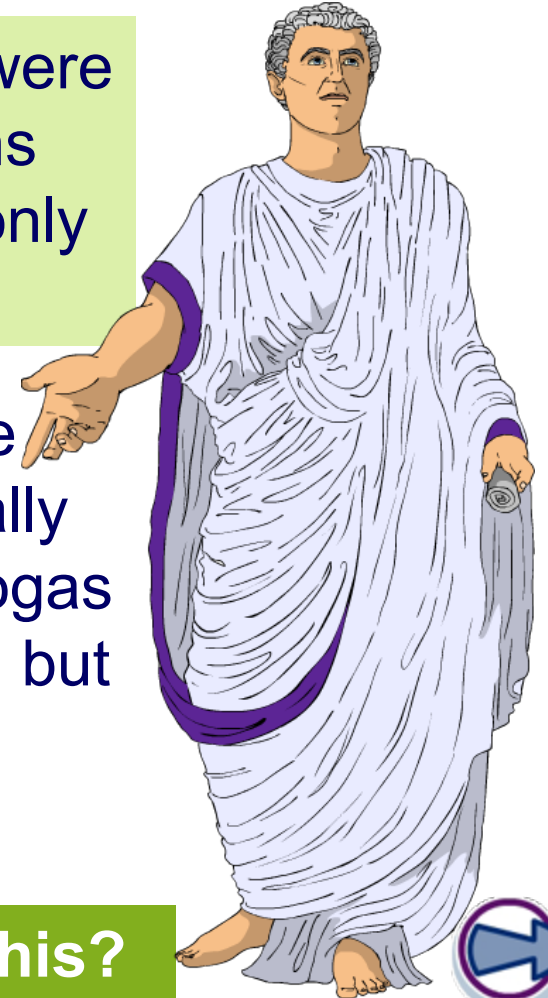
Senatus Populusque Romanus
“the Senate and the people of Rome”

Why do you think this was in so many places?

Roman society was divided into different social ranks, or hierarchies, which were based on wealth and status.

Free-born people who were born in Rome were granted automatic **citizenship**. Male citizens could vote and hold political positions, but only patricians could be senators.

Clothing was an important way to determine a person's social status in Rome. Men usually wore tunics, but wealthy men would wear togas at official events. Usually, togas were white, but senators and important magistrates wore a **toga praetexta**, which had a purple stripe.



Why might they have done this?

Roman society relied heavily on **slave labor**. They acquired slaves from conquered lands. Slaves were the lowest social class: they had no rights and were viewed as the property of their owners. Any children born to slaves were also slaves.

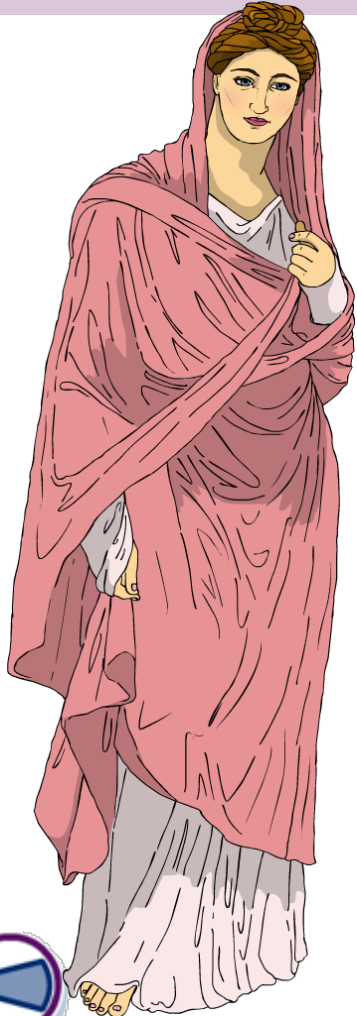
Some slaves could eventually buy their freedom, becoming one of the **libertini**, but for most slaves this was impossible.

Rome faced several slave rebellions in its history. The most famous was the revolt led by the gladiator **Spartacus** in 73 BC. He and his army of escaped slaves survived two years before finally being defeated in 71 BC.



Look at the image of Roman shackles.
What were they used for?

Roman women had few rights. Free-born women were citizens, but they were not allowed to own property or vote.



One of the few ways that women could gain power was by becoming a **Vestal Virgin**. These were a group of priestesses devoted to **Vesta**, the Roman goddess of the hearth.

Vestals were not allowed to marry or have children, but they could vote and own property. The penalty for injuring a Vestal was death.

Lower-class women wore tunics, while wealthy women might wear the **stola**: a long dress. Young women would wear white, but once they were married, they would wear bright colors. Elaborate hairstyles were also popular.



The Roman government provided plenty of entertainment for its citizens. If people were happy with their lives, they were less likely to be dissatisfied with their rulers.

As a result, the Romans built **amphitheaters** in most of their cities. The most famous of these is the Colosseum in Rome. Rome was also home to the **Circus Maximus**, a huge stadium where chariot races took place.

Gladiator fights were one of the most well-known events. Gladiators were usually slaves who were trained at a gladiator school and would fight to the death in the arena.

Popular gladiators could gain many admiring followers, much like sports teams or celebrities today.



By about 150 BC, the Romans had gained control of the Italian peninsula and the surrounding Mediterranean Sea.

Roman soldiers were divided into two classes:

- **Legionaries**, who were Roman citizens aged 20 or over. They enlisted in the army for a period of 25 years, after which they were given a pension and could retire.
- **Auxiliaries**, who were recruited from conquered or allied foreign tribes. They were paid less than legionaries but were granted Roman citizenship after 25 years.



Which class do you think this soldier is from?

The Roman army used tactics copied from the Greek hoplite style of fighting. They were adapted and refined over the years until the Roman army became a formidable force.

Roman soldiers were organized into **centuries**: groups of eighty men commanded by **centurions**. There were about sixty centuries in a **legion**, which would have been about 5000 men.



Roman soldiers fought in **phalanxes**, where each soldier's shield overlapped with the shield of the man next to him. When an enemy fired arrows at them, they raised the shields above their heads. This was known as the tortoise formation.





The end of the Roman Republic

In times of national emergency, the Republic appointed one man the office of **dictator**, to speed up military decisions. Dictators were only allowed to rule for six months.

In 45 BC, the successful Roman general **Julius Caesar** proclaimed himself dictator for life. Although he had a lot of support from the army and the plebeians, the patricians were angry at this attempt to remove their own political power.

Caesar was assassinated in 49 BC by the Senate. However, his attempt to seize power had changed Rome. In 27 BC, his nephew Augustus proclaimed himself the first **emperor**, beginning a new era of Roman history.



The **Roman Empire** had begun.



Keywords

