

RESOURCE LIBRARY | ACTIVITY : 50 MINS

Physical Geography and Power in Ancient Rome

Students use a physical map of the Roman Empire to investigate how physical geography contributed to economic and military power in ancient Rome.

GRADES

6, 7, 8

SUBJECTS

Geography, Human Geography, Physical Geography, Social Studies, World history

CONTENTS

1 Photograph, 3 PDFs

OVERVIEW

Students use a physical map of the Roman Empire to investigate how physical geography contributed to economic and military power in ancient Rome.

For the complete activity with media resources, visit:

<http://www.nationalgeographic.org/activity/physical-geography-and-power-ancient-rome/>

Program



DIRECTIONS

1. Have students complete an anticipation guide and then introduce the activity.

Distribute a copy of the Anticipation Guide worksheet to each student. Have them work independently to complete it. Next, as a whole class, brainstorm the impact of local physical and human geography on students' lives and communities. For example, students could discuss how their close proximity to the ocean allows jobs for oceanographers, fishermen, and other water-oriented workers. Capture all ideas on the board. Then explain to students that, in this activity, they will investigate how physical and human geography in ancient Rome impacted Roman society.

2. Have students discuss geographic features that could strengthen an ancient society.

Ask: *What is an ancient society?* Students will know that in a general sense *ancient* is a synonym for *old*. Explain to students that, in world history, an *ancient society* is one that existed no later than the traditional end of the Roman Empire (CE 476). Next, write the following definitions of economic and military power on the board:

- *Economic power* is the capacity to influence other people or societies through trade, buying, or selling.
- *Military power* is the capacity to use force or the threat of force to influence other people or societies.

Distribute a copy of the Physical Geography and Power worksheet to each student. Ask students to complete column 2 by writing their ideas about how each feature of physical geography could strengthen an ancient society's economic or military power. Then, discuss students' ideas as a class.

3. Have students identify these features on a map of the Roman Empire.

Project the provided map of the Roman Empire on the board. Use the map legend to review and discuss the spread of the Roman Empire over time. Then divide students into pairs and distribute a copy of the map to each pair. Ask them to circle and discuss the specific physical geographic features on the map that they think may have contributed to the strength of ancient Rome. Ask students to write their ideas in column 3. Regroup as a class and invite volunteers to come up to the board and circle all of the specific geographic features they

think may have contributed to the strength of the Roman Empire. As needed, remind students of the list on the board of how physical and human geography can impact citizens' lives and communities.

4. Have students check their understanding.

Read aloud the activity background information to students. As you read, ask students to compare the information to what they wrote in column 3. Ask:

- *Were there any ways a feature could strengthen a society's economic or military power that you didn't think of? Explain.*
- *Is there anything about the physical geography of ancient Rome that you think may have been a threat to the Roman Empire's power?*

5. Have students discuss these same features to determine if each would strengthen a society's economic and military power today.

Ask students to consider if these same features would strengthen a society's economic and military power today. Have them complete column 4. Then, as a whole class, discuss students' answers. Use prompts to guide students to include specific examples and justifications for their reasoning. For example, ask:

- *Today, are mountains or water sufficient barriers to protect citizens and armies from harm? Explain.* (No. Drones and other weapons do not depend on ground and water transport. And today, weather would not be an obstacle to invasion the way it was in the past.)
- *Today, does proximity to a port translate into economic power? Explain.* (No. Today we have air transport, which is both faster and cheaper.)

Informal Assessment

Have students revisit their Anticipation Guide. Ask: *What did you learn? Have your answers to these questions changed? Why or why not?* Collect students' completed Physical Geography and Power in Ancient Rome worksheets and use the provided answer key to check their understanding and progress toward the learning objectives.

Extending the Learning

Compare the map of ancient Rome to a current physical map using the National Geographic [MapMaker Interactive](#). Look at where the political boundaries are drawn on the current map. Have students compare these political boundaries to the physical features in the area. Ask: *Do any physical features determine political boundaries? If so, which? Where do physical features NOT determine political boundaries? Why do you think physical features determine political boundaries in some areas and not in others?*

OBJECTIVES

Subjects & Disciplines

Geography

- [Human Geography](#)
- [Physical Geography](#)

Social Studies

- World history

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- define the terms physical geography, human geography, economic power, and military power
- describe how physical geographic features strengthened economic and military power in ancient societies
- use maps to identify specific physical features that gave the Roman Empire economic and military strength
- analyze whether or not those same physical features would strengthen a modern society

Teaching Approach

- Learning-for-use

Teaching Methods

- Brainstorming
- Discussions

- Information organization
- Visual instruction

Skills Summary

This activity targets the following skills:

- 21st Century Student Outcomes
 - Learning and Innovation Skills
 - Communication and Collaboration
 - Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- Critical Thinking Skills
 - Analyzing
 - Understanding
- Geographic Skills
 - Analyzing Geographic Information
 - Organizing Geographic Information

National Standards, Principles, and Practices

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHY STANDARDS

- **Standard 12:**

The processes, patterns, and functions of human settlement

- **Standard 15:**

How physical systems affect human systems

- **Standard 4:**

The physical and human characteristics of places

- **Standard 9:**

The characteristics, distribution, and migration of human populations on Earth's surface

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR HISTORY

- **World History Era 3 (5-12) Standard 3:**

How major religions and large-scale empires arose in the Mediterranean basin, China, and India, 500 BCE-300 CE

- **World History Era 3 (5-12) Standard 5:**

Major global trends from 1000 BCE-300 CE

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS & LITERACY

- **Writing Standards 6-12:**

Production and Distribution of Writing, W.8.4

- **Writing Standards 6-12:**

Production and Distribution of Writing, W.7.4

- **Writing Standards 6-12:**

Production and Distribution of Writing, W.6.4

Preparation

What You'll Need

MATERIALS YOU PROVIDE

- Pencils
- Pens

REQUIRED TECHNOLOGY

- Internet Access: Required
- Tech Setup: 1 computer per classroom, Color printer, Projector

PHYSICAL SPACE

- Classroom

GROUPING

- Large-group instruction

RESOURCES PROVIDED: HANDOUTS & WORKSHEETS

- Anticipation Guide

- Physical Geography and Power in Ancient Rome

- [Physical Geography and Power in Ancient Rome Answer Key](#)

RESOURCES PROVIDED: IMAGES

- [Roman Empire](#)

BACKGROUND & VOCABULARY

Background Information

The physical geography of the Roman Empire directly contributed to its economic and military strength. In the winter, the snowy Alps blocked the passage from the rest of Europe to Rome, protecting Rome from invasion. The Apennines, an approximately 1,400 kilometer (870 mile) long mountain range that stretches from northern to southern Italy, provided protection and natural resources for Romans. The fertile soil of the Po and Tiber River Valleys allowed Romans to grow a diverse selection of crops, such as olives and grains. This allowed the empire to have a food surplus to feed its population and trade with other societies. The empire also used the resulting wealth to expand its military strength. The Mediterranean Sea, on which Rome was centrally located, further heightened Romans' ability to trade with other societies, increasing Rome's economic strength as a result. The sheer size of ancient Rome, although a marker of its military success, was also a threat to Rome's power; leaders at times had difficulty maintaining communication, control, and cohesion across such a vast territory.

Prior Knowledge

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Recommended Prior Activities

- None

Vocabulary

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
ancient Rome <i>noun</i>		civilization founded on the Mediterranean Sea, lasting from the 8th century BCE to about 476 CE.

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
economic power	<i>noun</i>	capacity to influence other people or societies through trade, buying, or selling.
human geography	<i>noun</i>	the study of the way human communities and systems interact with their environment.
military power	<i>noun</i>	capacity to use force or the threat of force to influence other people or societies.
physical geography	<i>noun</i>	study of the natural features and processes of the Earth.
Roman Empire	<i>noun</i>	(27 BCE-476 CE) period in the history of ancient Rome when the state was ruled by an emperor.

For Further Exploration

Video

- [National Geographic Channel: Killing Jesus](#)

PARTNER



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