

The Power of Latin in Ancient Rome

How did the spread of Latin influence power in ancient Rome?

Overview

Students investigate how the geographic spread of an impactful human system—language—influenced power in ancient Rome.

For the complete activity with media resources, visit:

<http://education.nationalgeographic.org/activity/power-latin-ancient-rome/>

Program



Directions

1. Activate students' prior knowledge.

Ask: *Have you ever been in a situation where you didn't understand the language being spoken?* Invite volunteers who are comfortable doing so to share their experiences with the class. As a class, discuss the common themes that are most likely to come up: feelings of discomfort, confusion, and not being understood (loss of power). Then ask:

- *What would it feel like to be heavily influenced to adopt a language other than English?*
- *What would it feel like if the most popular activities and places in the United States today were conducted in or marked with the language of another, currently existing country?*

Explain to students that, in this activity, they will learn about how the spread of Latin influenced power in ancient Rome and consider how it impacted people in the invaded cities and towns.

2. Have students read about the spread of Latin in ancient Rome.

Distribute a copy of the Latin in Ancient Rome worksheet to each student. Divide students into pairs and have pairs work together to read the passage and answer the questions in Part 1. Review the answers as a whole class. Ask:

- *In your own words, describe Romanization.* (Romanization is the spread of Roman customs, dress, activities, and language.)
- *How was Latin different for different economic classes?* (They had different versions of the language: Vulgar and Classical.)

- *How do you think the invaded cities and towns felt about switching to Roman customs and language?* (Possible response: They probably felt pressured to do so, from both the government and the military, instead of a desire to do so on their own.)

3. Have students read a primary source about how the government engineered the spread of Latin.

Explain to students that next you will read aloud a primary source by Valerius Maximus, a Roman writer and historian. Have students follow along as you read the passage in Part 2 of the worksheet. Answer any questions students may have about the meanings of unfamiliar words. Then, have pairs work together to answer the two questions. Review the answers as a whole class. Ask:

- *How does Valerius think Latin influenced Roman power?* (Valerius thinks that Latin was used as a tool to protect Roman power.)
- *Who does Valerius think is spreading Latin? Why does he think this is happening?* (Valerius thinks that the magistrates, or elected judges in Rome, orchestrated the spread of Latin in order to maintain the power of the Roman people.)

4. Have a whole-class discussion about how language influenced power in ancient Rome.

Ask each pair to discuss and then share with the class their ideas about how Latin influenced the power of Rome and/or certain Romans. Guide students to include ideas about how, as Rome conquered more cities and towns, Latin replaced local languages. They should also make a connection between the purposeful spread of Latin and the dissolution of other languages as a result, and the economic differentiation between Classical Latin and Vulgar Latin.

5. Have students write a reflection essay.

Ask each student to take out a blank piece of paper and write a two-paragraph response to the following prompt: How did the spread of Latin impact ancient Rome? Ask students to include why some people might want to maintain their local language and how influences from other cultures impact our own language. Remind them to support their statement using evidence from the reading.

Modification

In Step 1, if none of the students have ever been in a situation where they didn't understand the language being spoken, read aloud a passage in another language and ask students to quickly respond to a question about it. Then move into the discussion of how it felt to not understand the language.

Informal Assessment

Collect students' essays and use the following 3-point rubric to assess the essays:

3 – The student's reflection essay includes all of the major ways the spread of Latin impacted Rome and he or she considers multiple perspectives and makes connections to his or her own life.

2 - The student's reflection essay includes some of the major ways the spread of Latin impacted Rome. He or she makes minimal connections to other perspectives and his or her own life.

1 - The student's reflection essay includes few of the major ways the spread of Latin impacted Rome. He or she does not make any connections to other perspectives or his or her own life.

Extending the Learning

Prompt students to respond to the following question either orally or in writing: Consider the availability of translation services today. Imagine you could go back in time and provide Romans and their conquered peoples with the instant translation technology that we have today. How, if at all, do you think this would change the influence that language had over power in ancient Rome? Explain your answer, using what you learned over the course of the activity in your reasoning.

Objectives

Subjects & Disciplines

Geography

- [Human Geography](#)

Language Arts

- Reading
- Writing (composition)

Social Studies

- World history

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- define *Romanization*
- identify the ways in which Latin spread in ancient Rome
- analyze the impact of language on power in ancient Rome

Teaching Approach

- Learning-for-use

Teaching Methods

- Brainstorming
- Discussions
- Information organization
- Reading
- Writing

Skills Summary

This activity targets the following skills:

- 21st Century Student Outcomes
 - Learning and Innovation Skills
 - Communication and Collaboration
- Critical Thinking Skills
 - Analyzing
- Geographic Skills
 - Answering Geographic Questions
 - Asking Geographic Questions

National Standards, Principles, and Practices

National Geography Standards

- **Standard 17:**

How to apply geography to interpret the past

- **Standard 4:**

The physical and human characteristics of places

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

- **Reading Standards for Informational Text 6-12:**

Key Ideas and Details, RI.8.1

- **Reading Standards for Informational Text 6-12:**

Key Ideas and Details, RI.6.1

- **Reading Standards for Informational Text 6-12:**

Key Ideas and Details, RI.7.1

- **Writing Standards 6-12:**

Text Types and Purposes, W.6.1

- **Writing Standards 6-12:**

Production and Distribution of Writing, W.6.4

- **Writing Standards 6-12:**

Text Types and Purposes, W.7.1

- **Writing Standards 6-12:**

Production and Distribution of Writing, W.7.4

- **Writing Standards 6-12:**

Text Types and Purposes, W.8.1

- **Writing Standards 6-12:**

Preparation

What You'll Need

Materials You Provide

- Pencils
- Pens
- Writing paper

Required Technology

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

Physical Space

- Classroom

Grouping

- Large-group instruction

Resources Provided: Handouts & Worksheets

- [Latin in Ancient Rome](#)

Background & Vocabulary

Background Information

Latin originated as the local language of Latium, a small town on the Tiber River. In 753 BCE, Rome was founded on the Tiber River.

Roman power spread militarily, economically, and politically. The Romans conquered Italy, then most of western and southern Europe, and finally the central and western Mediterranean coastal regions of Africa. As the Romans conquered each place, some men from these places became Roman soldiers, and as a result, people from the different territories traveled and intermixed. Some rulers, like Gnaeus Julius Agricola, the governor of Britain from 78-84 CE, encouraged their populace to adopt Roman customs, including Latin. As Roman leaders sponsored the construction of new buildings and the education of aristocracy, the popularity of all things Roman grew. This distribution of Roman customs was called Romanization.

Different economic classes used different forms of Latin. The form that we know as Classical Latin was the language of literature, other writings, and the upper classes. The form that we know as Vulgar Latin was the informal and middle lower class version of the spoken form of Latin.

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.
language	<i>noun</i>	set of sounds, gestures, or symbols that allows people to communicate.
Roman Empire	<i>noun</i>	(27 BCE-476 CE) period in the history of ancient Rome when the state was ruled by an emperor.
Romanization	<i>noun</i>	spread of Roman customs, dress, activities, and language.

For Further Exploration

Video

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

Partner



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