

Name _____

Date _____

Latin in Ancient Rome

Part 1. With a partner, read the passage below about the evolution of Latin. As you read, underline words or phrases that relate to how the spread of Latin influenced Rome's power.

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 such, 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. You may have heard Classical Latin in terms related to science, technology, medicine, law, or religion. The form that we know as Vulgar Latin was the informal and middle lower class version of the spoken form of Latin.

Questions

1. In your own words, describe Romanization. _____

2. How was Latin different for different economic classes? _____

3. How do you think the invaded cities and towns felt about switching to Roman customs and language? _____

Latin in Ancient Rome, continued

Part 2. Follow along as your teacher reads the primary source below. As you follow along, circle any vocabulary terms that you do not recognize and underline parts of the passage that relate to how Latin influences Roman power.

Latin the Official Language

Valerius Maximus, Memorable Deeds and Sayings II. ii. 2

Indeed the manner in which the magistrates of olden times conducted themselves in order to maintain their dignity and the sovereign power of the Roman people can be understood by the fact that, among other evidences of how they acquired dignity, there was this practice, which they observed with great steadfastness, never to answer the Greeks except in Latin. Further, wresting from them the fluency of speech in which they excel, they forced them to speak through an interpreter, not only in our city, but also in Greece and Asia, in order, doubtless, to diffuse the Latin language among all peoples and to make it more respectable. Not that they lacked an interest in learning, but they thought that in every matter the Greek cloak should be subjected to the toga, thinking it an indignity that the weight and the majesty of the empire should be bestowed upon the allurements and delight of literature.

Excerpted from: Lewis, Naphtali and Meyer Reinhold. *Roman Civilization: Selected Readings, Volume 1*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.

Questions

1. How does Valerius think Latin impacted Roman power? _____

2. Who does Valerius think is spreading Latin? Why does he think this is happening? _____

© 2015 National Geographic Society

