

Ancient Rome - What Is a Dictatorship?

Lesson Plan

Grade Level: 3-5

Curriculum Focus: Ancient History

Lesson Duration: One class period

Student Objectives

- Experience and analyze the pros and cons of a dictatorship.
- Apply these ideas to their understanding of life in ancient Rome.

Materials

- Discovery School video on *unitedstreaming: Life in Ancient Rome*
Search for this video by using the video title (or a portion of it) as the keyword.

Selected clips that support this lesson plan:

- The Government of Ancient Rome
- Chart paper

Procedures

1. Explain to your students that the most famous general of the Roman Republic was Julius Caesar. He defeated all of his rivals and eventually ruled Rome as a permanent dictator. (Explain that a dictator is someone who rules with absolute power.) This enraged the Roman senators, who eventually arranged Julius Caesar's death. Tell students that they are going to experience firsthand the pros and cons of living with a dictator right in their own classroom by having one of their classmates play the role for the day.
2. Discuss with your students what they believe to be the positive and negative aspects of a dictatorship. List their answers on a chart for later referral.
3. Select one student to serve as dictator for the day. Allow him or her to make many decisions concerning the daily routine of your class (who will be first for lunch, who will get the playground equipment, who is at the front of the line, and so on).
4. At the end of the day, hold a class meeting and discuss the impact of one person making all of these decisions for the class. Add any new opinions to the pro-and-con chart that you made earlier in the day. Did students' opinions change? Were there any positive aspects to the dictatorship that they had not expected?

5. Ask students if any problems arose that they did not anticipate? How did the person who served as dictator feel about the experience? Was it an easy job? Was he or she worried about others' opinions? How did that student feel when he or she was initially chosen? Did his or her feelings change by the end of the day?
6. Would the students like to have one student chosen every day to serve as dictator? Using the class chart as a reference, have the students write a persuasive paragraph that supports their opinion about whether or not such a change would benefit the class. Their paragraphs should include a topic sentence, three supporting details, and a conclusion.
7. After they share their paragraphs, have your students apply their new personal knowledge of dictatorship to life in ancient Rome. How do they think people felt about dictatorships at that time? Who would have liked such a system and who would not have liked it? Why?

Discussion Questions

1. Rome was an important city in ancient times. If you lived at that time, why do you think your family would want to live there?
2. During the Roman republic, the citizens experienced two types of government. What were they and how were they different? Which do you think that you would prefer and why?

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- 3 points: Students were active in class discussions about the pros and cons of having a dictatorship; wrote a thoughtful paragraph with a topic sentence, three supporting details, and a conclusion; provided several ideas about what a dictatorship was like in ancient Rome.
- 2 points: Students participated in class discussions about the pros and cons of having a dictatorship; wrote a satisfactory paragraph with a topic sentence, two supporting details, and a conclusion; provided a few ideas about what a dictatorship was like in ancient Rome.
- 1 point: Students did not participate in class discussions about the pros and cons of having a dictatorship; wrote an incomplete paragraph that did not include a topic sentence, three supporting details, and a conclusion; provided few or no ideas about what a dictatorship was like in ancient Rome.

Vocabulary

forum

Definition: The marketplace or public place of an ancient Roman city forming the center of judicial and public business.

Context: Imagine a square in the center of town where people would gather to buy and sell things: this This was the Roman forum.

primitive

Definition: Belonging to or characteristic of an early stage of development.

Context: Rome grew from a primitive town of mud and thatch huts to a thriving city of brick.

senate

Definition: An assembly or council usually possessing high deliberative and legislative functions; the supreme council of the ancient Roman republic and empire.

Context: Servius, like all rulers since the founding of Rome, had a group of advisorsadvisers. They were called the Senate.

toga

Definition: The loose outer garment worn in public by citizens of ancient Rome.

Context: We often think of Romans dressed in togas, but it was only the wealthy who wore them.

tunic

Definition: A simple slip-on garment made with or without sleeves and usually knee-length or longer, belted at the waist, and worn as an under- or outer garment by men and women of ancient Greece and Rome.

Context: Since the weather in Rome is warm most of the year, Romans wore garments called tunics that left their legs bare.

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/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- History: Understands selected attributes and historical developments of societies in Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Europe.
- Geography: Understands how geography is used to interpret the past.

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>

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Time, continuity, and change
- Power, authority, and governance



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>