

*History*  
UNFOLDING

# ANCIENT ROME



**MindSparks**  
CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO THINK HISTORICALLY

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# Introduction

## The World of the Ancient Romans

People in Western societies often trace their origins back to the two great civilizations of the Classical Age—ancient Greece and Rome. Those two civilizations shared so much, after all, and we still value so much of what they gave us. Both were societies of the Mediterranean. Both were based on trade and complex interactions with other cultures. Each developed an early form of democratic rule, at least for a part of its history. And both shared a great deal in the realms of religion, literature, philosophy, and science—largely because of what Rome borrowed from the Greeks.

And yet, the two civilizations were dramatically different. Today we admire the Greeks for their art, their intellectual accomplishments, and their ideals. The triumphs of the Romans were much more practical. It is their roads, bridges, aqueducts, public baths, temples, forums, and their city planning that still impress us most. Even in the realm of ideas, their greatest legacy to the modern world—Roman law—was a practical one.

While ancient Rome amazes us, it also often repulses us. Its slavery, its militarism, its huge gap between rich and poor, and its barbaric gladiatorial spectacles force us to realize that ancient civilizations were often anything but “civilized” in terms we accept today. Yet even these aspects of ancient Rome have things to teach us. They, too, are a part of the heritage that has shaped us, for good or bad.

Obviously, it is impossible to tell the entire thousand-year story of ancient Rome in just 12 illustrations. But the 12 we have chosen focus on several key themes in this history. The illustrations are presented in four lessons. Each lesson uses three of the illustrations to explore one broad topic in the overall story. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

### **The Rise of Roman Power**

The illustrations here focus on the impressive achievements of Rome in the realm of warfare and technology. These always formed the basis for all of the future conquests and triumphs of Roman civilization.

### **The Roman Republic**

The Roman Republic never created a fully democratic system in a sense that we would recognize today. But the achievement, as flawed as it was, is still impressive. The illustrations in this lesson focus on key aspects of this early phase of ancient Roman history.

### **The Roman Empire**

These illustrations give you a chance to discuss the end of the Roman Republic, the stability achieved by Augustus and his immediate successors, and the underlying realities that made the empire something less than an “Augustan” paradise.

### **Decline and Fall**

We complete this look at ancient Rome by focusing on the growing troubles of the empire, the rising threat of the “barbarian” societies along its borders, its spiritual crisis, and the rise of Christianity.

## Using Photos, Cartoons, and Other Visuals to Teach History

Many textbooks are full of colorful visuals. However, all too often these visuals function primarily as window dressing. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable. Only occasionally do the visuals in textbooks do more than offer simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, they pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help young people master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as historical documents. The lessons in this booklet focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power, and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general, as well as their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

## How to Use This Booklet

The booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

**A BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET** This page provides brief summaries explaining the three illustrations on which the lesson is based and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

**DIGITAL IMAGES** The booklet's PDF allows you to project the images for use in your class discussions.

### **DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY SHEETS**

Each sheet displays one illustration. It includes a sequence of questions to help you plan an all-class discussion while using the projected images. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the illustration. If you wish, you may reproduce these pages and hand them out. In addition to the discussion questions on the illustration itself, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. Some of these can be made into individual assignments. Others will work best as small-group or all-class activities.



**OBJECTIVE**

1. Students will understand the central importance of military ability and technical skill in the rise of the city of Rome to power as a mighty empire.

# The Rise of Roman Power

*Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.*

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION****Illustration 1**

Rome's origins are hidden in legend. But legends often tell us much about the way a society sees itself. The legend of Rome's founding is the story of Romulus and Remus. They were twin sons of a human queen and the god Mars. Left to die, they were nursed by a she-wolf until a shepherd found and raised them. This famous statue shows them with the wolf. Later, the twins planned a city to be built on the banks of the Tiber River, where the she-wolf had cared for them. An omen showed Romulus to be the city's founder, after which he killed his brother in an argument. Romulus used a plow to mark the boundaries of his city, Rome. He would fill this city with people from many nearby regions. The myth does touch on certain major themes in Roman history: a key role for the god of war, a strong sense of family honor, murderous strife, and a city unified by a powerful leader and built by people of mixed origins.

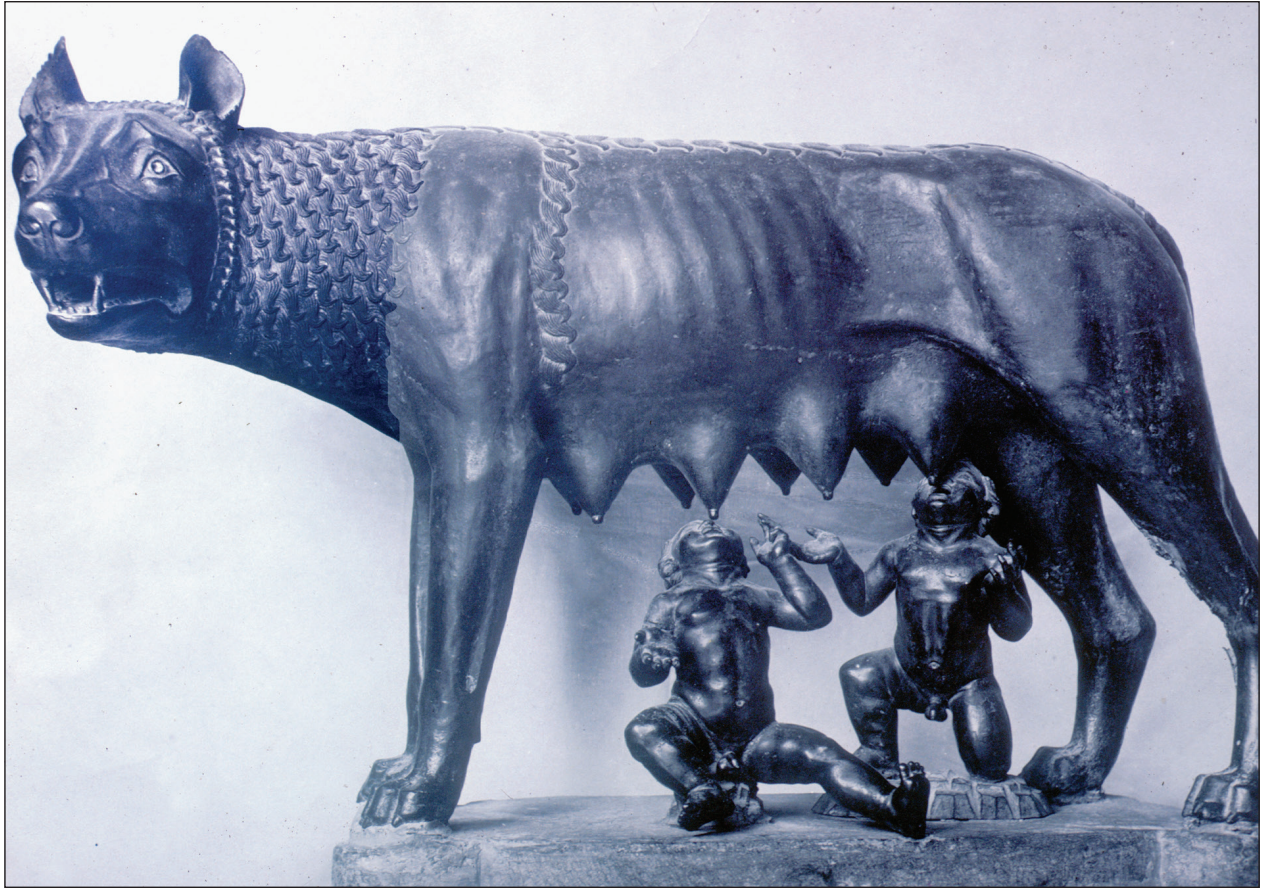
**Illustrations 2A & 2B**

War was indeed what made ancient Rome a mighty empire. The famous Roman legionaries were well armed. And Rome's technical genius gave them powerful weapons, such as the ballista (Illustration 2A), a machine for hurling 60-pound stones and bolts of iron more than 500 yards. More crucial were the discipline, organization, training, and military tactics the Romans perfected, often in camps such as in Illustration 2B. Rome added one small territory at a time through conquest and diplomacy. The Romans were often wise enough not to deal too harshly with those they conquered. In fact, Roman citizenship in time was given to many groups who were originally taken over by force or threats of force.

**Illustrations 3A & 3B**

Technical building skills were every bit as important to Rome's success as its military skills. Fortification was important from the start. But Rome's ability to use wood and stone (and later, concrete) soon outpaced all earlier societies. Roman roads, as shown in Illustration 3A, were wonders of engineering skill. Some can still be seen today. They made it easy for merchants and legionaries to travel by foot or horseback from one end of the empire to the other rapidly. The aqueduct (Illustration 3B) is another engineering marvel. Such aqueducts could deliver a water supply to a Roman city from streams and hills many miles away.

## Illustration 1



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### *Discussing the Illustration*

1. This sculpture is about the myth of how Rome began. That myth centers on the twins being nursed here by a she-wolf after they were taken from their mother by a bad king and left to die. Their mother was a queen, but their father was a god. Can you name the twins and that god?
2. The twins argued, and Romulus killed Remus. Then Romulus marked the boundaries of a new city, Rome. Rome was on the river where the she-wolf cared for these twins. Which river is that?
3. From what you know about ancient Rome and the Romans, why do you think they developed this myth about their city?
4. The original twins in this Etruscan bronze statue were destroyed in 65 BCE. New ones were added during the Renaissance, many centuries after Rome's fall. Do you think the sculptor who created the new twins imitated the original style well? Why or why not?

### *Follow-up Activities*

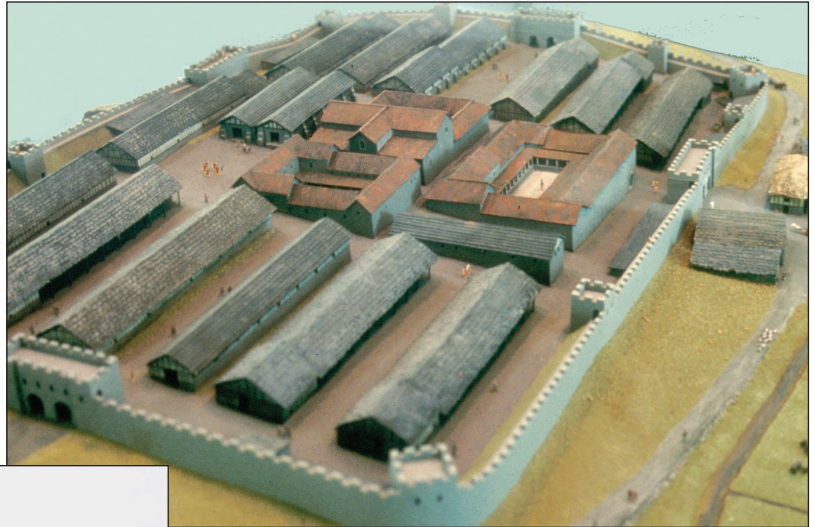
1. **Small-group activity:** Read the entire story of Romulus and Remus. Your teacher or librarian can help you find books or other sources on this myth. Discuss five key parts of the myth that you think could be illustrated. Then create a bulletin board-sized (or wall-sized) mural showing the entire Romulus and Remus myth. Use a picture of the above statue as one of the five scenes in your mural. Try to keep the artistic style of the other parts of the mural similar to the style you see here.
2. The myth of Romulus and Remus contains many elements important to the ancient Romans. Keep this in mind, and think about the history of your own town, city, or community. How much do you know about its beginnings? Ask your librarian to help you learn more about how your community began. Then invent a myth or story that you think sums up what is most important about your community and how it began. Either write your myth down as a brief story, or draw several scenes that illustrate it.



## Lesson 1 — The Rise of Roman Power

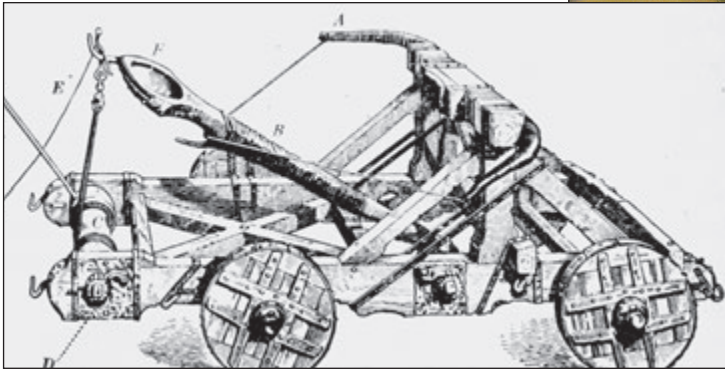
# Illustrations 2A & 2B

2B



© Instructional Resources Corporation

2A



© Instructional Resources Corporation

### Discussing the Illustrations

1. Ancient Rome grew from a single city into a mighty empire mainly through use of its amazing military skills and strength. Its military technology was one factor explaining this strength. Illustration 2A is a Roman ballista. Using the illustration, explain this weapon's purpose and, as well as you can, how it worked. It could hurl stone or iron missiles 500 yards or more. Why would this weapon have been so effective in the centuries before gunpowder and explosives?
2. Rome's success owed even more to the disciplined organization of the fighting units in its armies. Illustration 2B is a model of a typical Roman fort along Hadrian's Wall in England. What can you learn about the Roman army from this model?
3. Roman soldiers generally had to pay for their own weapons and armor. At first, this meant that only citizens who owned land could be in the army. What reasons might the Romans have for limiting the army to property holders?

### Follow-up Activities

1. From early on, Rome's army was organized into legions. Create a diagram with drawings to help other students understand how a typical Roman legion was organized. Make sure you show clearly the legion's overall numbers, its cohorts, centuries, *contubernia*, and its key officers. Describe the duties of these officers. Show how the centuries formed into lines of battle. Finally, describe the makeup and role of cavalry units and various "auxiliary" units.
2. **Small-group activity:** Over the centuries, the Roman army changed in many ways. Have each group member read more about the changes in the Roman army made by each of the following historical figures:

Marius  
Octavian (Augustus)  
Diocletian

Discuss what you learn, make an outline of all the changes these figures made, and report your findings to the rest of the class.

## Illustrations 3A & 3B

3B

3A



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### ***Discussing the Illustrations***

1. Illustration 3A shows the Via Appia (Appian Way) just outside Rome. Illustration 3B is one of Rome's famous aqueducts. What were these aqueducts?
2. Roman roads are still admired today. In fact, some of these roads still exist. Using Illustration 3A, explain what you know about how these Roman roads were constructed? Why do you think they were so sturdy and long lasting?
3. The building of roads was closely connected to the way ancient Rome grew as a civilization. Why might these roads have been useful to the Romans in expanding and defending their territory?
4. Illustration 3B shows an aqueduct near Nîmes, France. What features do you think enabled these structures to deliver water supplies over many miles of countryside to Rome and other cities?
5. These photos show a key cause for Rome's rapid growth and great power—its technological skill. What other examples of this skill do you know about?

### ***Follow-up Activities***

1. How exactly did the Romans build those roads that are still so admired today? Ask your librarian to help you find books on Rome. Specifically, look for those that illustrate ancient Roman building techniques. Create a diagram showing how the ancient Romans built their roads. Show cutaway slices of a road at each stage in order to give viewers a good idea of the materials used. In the diagram, explain why the roads were so good and why they could last so long.
2. The Romans also learned to build strong bridges. The challenge was to create a structure strong enough to span large distances, bear heavy loads, and not collapse under its own weight. The key to how the Romans met this challenge was the arch, made of tapered stone blocks. In your library, find books with pictures of ancient Roman bridges and explanations of how they were made. Draw your own simple diagram of a typical arch. Use your diagram, along with any other illustrations you find, in a brief talk in class explaining how the Romans built bridges.



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**OBJECTIVES**

1. Students will better understand some key characteristics of the Roman Republic's political life.
  2. Students will better appreciate the key differences between the Roman Republic and modern-day democratic governments.
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# The Roman Republic

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*Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.*

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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION****Illustration 1**

At first, Rome was ruled by kings. But in 509 BCE, a republic was founded—that is, a government of officials elected by the citizens. The most powerful body in the Roman Republic was the Senate. It made laws and supervised elected officials called “magistrates.” At first, it was made up entirely of patricians—men from older noble families. In time, the Senate became an assembly of former magistrates, some patricians and some not. Even then, however, only men of wealth were members. And it continued to speak mainly for their point of view. As this illustration suggests, it was also the scene of spirited debates, and it guarded its traditions, powers, and aura of dignity with great care.

**Illustration 2**

The senators were all wealthy. But huge assemblies of citizens got to choose the top magistrates. Even in the assemblies, voting rules usually gave greater say to the rich. But most citizens had some say. Roman law also helped ordinary citizens take part in public life. Roman historians said that in 450 BCE, the Twelve Tables, a law code, were set up in public so all citizens could read them. The code described customary laws and rules for punishing crimes or settling arguments between citizens. This written code meant justice would no longer be up to each judge's opinion. It is often seen as a starting point for Roman law and for the future growth of law in western Europe and elsewhere. This 19th-century engraving offers an idea of what a Roman court might have looked like.

**Illustration 3**

Rome often needed to recruit thousands of soldiers. It was thought that soldiers would be more loyal if they had a say in choosing their leaders. This may explain why ordinary citizens were given the right to choose magistrates. But Rome was sharply divided between rich and poor. A small class of wealthy nobles, businessmen, and others enjoyed a life of luxury. For others, life was harsh. In fact, it may have become even harsher as the decades went by. Roman wars and conquests led to the capture of huge numbers of slaves. The rich came to rely more and more on slave labor on their huge farms and as servants in their homes, as this illustration suggests. This made it hard for ordinary farmers to compete. Many gave up their land and crowded into the cities.



## Lesson 2—The Roman Republic

# Illustration 1



The Granger Collection, New York

### *Discussing the Illustration*

1. This painting from a later time shows how one artist pictured the most important group of leaders in the Roman Republic. What is a republic, and who generally chooses the leaders in a republic?
2. The Roman Senate was made up of wealthy nobles or other very rich and powerful men. The Senate's job was to discuss important problems and pass laws. How does this illustration help to show what senators were like and what the Senate did?
3. Several top magistrates, or officials, ran the government from day to day. They were also members of the Senate. But the Senate did not get to choose them as magistrates. The way they were chosen is what made Rome a republic. Can you explain?
4. This painting is of a famous speech by Cicero in 63 BCE accusing Catiline of treason. What do you know about this episode? Do you think this illustration offers a realistic or an idealized version of the Roman Senate? Explain your answer.

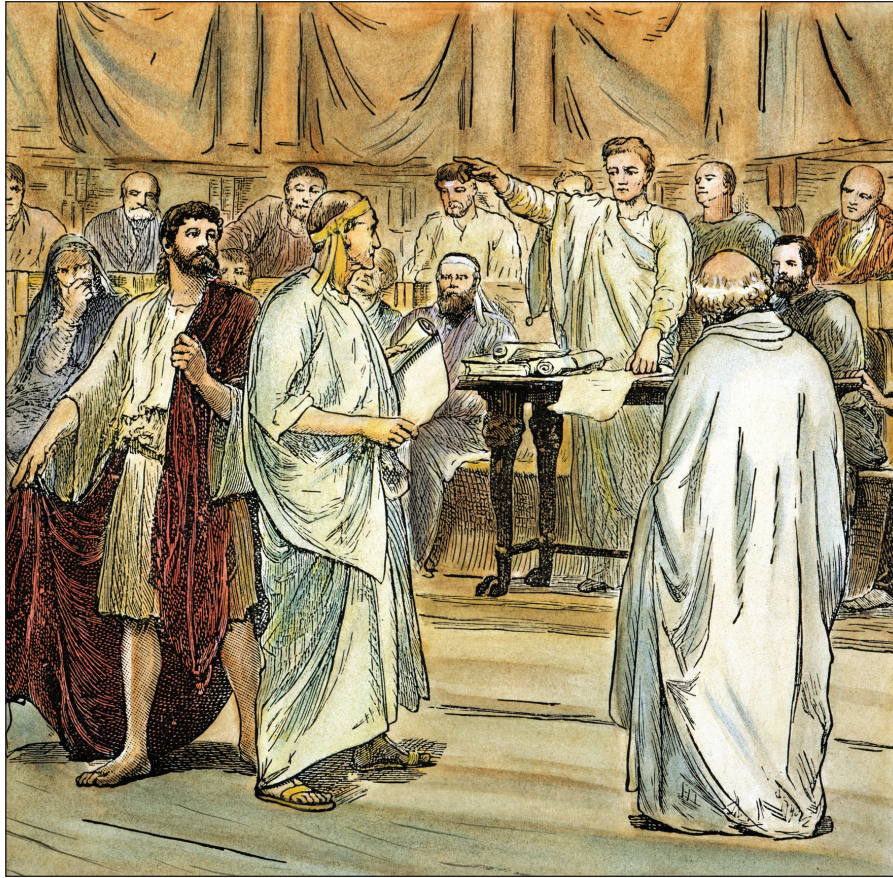
### *Follow-up Activities*

1. First, do some extra reading about the Roman Senate and the United States Senate today. In what ways do the two senates differ? In what ways are they alike? Find a good photo of a recent debate in the U.S. Senate. Use this photo, along with a copy of the above illustration, in a large poster designed to explain the similarities and differences between the U.S. Senate and the ancient Roman Senate.
2. **Small-group activity:** Oratory, or public speaking, was one of the proud traditions of the Roman Senate. And one of the greatest Roman orators was Cicero. As a group, learn more about Cicero's life. Find and read one or more translated versions of his speeches. Choose one speech and do some research to understand what the speech is about. Practice giving the speech or a key portion of it. Write a one-page background sheet for others in the class so that they can also understand the speech. Then choose one of your group's members to deliver the speech to the entire class.



## Lesson 2—The Roman Republic

# Illustration 2



The Granger Collection, New York

### Discussing the Illustration

1. This 19th-century illustration shows a Roman court. How does this illustration suggest the idea of a trial in which reason and calm discussion lead to justice?
2. Law was another key feature of Roman life, at least since the Twelve Tables were publicly displayed in Rome in the year 450 BCE. Can you explain briefly what these Twelve Tables were?
3. According to Roman historians, before the Twelve Tables, many citizens felt the judges were unfairly interpreting the unwritten laws. What do you think it means for a judge to “interpret” a law? Why might it be harder for a judge to do this unfairly if the law were written down in public for everyone to see?
4. Some rules in the Twelve Tables were quite harsh. But all Roman law slowly grew from these early rules. And having a written law code helped Romans to see themselves as free citizens of a republic. Why might having a written law code help people see themselves in this way?

### Follow-up Activity

1. We do not know all the laws in the Twelve Tables. But a Roman writer described one of them as follows:

*“If one has maimed a limb and does not compromise with the injured person, let there be retaliation. If one has broken a bone of a freeman with his hand or with a cudgel, let him pay a penalty of three hundred coins. If he has broken the bone of a slave, let him pay one hundred and fifty coins. If one is guilty of insult, the penalty shall be twenty-five coins.”*

First, decide what exactly this law says. You may wish to write out a version of the law using words everyone can understand easily without losing the law’s meaning. Then write a brief essay answering these questions: How fair or unfair is this law, in your opinion, and why? What ideas about justice did the ancient Romans seem to have that were like our ideas today? What ideas about justice were not like ours today? Discuss your essay and those of other students with the entire class.



## Lesson 2—The Roman Republic

### Illustration 3



The Granger Collection, New York

#### *Discussing the Illustration*

1. Rome expanded by conquering more and more territory. As it did, it captured many enemy soldiers and others in those lands. From your knowledge of Roman history and this illustration, can you explain what often happened to these captives?
2. Hundreds of thousands of captives were made into slaves. Usually, they were owned by the wealthiest Romans. From what you see here, can you explain how some of those slaves were used? How does this illustration stress the wealth and luxury of the slaveowner shown in it?
3. As Rome grew, so did the number of slaves. The majority of slaves were not personal servants such as those shown here. Why might that be?
4. An increasing number of slaves made life even harder for many owners of small farms, especially since slaves were often put to work on the huge estates of wealthy landowners. Why might that have made life harder for Rome's smaller farmers?

#### *Follow-up Activities*

1. **Small-group activity:** The Second Punic War was a turning point in the history of the Roman Republic. It hurt many small farmers throughout Italy, while also helping certain wealthy senators become even richer and more powerful. The increased use of slaves on large estates was one reason for this change. Learn more about the Second Punic War (218–201 BCE). Create a large bulletin board–sized map showing Italy, Spain, and North Africa. Use the map to outline the events of the war. Add brief paragraphs to the map describing key battles and other events. Where possible, describe economic and social changes taking place in Italy as a result of the war.
2. **Small-group activity:** One famous slave uprising was led by Spartacus. Read more about Spartacus. Then design a newspaper front page on the final outcome of the uprising. Create headlines for several stories. Include copies of the illustration on the right above and any others you find. Add “sidebars” on the life of Spartacus and the history of the revolt.

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**OBJECTIVES**

1. Students will better understand the role of Caesar and Octavian in controlling disorder in Rome and ending the republic.
  2. Students will appreciate both the strengths and the limitations of the Augustan Age.
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# The Roman Empire

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*Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.*

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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION****Illustrations 1A & 1B**

During the Punic Wars with Carthage (264–146 BCE), disorder spread within the Roman Republic. Clashes between rich and poor, slave revolts, and political assassinations grew more common. Respect for the Senate and the republic declined. At times, people looked to military leaders to restore order. In 46 BCE, Julius Caesar was made dictator. Fearing his power, a group of senators killed him in 44 BCE. Yet the Senate could not solve Rome's huge problems. In 31 BCE, Caesar's grand-nephew Octavian and his troops finally defeated all his rivals and took control. Taking the title "Augustus," he became Rome's first emperor. The republic was over. As emperor, Augustus was also the empire's pontifex maximus (or chief priest)—as is suggested by this sculpture which shows the emperor as high priest conducting a sacrifice to Diana, the Roman goddess associated with the moon, virginity, and hunting.

**Illustration 2**

Under Augustus, a calmer time began for Rome. The Senate continued to meet. But all real political control was now in the hands of the emperors. For almost two centuries, Rome thrived. Augustus began a huge building program in cities throughout the empire, especially in Rome. As this illustration of Rome shows, beautiful temples, theaters, public baths, and other buildings were added to the city. Other Roman cities were founded, often by settling Roman soldiers on lands they had conquered. Literature, philosophy, and art also flourished. Ever since, the term "Augustan age" has meant a time of peace and national glory.

**Illustration 3**

The Roman Empire was strong and stable. Yet as time went by, a crude, even cruel tone to Roman life seemed to increase. The Colosseum, built 75–80 CE, was a huge stadium where gladiators fought to the death for the amusement of the emperor and the people, as this Roman mosaic of 310–320 CE shows them doing. Over time, the hunger of the Roman crowds for such spectacles only seemed to grow stronger. Slaves, captured soldiers, and other prisoners were often cruelly put to death in fights with one another or in contests with wild animals. As Rome's power grew, a kind of spiritual emptiness did also. And by the third century CE, other big problems had also begun to appear.



## Lesson 3—The Roman Empire

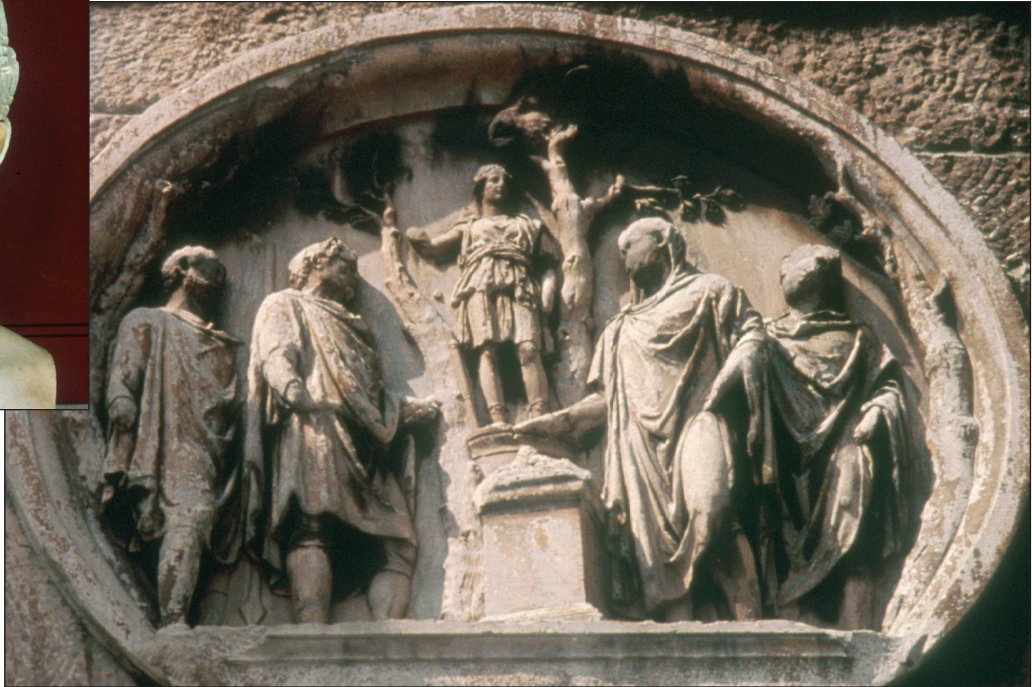
# Illustrations 1A & 1B

1A



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1B



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### Discussing the Illustrations

1. In the second and first centuries BCE, the gap between rich and poor in Rome grew wider. This led to civil wars, slave revolts, political assassinations and the growing power of certain military generals. Finally, a general named Julius Caesar was named dictator. What is a dictator?
2. Some senators feared Caesar was going to make himself a king for life. What did they do in 44 BCE to bring Caesar's rule to an end?
3. War and disorder continued until 31 BCE, when Caesar's grand-nephew ended the strife and became Rome's sole ruler. Illustration 1A is a bust of him. Can you explain who he was and what huge change he brought about in Rome's political system?
4. In Illustration 1B, an emperor is shown in his role as *pontifex maximus* (or chief priest), presiding over a sacrifice in honor of the Roman goddess Diana. How does the sculpture add to the image of the emperor as a person of high authority and power?

### Follow-up Activity

1. **Small-group activity:** During the first century BCE, a number of key figures had a major effect on the course of Roman history and the end of the Roman Republic. Each member of your group should learn more about one of the following famous people:

|           |             |
|-----------|-------------|
| Marius    | Cicero      |
| Sulla     | Brutus      |
| Pompey    | Mark Antony |
| Spartacus | Cleopatra   |

Based on what you learn, pretend to be the person you have read about. What would this person think of the figures in the above illustrations? Write a long letter about the illustration to one other famous person on the list. In your letter, give "your" thoughts and views about Julius Caesar and Augustus. (If the person you chose was not alive at the time, try to imagine what he or she would have thought of Caesar and Augustus.) On a bulletin board, arrange the letters in a timeline as a way to sum up the history of the last years of the Roman Republic.



## Lesson 3—The Roman Empire

# Illustration 2



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### ***Discussing the Illustration***

1. This is an artist's idea of Rome during the time of Augustus. Augustus began a huge building program. He restored temples, improved streets and housing, and built many new public buildings. According to one writer, Augustus "found Rome a city of brick and left it a city of marble." How do the details in this drawing show the various results of his work?
2. The phrase "Augustan age" has come to stand for a time of peace and harmony. Does this illustration portray that spirit of the times well? Why or why not?
3. Augustus showed respect for the Senate and gave it back some of its past duties. Yet he himself held all real power. That's why historians speak of this time as the end of the republic and the beginning of the empire. What do you see as the key differences between the terms "republic" and "empire"?
4. Augustus ruled well and brought order to Rome. But was that worth the loss of the republic, which Romans had long held so dear? Why or why not?

### ***Follow-up Activity***

1. Small-group activity: The Age of Augustus is also known as the "Golden Age" of Roman literature. According to many historians some of Rome's greatest writers lived and worked during this time. Four great writers of this time were:

Virgil (70–19 BCE)  
Horace (65–8 BCE)  
Ovid (43 BCE–18 CE)  
Livy (59 BCE–17 CE)

Each member of your group should learn more about one of these writers. If your group has more than four members, divide up into four small teams. Learn more about the life of the writer you have chosen. Then decide whether that writer was in favor of, against, or uninterested in the big changes Augustus made in Roman life. Prepare a brief report to the entire class explaining what you decide. Also find one brief passage from this writer to share with the class.



## Lesson 3—The Roman Empire

# Illustration 3



The Granger Collection, New York

### Discussing the Illustration

1. This is a Roman mosaic of gladiatorial combat. Who were the gladiators, and what is the name of the famous arena in Rome where many fought? What idea does this mosaic give you about the kinds of men who were gladiators and how they fought?
2. A victorious gladiator whose opponent was still alive would look to the crowd for a “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” sign. What would these two signs have meant to him?
3. Gladiators often had to fight each other to the death or in horrible battles with wild animals. During the empire, the crowds in Rome seemed to demand more and more such contests. Why do you think that was so? What does the growing popularity of these games say about life in the Roman Empire?
4. Gladiators were often slaves, criminals, prisoners of war, or others seen as some kind of threat to the empire. Christians were sometimes killed in these contests. Why do you think these Christians were seen as a threat to the empire?

### Follow-up Activity

1. The phrase “bread and circuses” is often used to describe the way many emperors ruled and how they tried to keep the poor of Rome happy. What do you suppose this phrase means? And does the phrase still have meaning today? While thinking about these questions, think also about what one historian said:

*“The gladiatorial spectacle...was an exploitation of cruelty as entertainment on a bigger scale than ever before and not to be rivaled until the 20th-century cinema.”\**

Do you think the gladiatorial games were part of a program of “bread and circuses” for the poor of Rome? Do you agree with the above statement by the historian J. M. Roberts? Read more about the gladiatorial games. Then write a brief essay answering these questions.

\*J. M. Roberts, *The Pelican History of the World* (Penguin Books, London, 1987, p. 248)

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**OBJECTIVES**

1. Students will better understand some of the key problems weakening the Roman Empire after the third century CE.
  2. Students will appreciate the sharp contrast between classical Roman culture and the Christian Middle Ages that followed.
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# Decline and Fall

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*Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.*

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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION****Illustrations 1A & 1B**

The empire reached its greatest size under Trajan (98–117 CE). Until then, newly conquered regions provided riches to the empire and often land to its soldiers. Rome's might is suggested here by Illustration 1A showing the emperor Constantine's triumphal arch beside the Colosseum in Rome. Yet even at its height, the vast majority of Rome's people were very poor. Illustration 1B is of a tenement block in Ostia Antica. The better-off often lived on the ground level of such tenements. The poor rented rooms on the upper floors. The rooms facing the street on the ground floor were also used as shops.

**Illustration 2**

The empire regularly faced threats from the many tribal societies on its borders. Romans called these peoples "barbarians." But many of them were trading with the empire, learning from it, and gaining in strength. Under Marcus Aurelius (161–180 CE), Rome defeated some Germanic tribes. In this relief, these Germans are being forced to execute their own people. Rome's soldiers were spread thin all along the borders. The need to pay for the army led to a constant demand for taxes. Inflation, plagues, and disorder began to spread. Roman citizens seemed to lose faith in the empire, whereas the barbarians outside it seemed far more sure of themselves. As numbers of converts to Christianity grew, millions of Roman citizens seemed to be longing for a new way of life.

**Illustrations 3A & 3B**

The emperors tolerated the many religions found in the empire—as long as Roman law was obeyed and the emperor was honored. But Christians could not put the emperor or his laws ahead of their beliefs. Their faith was based on a strong personal relationship with Christ, as is suggested by Illustration 3A, a Roman funerary stele showing an early Christian baptism by immersion. This spiritual longing put Christians at odds with official Roman religious rituals, which had little to do with such longings. For this, Christians were persecuted. Many learned to express their faith in disguised ways, one of which is shown in Illustration 3B. Yet the growing harshness of life seemed to drive more and more Romans to Christianity. In 313, the Emperor Constantine ended the persecution of Christians. Soon, Christianity became the religion of the empire itself.



## Lesson 4—Decline and Fall

# Illustrations 1A & 1B

1A



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1B



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### Discussing the Illustrations

1. Illustration 1A shows Constantine's triumphal arch beside the Colosseum in Rome. What is a triumphal arch? How does this photo seem to call attention to the power and majesty of the ancient Roman empire?
2. At its height, the wealthy lived lives of ease in the empire. However, most people were very poor. Illustration B is of a tenement block in a smaller Roman city. The poor lived on the top floors of such tenements, with somewhat better-off people and shops on the first floor. What do you think life was like for these people?
3. By the third century CE, the empire was facing a growing need for more tax money to help keep its borders in the north and east safe. From what you know of Roman history, what problems were making it harder to keep the borders safe? Why would Rome need more tax money for this problem, and why might that only make its troubles grow worse?

### Follow-up Activities

1. Use the above illustrations as the basis for a fictional short story about a day in the life of two citizens of the late Roman Empire. One should be a wealthy landowner on a visit to Rome. The other is a poor citizen who lives in the tenement shown in Illustration 1B. Be as accurate as you can about the characters you create and the problems they deal with.
2. **Small-group activity:** Inflation and a debasing of coinage were problems in the late Roman Empire. For a long time, the major silver coin used in the empire was the *denarius*. Learn more about Roman coins and how their values changed. Find photos or other illustrations of Roman coins. Create a bulletin-board display showing at least eight Roman coins from different times during the history of the empire. Try to find out what each coin was worth in an ordinary worker's wages, or how much of some good or set of goods it could buy. Include this information in a description of each coin in your display.

## Illustration 2



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### *Discussing the Illustration*

1. Under Marcus Aurelius (reigned 161–180 CE), Roman armies defeated German tribes in the northeast along the Danube River. The Roman column on which this relief appears shows Germans there forced to execute their own people. What can you learn about the Germanic tribes, or the Roman Empire and its armies, from this relief?
2. The decline of the Roman Empire began with troubles in the third century CE. It then became far more serious in the late fourth and the fifth centuries, especially after 378 CE. What happened from that point on that made it almost impossible for the Roman Empire to survive?
3. Actually, only one half of the Roman Empire fell apart in the fifth century CE. Can you explain?
4. Historians still argue about the causes of the decline of the Roman Empire. What do you think led to the downfall of the Roman Empire? Why?

### *Follow-up Activities*

1. The years 235–285 CE were a time of chaos in the Roman Empire. One military leader after another took over. But Diocletian, and then Constantine, brought back some order. They may have helped the empire survive for another century. Read more about these two emperors. In a brief talk to the class, sum up the changes they made in the army, government, economy, and in religious life. In your talk, explain how these changes may have helped the empire continue.
2. **Small-group activity:** Learn about the sack of Rome of 410 CE. Now learn more about these people: Diocletian, Constantine, Julian the Apostate, Theodosius, and Augustine. Imagine what each might have said about the sack of Rome had they known of it (Augustine did know of it). Have each group member pretend to be one of these figures and write a diary entry expressing his thoughts about the sack of Rome. Read the entries in class, and comment on these figures in Rome's history.



## Lesson 4—Decline and Fall

# Illustrations 3A & 3B

3A



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3B



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### Discussing the Illustrations

1. Illustration 3A is a Roman depiction of a key Christian ceremony. Can you tell what ceremony it shows?
2. The baptism of adults marked the deep personal change people felt as they joined Christian churches. In the last centuries of ancient Rome, more and more people in the empire did this. Why do you think so many people became Christians?
3. It was often dangerous for Roman citizens to become Christians. Why was it dangerous? Illustration 3B shows a mosaic of a chalice with a fish on the floor of a Christian home in Italy. The fish was a disguised symbol of Christianity. Can you explain why?
4. In the fourth century CE, the emperors themselves adopted Christianity and made it the state religion. Why do you think Christianity finally triumphed as it did throughout ancient Roman civilization?

### Follow-up Activity

1. **Small-group activity:** Look through art-history books or other sources for examples of art from ancient Rome and from the Middle Ages in Europe. Choose at least five illustrations that you think are typical of ancient Roman art. Now choose five that you see as typical of the Middle Ages. As a group, try to decide what makes each group typical of its time and place in history. In a brainstorming session, come up with five adjectives that best describe the Roman art, and five that best describe Medieval art (that is, the art of the Middle Ages). Now show the illustrations to the entire class. Before giving out your group's list of adjectives, ask the class to come up its own list of five adjectives for the art of each time period. Compare the lists to see how similar or different they are. Discuss the reasons for the choices people made. Also discuss what this exercise helps to show about the change from ancient Roman civilization to the civilization of Europe in the Middle Ages.



# **Image Close-ups**



## The Rise of Roman Power

# Illustration 1



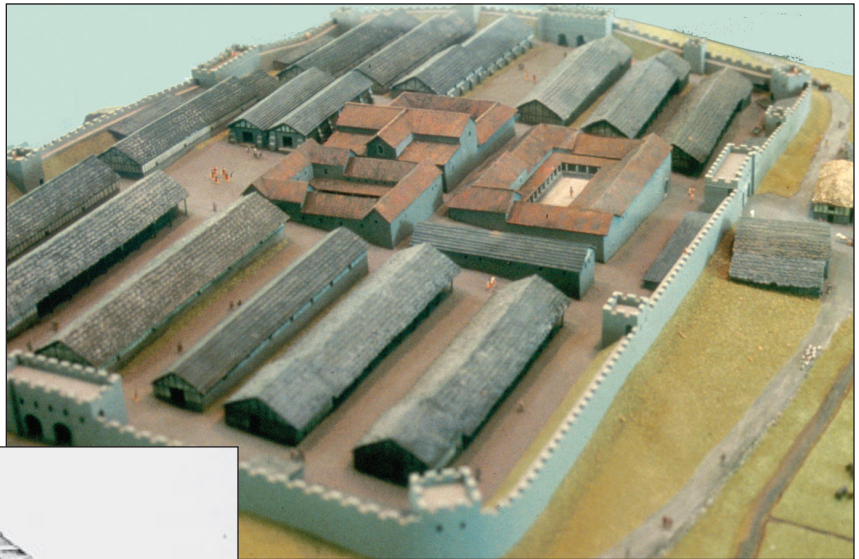
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The Rise of Roman Power

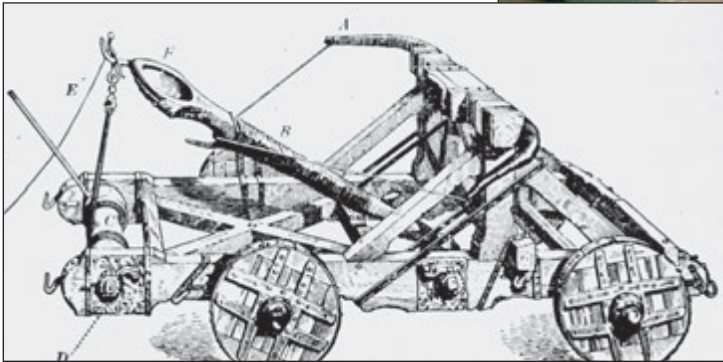
# Illustrations 2A & 2B

2B



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2A



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The Rise of Roman Power

# Illustrations 3A & 3B

3B



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3A

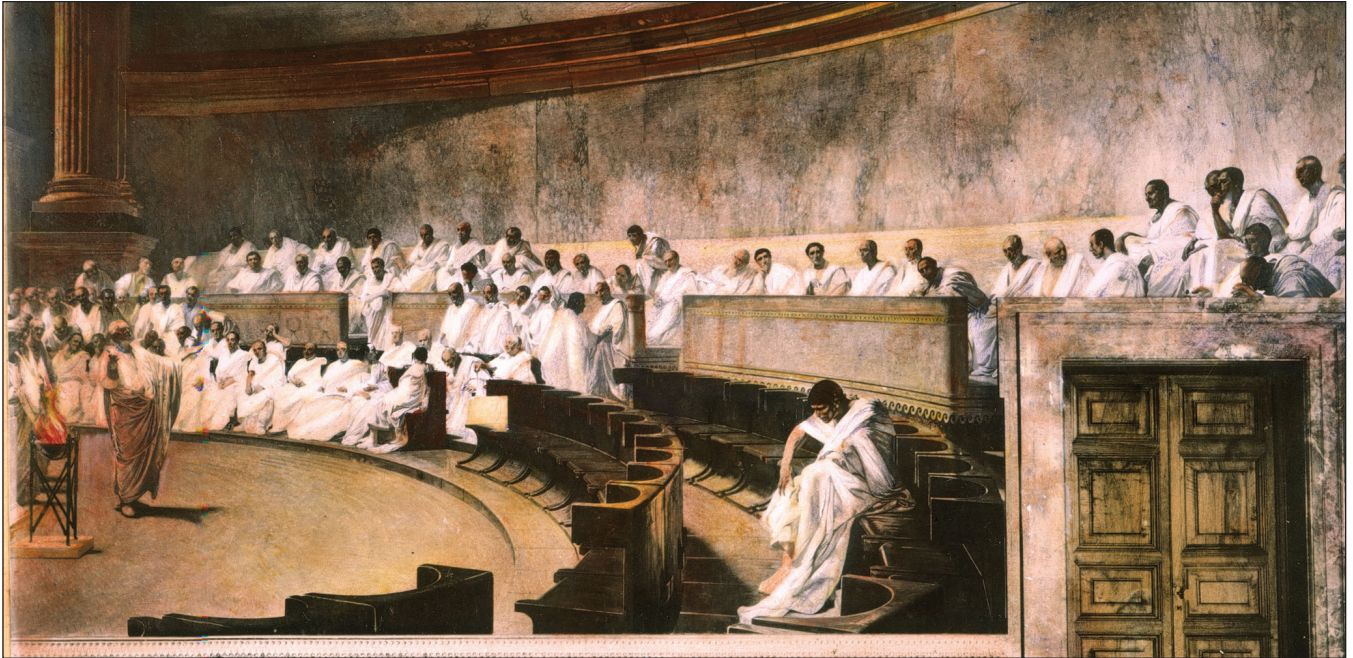


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# The Roman Republic

## Illustration 1



The Granger Collection, New York



## The Roman Republic

# Illustration 2



The Granger Collection, New York



# The Roman Republic

## Illustration 3



The Granger Collection, New York

The Roman Empire

# Illustrations 1A & 1B

1A



© Instructional Resources Corporation

1B



© Instructional Resources Corporation



# The Roman Empire Illustration 2



© Instructional Resources Corporation

## The Roman Empire

# Illustration 3



The Granger Collection, New York



**Decline and Fall**

# **Illustrations 1A & 1B**

**1A**



© Instructional Resources Corporation

**1B**



© Instructional Resources Corporation



Decline and Fall

# Illustration 2



© Instructional Resources Corporation

Decline and Fall

# Illustrations 3A & 3B

3A



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3B



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