INTERCULTURAL OUTREACH

CULTUREGUIDE

Italy

Series 1
Secondary (7–12)
# Table of Contents

Why Study Cultures? .................................................. 2

Traditions
   Carnival ............................................................. 3

Folklore & Language
   Dialects ............................................................. 8

Food
   Pizza, Panino, and Gelato ....................................... 13

Cross-cultural Contributions
   Architecture of the Roman Empire .......................... 18

Reference Material
   Facts about Italy ................................................ 24
   History and Holidays ........................................... 25
   Additional Resources ........................................... 27
   Visuals ............................................................. 29
Information

The Roman Empire

The great civilization of Rome was one of efficiency, innovation, and wealth. The city of Rome was founded in 753 B.C.E. and over hundreds of years it developed into an empire stretching across Europe and North Africa, lasting until the fourth century C.E. The Roman Republic (509 B.C.E.–31 B.C.E.) and Empire (27 B.C.E.–476 C.E.) contributed much to the ancient world. Their roads, temples, amphitheaters, aqueducts, and basilicas, among other structures, were used as the model for much of the architecture throughout the rest of the Western world.

History

According to legend, the city of Rome was founded by Romulus in 753 B.C.E. At this time it was little more than a few sheep herders who came together along the Tiber River. By 509 B.C.E. the republic was created, which ruled the growing city and territory with a senate rather than a king. The republic form of government later served as a model for the French and American Revolutions, which fought for a government free of monarchal rule. Due to the extensive growth of Rome’s territory, which extended all the way to the British Isles, and the ambitions of one man, Julius Caesar, the republic turned into an empire around 31 B.C.E. The new empire from this time until its fall about four hundred years later was ruled by every whim of an all-powerful emperor. Both the republic and empire were very prosperous and demonstrated their wealth by building magnificent structures. It was because of this zealous building that we have been left with a number of ruins that provide a good idea about life and history of Roman civilization and show how influential Rome was in the centuries following its fall. A number of Rome’s ancient structures were new and unique to their time and have served as a blueprint for many buildings and city plans today.

Concrete

Concrete was the most important building material of the Romans, and the reason for their architectural success. Some historians attribute the invention of concrete to the Romans, but whether they invented it or not, they mastered the art of using concrete in building. Romans made concrete by creating mortar out of small gravel and sand pieces and mixing that together with hot lime and water. Although by a modern standard this concrete mix would seem primitive, their concrete has withstood the test of time, as evidenced by the many structures and roads built during the empire that exist today. Concrete was most useful in the building of roads and aqueducts, which helped expand Roman civilization.

Roads

Much of what is left behind from the time of the Romans are their extensive roads, which are still used today. Roads were essential to the growth of the Roman Empire, because they helped the Romans maintain their power and control conquered land. Armies could move quickly along the roads and merchants and traders could travel easily between different territories and cities. The popular saying “all roads lead to Rome” was true at the height of the empire because fifty-three thousand miles of
Roads were built to connect all the cities and lands conquered by the Romans to the great capital of Rome. Roads were built with precision and durability—they continue to be the basis for many roads running through Europe and Italy today. The process of building a road was a long one and ended with laying stones and filling the cracks between them with concrete to produce a relatively smooth road (see Cross-cultural Contributions Visuals 1 and 2). The building of roads also led to the construction of Roman cities on a grid plan. The grid plan is a city plan in which streets run at right angles to each other, forming a grid. Although the Romans were not the first to use the grid plan, they are recognized for their perfect right angles and for intersecting two main streets. The intersection of these two main streets is often where the city forum would be built. A city forum is where public meetings, markets, and government meetings were held. Roads improved the efficiency of the empire. They continued to be used throughout the Middle Ages and continue to be used today. The grid plan also continues to serve as the city plan of choice in many U.S. cities.

**Aqueducts**

Aqueducts were used during the Roman Empire to transport water into cities. Romans constructed aqueducts both above and below the ground. Ones below the ground were preferred because they reduced the risk of infected water caused by dead animal carcasses, and were more difficult for enemies to destroy. Aqueducts are the greatest example of Romans’ advanced building techniques, and the sophisticated construction of aqueducts was not matched until over a thousand years after the fall of the Empire. The aqueducts were remarkable because they could transport large amounts of water up and down all different kinds of terrain, powered only by gravity. Concrete arches aided in the transportation of water because arches allowed the aqueducts to raise and lower the gradient depending on the terrain (see Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 3). The aqueducts brought fresh water into the city’s fountains, baths, and to the emperors’ and wealthy citizens’ private villas. Aqueducts remain an important aspect of life in all countries today, especially in countries like the U.S., where water is not readily available in many areas and must be transported in. Although we have technology today that can purify water or pump water up steep hills, the Romans remain responsible for the masterful architecture of the aqueduct.

**Temples and Public Buildings**

Temples were a very important part of the Roman Empire, because they served as the place for religious worship. The majority of Romans practiced a polytheist religion known as Paganism. This religion worshipped a number of gods and goddesses and was very similar to Greek mythology. Temples were built to honor the gods, such as Jupiter, Juno, Mars, and Venus. They believed to have power over different aspects of Roman life. Mars, for example, was the god of war and Venus was the goddess of fertility. Revering these gods and paying tribute to them was believed to be essential to the prosperity of one’s personal life and the empire as a whole. Inside the temple structure was a statue of the god, and only special priests were allowed inside to offer sacrifices. Many roman temples were built after the Greek style, which consisted of a raised podium, columns that ran along the front, and a triangle pediment on top in which a relief sculpture was placed. Once paganism was replaced by Christianity in the second century c.e., temples were
abandoned, torn down, or converted into new buildings. In fact, the stock exchange building in Rome was once an ancient temple (see Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 4).

Many public buildings and monuments also followed the Greek style, including temples, senate house, basilicas, baths, and coliseums (see Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 5). All of these buildings were built with brick, stone, and concrete and were decorated with columns, relief sculptures, and arches in a style that is copied in a number of the U.S. public buildings today.

**Basilicas**

A basilica was generally found at the center of town, in the forum, and served as a tribunal place for the city. The Basilica of Maxentius, which remains in very good condition in the Roman Forum, is open on two sides of a wide hall and its roof is supported by large arches. The basilica gained its importance with the rise of the Christian faith. When the Christian faith gained dominance in the Roman Empire around 321 C.E., the believers needed a proper place to worship. Christians could not worship in the pagan temples, which were generally too small to hold a large congregation, so they turned to the more familiar basilica. The basilica provided the perfect basic structure to create a church to worship in because it had a long, wide hall (and two lateral, parallel halls) with a raised area at one end known as an apse [ap-s].

The hall was perfect for the congregation of believers, and the apse was the ideal place for important members of the church hierarchy to sit, perform rituals, and speak to the congregation. Later in history, the hall of the basilica was crossed by a shorter hall so that the building made a cross and created more space for saint worship, burial, and seating. The basilica-based churches soon grew into magnificent cathedrals during the Middle Ages and Renaissance and were adorned with intricate detail, sculptures, and domes (see Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 6). A number of cathedrals continue to be built today based on the traditional basilica model, and it is one of Rome’s great and long-lasting contributions.

**Amphitheatres and the Colosseum**

Amphitheatres were used throughout the Roman world as a place to witness spectator sports, games, and displays. Amphitheatres differ from theatres because amphitheatres are circle or oval shaped, whereas theatres are semi-circular. Amphitheatres could seat hundreds to thousands and were the perfect construction for viewing games and sports. The most famous amphitheatre is the Colosseum in Rome (see Cross-cultural Contributions Visuals 7 and 8). The Colosseum was originally known as the Flavian Amphitheatre, but due to a colossal statue of the emperor in front, it adopted the name “the Colosseum.” It was capable of seating fifty thousand and, due to its elliptical shape, the actions in the center were always in view. The Colosseum was ingeniously constructed and is believed to serve as the basis for many spectator buildings today. The Colosseum is remembered for its vicious gladiator games and horrific executions; they are often accurately portrayed by popular movies and television shows. It was built at a time during the Roman Empire when many people were unhappy with a string of bad emperors and were restless for change. The Colosseum was therefore built to try to appease the people through entertainment. Although the activities that took place in the amphitheatres
were much more violent than sports today—often resulting in brutal death—they
drew huge crowds. The spectator aspect and government appeasement is not much
different than today. Like in Roman times, many people today enjoy watching an
aggressive football game or boxing match and will pay a lot of money to do so.
Often companies keep employees happy by giving them season tickets or box seats
to a favorite team or sport. The Colosseum’s structure and purpose to society is very
similar to many forms of entertainment in America today. Its structure and purpose
continues to be copied by nations all other the world.

Conclusion
The ancient Romans have contributed a number of great structures and techniques to
the ancient and modern world. The extensive use of concrete brought about excel-
lent roads and masterful aqueducts. Temples and public buildings provided the basis
of the modern architectural style of government and public buildings. The basilica’s
floor plan continues to be used as the basis of cathedrals built all over the world, and
the Colosseum serves a very similar purpose to our many sports arenas today. The
Roman Empire contributed much to society, and its contributions continue to be
seen and recognized all over the world sixteen hundred years later!

Activities
1. Using popsicle sticks, cardboard, and glue, engineer an ancient Roman structure
such as an amphitheater, temple, or basilica for display. Include a one-paragraph
explanation of the structure.

2. Write a magazine article that could be featured in National Geographic on one
of the ancient Roman structures that interest you. Include a history of the struc-
ture, and what it was used for.

3. In groups, thoroughly research one ancient structure, create a poster board of
pictures and facts, and present what you have learned to the class.

4. Write an essay on the significance of Roman structures and how they have been
influential throughout history. This can be written about one structure specifically
or about a handful of structures.

5. Create a travel log of your tour of ancient structures in Europe. Describe where
you are and the different ancient structures you have visited. Also explain how
what the structures remind you of at home and how they contributed to the mod-
ern world.

Discussion Questions
1. What importance do roads have today? Before e-mail, tv, and telephones, how
did roads add to the unity and efficiency of a country as a whole? Think about
Paul Revere and Wells Fargo. What did they help accomplish? Why was the
organized road system of the ancient Roman Empire so crucial to its prosperity?

2. Why was concrete such an important invention? How did it affect the building
process and durability of the building? If concrete had never been invented, how
would buildings and roads differ today?
3. Compare the design of a Roman temple with that of the White House or your state’s capitol building. What are some similarities? Why do you suppose many of our national buildings are reminiscent of ancient Roman architecture?

4. What is an aqueduct? Are they still used today? How are they important to the running of our homes and cities? How might the building of aqueducts all over the Roman Empire affect and improve society?

5. How did Christians make use of the basilica? Are basilicas still the base structure for buildings, namely churches, today? Are basilicas still used in the same ways as they were in the ancient world? In what ways? How are the uses different?

6. The Roman Empire is remembered for its magnificent amphitheaters and the fatal spectacles that took place in them. Why do you suppose people came to watch gruesome gladiator fights and torturous deaths? What role did these spectator sports play in Roman society? What role do spectator sports play in our society? Are there similarities?
**Facts About Italy**

**Official Name:** Italian Republic

**Capital:** Rome

**Government Type:** republic

**Area:** 301,230 sq km

**Land Boundaries:** Austria, France, Holy See (Vatican City), San Marino, Slovenia, Switzerland

**Climate:** predominantly Mediterranean; Alpine in far north; hot, dry in south

**Lowest Point:** Mediterranean Sea 0 m

**Highest Point:** Mont Blanc (Monte Bianco) de Courmayeur 4,748 m (a secondary peak of Mont Blanc)

**Natural Resources:** coal, mercury, zinc, potash, marble, barite, asbestos, pumice, fluorspar, feldspar, pyrite (sulfur), natural gas and crude oil reserves, fish, arable land

**Natural Hazards:** regional risks include landslides, mudflows, avalanches, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, flooding, land subsidence in Venice

**Population:** 58,145,320 (July 2008 est.)

**Ethnic Groups:** Italian (includes small clusters of German-, French-, and Slovene-Italians in the north and Albanian-Italians and Greek-Italians in the south)

**Religions:** predominately Roman Catholic with mature Protestant and Jewish communities and a growing Muslim immigrant community

**Languages:** Italian (official), German (parts of Trentino-Alto Adige region are predominantly German speaking), French (small French-speaking minority in Valle d'Aosta region), Slovene (Slovene-speaking minority in the Trieste-Gorizia area)

**GDP:** $1.8 trillion (2007 est.)

**GDP Per Capita:** $30,900 (2007 est.)

**GDP Composition by Sector:** agriculture: 2%, industry: 27%, services: 70.9% (2007 est.)

**Labor Force:** 24.74 million (2007 est.)

**Unemployment Rate:** 6.2% (2007 est.)

**Industries:** tourism, machinery, iron and steel, chemicals, food processing, textiles, motor vehicles, clothing, footwear, ceramics

**Agricultural Products:** fruits, vegetables, grapes, potatoes, sugar beets, soybeans, grain, olives; beef, dairy products; fish

**Exports:** $502.4 billion f.o.b. (2007 est.)

**Imports:** $498.1 billion f.o.b. (2007 est.)

**Trade Partners:** Germany, France, U.S., Spain, UK, Netherlands, China, Belgium (2006)

**Currency:** euro (EUR)

**Exchange Rate:** euros per U.S. dollar - 0.7345 (2007)
HISTORY AND HOLIDAYS

TIME LINE

1000–3000 B.C.E.  Etruscan civilization lives on the Italian peninsula
753    Romulus founds the city of Rome
509–31   The Roman Republic is created and governed by the senate and
         Rome gains land and dominance in the ancient world
31    The Republic falls and is replaced by the Roman Empire,
       governed by the emperor

31 B.C.E.–395 C.E.  Empire stretches across the European continent to the British
                   Isles and as far south as North Africa
313    Emperor Constantine legalizes Christianity, empire is split,
        creating the eastern and western Roman Empire
387    Rome is sacked by barbarian invasions
400–600  Barbarian invasions continue from the north and east, bringing
         the empire to its end
600–1300  The Italian peninsula is ruled by various city-states during the
          Middle Ages
754–1305  The Catholic Church gains prominence and the papacy rules all
          of central Italy
808–1797  The Venetian Republic gains wealth and power until it is
          conquered by the French dictator Napoleon
1400–1500  The Renaissance occurs in Florence, bringing an explosion of
          art, literature, science, and reason. Michelangelo and da Vinci
          live and work during this time.
1282–1743  The Medici family governs the prosperous state of Florence
          and surrounding areas
1815–1861  The Austrian Empire rules much of northern and central Italy
1861    The states on the Italian peninsula are unified, creating the
        Italian Republic
1922–1945  The Fascist regime, lead by Mussolini and supported by Hitler,
           rules Italy
1946–present  The Italian Republic begins

HOLIDAYS

1 Jan    New Years Day
6 Jan    Epiphany (Christian feast celebrating the three Wise Men arriving
         to see Jesus)
Feb    Shrove Tuesday (the last day of Carnival and the day before the
        beginning of Lent)
       Ash Wednesday (the first day of Lent [dates change annually])
19 Mar    St. Joseph’s Day (a day of feasting to honor Joseph, the spouse
          of Mary and foster father of Jesus Christ)