

Firing insults: Roman Bullets

This lesson teaches about life in the Roman army, in particular the personalised messages that Romans would send to their enemies on sling bullets. Children learn a series of Latin commands through a drill activity and card matching game. They go on to use these to make personalised “sling bullets.”

You will need:

- Card matching sets (see accompanying document) shared in small groups
- Worksheets
- Felt tip pens
- Polystyrene eggs (if you can't get polystyrene eggs, you can change the activity so children write their insults on pieces of card instead)



To prepare, print and cut out the card matching sets. If you plan on using them again, it might help to mark each set in a different colour (to stop them getting mixed up) and laminate them.

Introduction

Introduce the session by talking a bit about the Roman army (there is a PowerPoint presentation with some introductory information in this kit). Be sure that children know:

- the terms Centurion and Legionary (and know who was in charge!)
- what a standard soldier's kit includes (helmet, shield, armour, spear, short sword)
- that there were special teams of soldiers in each legion called auxiliaries. Auxiliaries had different skills like horse riding or using arrows.
- that some auxiliaries used slings.
- what a sling is and how it works. You can find videos of slings in use on Youtube (like this one: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oK65f4AyUSs>)

Drill activity

Ask pupils to stand up with enough space around them to move. Teach them the following commands and actions:

- Cape (pronounced cah-pay)= catch – lift one hand up in the air and mime catching with the fingers
- Sede (said-day) =sit – sit down cross-legged on the floor
- State (stah-tay) =stand – stand up/stand to attention
- Nolite movere (noh-lee-tay mov-err-ay)= don't move, freeze
- Noli fugere (noh-lee foo-gerr-eh)- don't run away raise arms in sprinting mime then freeze

Mix the commands up – Nolite movere can be used after cape or sede to catch out anyone who wasn't listening.

You can use modern English cognates to encourage children to guess meanings: Capture is from the same root as cape; fugitive from fugere; move from movere etc. You can point out that the "Don't" words (noli/nolite) sound like "no."

Choose class members for a "promotion" and let them pick the orders and shout them.

Card matching game

This memory activity tests recall of the words from the previous activity and introduces the form of the sling bullets.

Ask the class to divide into small groups, then distribute a pack of cards to each.

Children begin by simply matching the Latin words to their English meanings. Check their answers against the meanings above, or keep one set of cards uncut as an answer sheet.

For a second game, ask the children to jumble all the cards on the table face down. They can then take turns to turn over any two. If the two cards match (Latin and translation) they are taken off the table and kept by the person who turned them over. If not, they are returned to their positions face-down. Picking continues until all pairs of cards are off the table. The winner is the person who matched the most pairs.

Designing a sling bullet

The final activity is a chance to apply this Latin vocabulary to design sling bullets with authentic insults.

The activities on the worksheet let children practise using these phrases in a sling bullet context. There is space for them to design three of their own. If polystyrene eggs are available, they can then pick a design to transfer to their polystyrene bullet.



If you're feeling brave, you can get the class to try throwing their bullets!