

Making a Roman inscription

In this activity, children are given Roman names and then use these names to make a simple Latin inscription.



You will need:

- Mats to work on
- Air drying clay
- Rolling pins
- Inscribing tools (glue spreaders work well if you do not have specific clay tools)
- Red poster paint (optional)
- Fine paint brushes (optional)
- Worksheets with Roman nicknames
- Roman name kit (3 containers, printed male first names, male second names and female first names)

Before the session:

- Print worksheets
- Print and cut out Roman names
- Put Roman names into three containers (for male first names, male second names and female first names). The ash chest printable makes something the right size that looks authentically Roman.

Immediately before the session, divide the clay into small balls (a bit smaller than a tennis ball), one for each child.

Introduction

As a starter activity, you could ask everyone to think of three things about themselves they would want to tell people living 2000 years in the future. Discuss responses and compare them to this list of things Romans wrote inscriptions about:

- Their family
- Lists of achievements (awards, positions of authority etc.)
- Their jobs
- Where they were from

There is a Powerpoint presentation to introduce this activity. Key points to get across:

- Latin is the language spoken by the Romans.
- Inscriptions are any object with writing on. They can be used for lots of purposes – marking one's property, making a public announcement, commemorating loved ones, putting a trade mark on something you've made etc. There are lots of examples in the PowerPoint presentation.
- Roman male citizens have three names (first, second and family nickname); Roman women have only two (first and family nickname).
- Children do not need to stick to their gender in picking a name. Note that women's names are shorter and easier to write. Men's names have more variety. This may provide an opportunity to talk about how men had more legal rights than women.
- Fecit means "made this". Write this at the end of the inscription to make it into a full Latin sentence.
- Latin inscriptions are made in capital letters. They don't always have spaces between words. They often had mistakes on them. There are some examples of mistakes on the powerpoint.
- Letters on inscriptions were often painted to make them stand out more. It is rare to see paint because it wears away over time.
- Demonstrate technique of rolling and inscribing. It is important to make sure that the clay doesn't get stuck to the working surface.

Picking names

Children begin by picking Roman names. To speed up the process, the first and second names are randomised. Children pick whether they are going to be Roman men or women. "Men" take two names (one first, one second) "women" take one first name.

All children then pick a nickname from the list on the worksheet. This is the last name. They now have a full Roman name.

We don't know exactly how Romans pronounced their names. This pronunciation guide might be helpful for difficult names: <http://www.txclassics.org/old/PronunciationGuide.pdf>.

Making the inscription

Children begin by rolling out their clay. They are aiming to make a rough rectangle, 1-2cm thick and large enough to write their Roman name on.

Make sure they pick up the clay and turn it regularly when rolling out. Inscriptions should not be stuck to the board.

Once the clay is nice and flat, children can write on it. The layout is:

	First name	Second name (men)	Nickname	Made this
e.g.	GAIUS	LIVIUS	SEVERUS	FECIT
e.g.	BAEBIA		MAIOR	FECIT

Some tips:

- Push the implement into the clay
- Do not drag the implement through the clay (this leaves rough edges)
- Be careful not to push too hard and make a hole in the clay
- Use straight lines to make letters as much as possible (see examples on PowerPoint presentation)
- Don't worry about making mistakes. Lots of inscriptions are spelled wrong, written untidily or broken. It makes them more authentic.
- Romans used V instead of U and I instead of J

If there is some extra time, children can decorate the borders of their inscription.

Painting

If there is time, children can pick out their inscriptions in red paint. Painting carefully inside the lines. This can be done when the clay is wet, or after it has dried.

Leaving to dry

Spread the inscriptions out on some old newspaper until the clay is fully dry. Check the clay packaging for drying times.