

ROMAN FUNERAL ACTIVITIES

This is a toolkit of suggested activities to reconstruct a Roman funeral with your class. It includes:

- A video of a reconstructed Roman funeral
- A True/False quiz
- Factsheets and guidelines for writing a Roman Eulogy
- A papercraft ash chest to print and make
- Cut out and make Roman ancestor masks
- Advice on staging your own Roman funeral

Introduction

This set of activities offers an introduction to Roman funerals. The activities can be done together as a longer project or as stand-alone sessions. Together, it covers a range of Roman life topics, especially around Roman family and religion. The Eulogy activity offers case studies of real Romans that look at military careers, manufacturing and the role of women. There are opportunities for creative writing, art, music and drama elements in the funeral performance.

Roman funeral video:

The Ashmolean staged a Roman funeral for Halloween. Videos of the funeral and the process of making wax death masks can be viewed online:

<http://blogs.ashmolean.org/latininscriptions/2015/11/23/the-walking-dead-staging-a-roman-funeral-at-the-ashmolean-museum/>

Watch the video of a reconstructed Roman funeral with the class. While they are watching, ask the class to make notes about what they see:

- How is this similar to or different from their expectations of a funeral?
- Which bits do they think are accurate and which bits have had to be changed or explained to do this in a museum setting for a modern audience?

Get them to pay special attention to the Eulogy, as they will be writing their own eulogies for real Romans next.

Use the Roman Funerals Quiz to quickly check comprehension and underline some key points.

Roman Funerals Quiz answers:

1. Romans cremated their dead: True
2. Everyone at the funeral knew the deceased personally: False. Wealthy families would pay professional mourners to make the dead person seem more important and popular.
3. All of the dead person's slaves were freed when they died: False. People could choose to free slaves in their will. In fact, there was a limit on how many slaves could be freed this way in each will.
4. Romans displayed masks of their ancestors at the funeral: True
5. Mourners would put offerings of gold on the funeral pyre: False. This was forbidden under sumptuary laws designed to prevent wealthy families from showing off too much.
6. Roman tombs were outside the city: True. Romans saw death as unclean. However, they still valued their ancestors and would visit tombs to leave offerings.

Make an Ash Chest:

For this activity, you will need:

- Card
- Glue
- Scissors

This paper craft activity makes an authentic looking Roman ash chest. This is a stone urn (often intricately carved) that holds the cremated remains of the deceased. These were stored in a *Columbarium* – a large shared tomb outside of the town. Each burial had its own niche, where the ash chest was stored. The niche would be labelled with the deceased's name, some also included a portrait bust. The columbarium might be a family tomb, or unrelated people could join a burial club to share the costs of maintaining one.



A reconstruction of a *Columbarium* at the Ashmolean Museum

Write a Eulogy:

This is a creative writing activity that uses the lives of real Romans as inspiration. Pupils pick one of the Romans from the fact sheets. Pupils work either independently or in small groups. Encourage them to use the information in their video notes and fact sheets to write a short eulogy praising their chosen Roman.

Fact sheets give short biographies of Romans and summaries of some Roman virtues. Encourage pupils to make up details to make it seem realistic and add some rhetorical flourishes.

Perform the funeral:

The class can perform their eulogies and carry their ash chests to their resting place as part of a whole-class performance of a Roman funeral.

This can be treated as a drama activity. Give everyone a role to play:

- Dominus Funebris – the funeral director who oversees what is going on (a good role for the teacher)
- Lictors – ceremonial guards who carry a bundle of sticks (*Fasces*) to clear bystanders out of the way
- Family of the deceased – deliver eulogies
- Archimimus – carries the mask of the dead man and makes silly jokes
- Imago (ancestor mask) carriers – carry masks of ancestors
- Professional mourners – Wail loudly and look dishevelled
- Musicians – you may not be able to get authentic Roman instruments, but try using a drum to keep the pace of the procession and experimenting with adding other instruments available to make a sad but loud sound experience.

You can add costumes and props to make the whole thing even more effective or just keep it simple. Use the *Imagines* papercraft to make some quick ancestor masks.

There is guidance on wrapping a toga here:

<http://blogs.getty.edu/iris/how-to-wear-a-toga-the-ancient-roman-way/>

Ancestor Mask papercraft

For this activity, you will need:

- Card
- Glue
- Scissors
- Lollipop sticks

- Tape

Romans carried images of their ancestors at their funerals (singular *imago*, plural *imagines*). This allowed even dead members of the family to be present at these important events. These images were probably wax death masks. The Ashmolean made masks from casts of live volunteers' faces for the funeral video. You can watch the process of making them here:

<http://blogs.ashmolean.org/latininscriptions/2015/11/23/the-walking-dead-staging-a-roman-funeral-at-the-ashmolean-museum/>

For a quicker and less messy death mask, you can use the Ancestor Mask Papercraft sheet. This features photos of Roman portrait sculpture (which we think was influenced by the look of the death masks).

Stick the sheets to stiff card and then cut out the heads. Tape a lollipop stick to the back so that it can be carried in front of your face.

More information:

You can read more about the Ashmolean's Roman funeral in the following article:

Masségliá, Jane. 2016. 'Rome's Walking Dead: Resurrecting a Roman Funeral at the Ashmolean Museum'. *Journal of Classics Teaching* 17.33.

Find out about the real Roman behind our funeral:

<http://blogs.ashmolean.org/latininscriptions/2016/01/27/whose-funeral-is-it-anyway-alison-cooley-talks-about-the-real-abascantianus/>

There is a good 19th century summary of the Roman texts on funerals in:

William Smith, D.C.L., LL.D.:

A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities, John Murray, London, 1875.

http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/secondary/SMIGRA*/Funus.html

Follow up:

If you visit the Ashmolean, you can see real objects relating to the real Romans covered in this lesson:

- A reconstruction of a *Columbarium* in the Reading and Writing gallery (basement). Including the ash chest of Tiberius Claudius Abascantianus from the funeral.
- A stone listing the achievements of Publius Besius Betuinianus. On the stairs at the end of the Randolph gallery.
- A brick made in a factory owned by Domitia Lucilla Minor in the Rome gallery.
- Lucius Marcus Pacatus' tomb stone in the Randolph Gallery.