

Ancient Rome

Rome: Republic to Empire

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- Identify Cincinnatus, Julius Caesar, Cicero, and Augustus.
- Describe the government of the Roman Republic, the checks on it, and its use of dictators.
- Express a reasoned opinion on whether the United States should adopt an amendment to grant the president greater powers in an emergency.

PREPARATION

Handout A: Rome: Republic to Empire—1 per student

Handout B: Emergency Powers—1 per student

Overview

This lesson provides an overview of the governance of the Roman Empire. First, students hold a discussion on what a dictator is. Then they read and discuss an article on the beginning of Rome, the Roman Republic, and its transformation into an empire. Finally, in small groups, students role play members of a congressional committee deciding on whether the U.S. Constitution should be amended to give the president greater powers in an emergency.

STANDARDS ADDRESSED

California History-Social Science Standard 6.7: Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures during the development of Rome.

(1) Identify the location and describe the rise of the Roman Republic, including the importance of such mythical and historical figures as Aeneas, Romulus and Remus, Cincinnatus, Julius Caesar, and Cicero. (2) Describe the government of the Roman Republic and its significance (e.g., written constitution and tripartite government, checks and balances, civic duty).

(4) Discuss the influence of Julius Caesar and Augustus in Rome's transition from republic to empire.

National World History Standard 9: Understand how major religious and large-scale empires arose in the Mediterranean Basin, China, and India from 500 BCE to 300 CE.

(1) Understand the origins and social framework of Roman society (e.g., ... how legends of the founding of Rome describe ancient Rome and reflect the beliefs and values of its citizens...). (2) Understand shifts in the political and social framework of Roman society (e.g., political and social institutions of the Roman Republic and reasons for its transformation from Republic to Empire; how values changed from the early Republic to the last years of the Empire as reflected through the lives of such Romans as Cincinnatus, ... Julius Caesar ...).

A. Focus Discussion

1. Hold a brief discussion on dictatorship by asking students the following questions:
 - What is a dictator?
 - What powers does a dictator have?
 - What is the problem with having a dictator?
2. Tell students that they are going to read about ancient Rome, a society that sometimes installed a dictator for a short time to solve problems.

B. Reading and Discussion—Rome: Republic to Empire

1. Distribute Handout A: Rome: Republic to Empire. Ask students to look for the following as they read:
 - Important people—historical and mythical—in the history of Rome.
 - How Rome changed from a republic to an empire.
2. When students finish reading, hold a discussion on Rome. Questions to raise:
 - How did the Roman Republic check the power of its leaders? Why do you think it checked their power?
 - Why did the Roman Republic sometimes resort to dictators? Who did the Romans hold up as the perfect dictator? Why?

C. Small-Group Activity—Emergency Powers

1. Tell students that the United States is a republic. Explain that voters elect Congress and the president. The Congress passes laws and the president can sign them or veto them. Explain that in an emergency, the president has great power. For example, the president is the commander in chief of the armed forces and if the United States were attacked, the president could order a response.
2. Tell students that they are going to get a chance to role play members of Congress who decide whether to give the president new powers in an emergency.

3. Divide the class into groups of three or four students. Distribute to each student Handout B: Emergency Powers. Review the instructions on the handout and answer any questions students may have.
4. Give students time to complete the activity. Before they finish, go to each group, ask how they decided, and make sure they have written down their three reasons.
5. When they are finished, ask which groups decided to recommend the amendment. Ask them to give their reasons to the class. Ask which groups decided not to recommend the amendment. Ask them to give their reasons to the class. Hold a discussion by asking:
 - Why do we have the First Amendment? What good does free speech do?
 - What problems might the new amendment solve?
 - What dangers might the new amendment bring?

The Roman Empire

When Rome began in about 750 B.C., it was ruled by kings. A council of nobles, called the Senate, advised the kings. In 509 B.C., the Romans threw out their last king.

To replace the king, a citizen assembly elected two men as consuls. They would govern together for one year. Both consuls had to agree for the government to act. After their time in office, the consuls would become members of the Senate. On the surface, the consuls seemed to hold more power than senators. But consuls held office for only a year and Senators served for life.

Rome had two classes, the patricians and the plebeians. The patricians were wealthy, landowning nobles. The plebeians were the common people. At first, the consuls were always patricians. Later, however, at least one consul had to come from the plebeian class. The plebeians had their own citizen assemblies. One was for questions of war. Another passed laws and sat as a court.

The system of government had many checks and balances. The consuls assumed the role of kings. But both had to agree to get anything done. The Senate represented the rich. The citizen assemblies represented the plebeians. No one person or group held all the power.

Dictatorship

Romans believed in limiting the power of their leaders. The Romans, however, came up with a way to sidestep these checks for short periods. During a crisis, when strong leadership was needed, the Senate could vote to grant total power to one man. Romans called this person a “dictator.”

During the first 300 years of the republic, dictators came to power when Rome faced an invasion or other danger. The dictatorship lasted only six months or even less if the crisis passed. If a dictator refused to step down, he could be forced out.

The Roman dictator’s word was law. He could even order executions without a trial. For centuries, Roman dictators served when duty called and gave up power when their terms ended.

Romans held up Cincinnatus as the ideal dictator. According to legend, Cincinnatus was working in the fields when the Senate named him dictator in 458. He left his farm, led the Roman army to defeat invaders, and returned to his farm. He was named dictator again about 20 years later. Again, he served briefly and returned home.

But in 81 B.C., a general named Cornelius Sulla seized control of Rome. Sulla was not like other dictators. He bypassed the Senate, which was filled with his enemies. He persuaded the citizens’ assembly to make him a permanent dictator. Sulla then banished or killed hundreds of his opponents.

After more than two years of rule, Sulla resigned and died soon after. For the next 30 years, the Roman Republic stumbled along. A slave named Spartacus led a massive revolt that almost brought down the republic. New feuds and factions emerged.

The greatest defender of the republic was Cicero. He was born outside Rome, and he was not a patrician. He studied law and made a name for himself as a great speaker. Despite his background, he was made a member of the Senate and consul in 63. He worked hard to hold the republic together.

The Dictatorship of Julius Caesar

But factions in the Senate had paralyzed the Roman government. The annual consul election turned into a contest of who could bribe the most voters. Street riots broke out. To restore order, the

assembly elected General Gnaeus Pompey as consul for a year. But actually, Pompey shared power with two other powerful generals—Julius Caesar and Marcus Crassus.

Crassus was the general who had defeated Spartacus. Caesar was the governor and military conqueror of Gaul (France). These three men were known as the First Triumvirate (group of three).

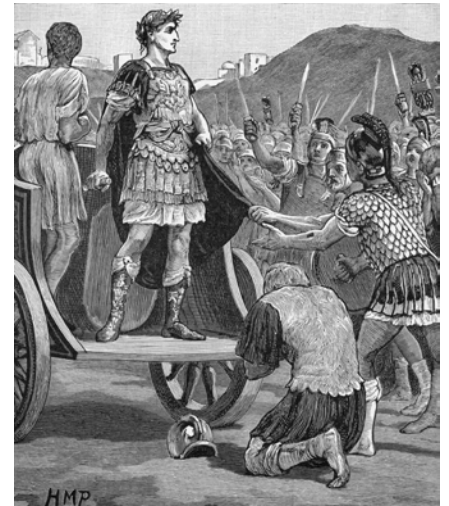
Caesar used his power to put supporters like General Marc Antony into key positions. Caesar's enemies in Rome spread rumors that he planned to take power. In 49 B.C., Caesar massed his army at the border between Gaul and Italy. It looked as if Caesar was about to invade Rome. The consul Marcellus named Pompey the defender of the city.

The Senate demanded that Caesar give up his post. Caesar answered by leading his army across the Rubicon River into Italy. This "crossing of the Rubicon" was an act of war. It was against the law for a Roman general to lead an army outside the province he governed. Pompey, Cicero, and most of the senators fled from Rome.

Unlike Sulla, Caesar did not butcher his opponents. He tried to form alliances with them, and he had himself elected consul. Caesar then took his army in pursuit of Pompey and defeated him in Africa. After staying for some time with Cleopatra, the ruler of Egypt, Caesar returned to Rome.

By 45 B.C., Caesar had defeated all the troops loyal to Pompey. The Senate acclaimed him "Liberator" and made him dictator for 10 years. Caesar handed bonuses to his troops, gave money to every citizen, and pardoned his enemies.

During his rule, Caesar made many reforms such as a new calendar and relief for debtors. In return, the Roman people heaped honors on him. One of the Roman months was renamed Julius, our July. Statues of Caesar went up in the city. His image appeared on coins. Then, in February 44 B.C., Caesar was made dictator for life.



It's not clear whether Caesar intended to become king. According to tradition, Marc Antony publicly offered a king's crown to Caesar, who refused it three times. As king, Caesar would no longer need the Senate to stay in power. But he was killed only a few days later. Caesar's death plunged Rome into 17 years of civil war.

The warfare finally ended when Octavian, Caesar's adopted son, became the sole ruler of the Roman Empire. Octavian kept the forms of the republic. The Senate met. Consuls were elected. But the emperor held all the power. The republic was dead, and dictatorship had won.

For Discussion

1. How did the Roman Republic check the power of its leaders? Why do you think it checked their power?
2. Why did the Roman Republic sometimes resort to dictators? Who did the Romans hold up as the perfect dictator? Why?

Activity: Emergency Powers

As you know, in ancient Rome, the Roman Senate could grant a consul the powers of a dictator in an emergency. In the United States, the president has great power to deal with an emergency. But should the U.S. president have even greater power in such a situation?

Congratulations, you have been elected to Congress! You are serving on a special committee that will decide if the President should have greater power during an emergency.



A new constitutional amendment has been proposed:

In an emergency, the president may have this special power: After declaring an emergency, the president may outlaw anyone from making critical comments about the president or U.S. government. This ban may last up to six months. If this power goes into effect, a person who writes or speaks anything critical about the U.S. government may be arrested and put on trial. If convicted of making such a statement, the person may be sentenced to serve up to one year in jail.

This amendment would create a major exception to the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment. The First Amendment protects the freedom of speech of every person.

Your committee's job is to decide whether or not to recommend this amendment.

In your group, do the following:

1. Discuss the amendment.
 - What might be good about having this amendment?
 - What might go wrong if we had this amendment?
2. Decide either to recommend passing the amendment or to recommend not passing the amendment.
3. Write down three reasons for your decision.
4. Be prepared to report your decision and your reasons for it to the rest of the class.