

NUFFIELD PRIMARY HISTORY



THE ROMAN MARKET: SHOPPING IN A ROMAN TOWN

KS1: The way of life of people who lived in the more distant past in Britain

TEACHERS' NOTES

This account tells how we recreated a Roman market in the Reception/Year 1 classroom to end a ten-week Roman unit.

The KS1 children at the school usually looked at the Victorians when they studied '*the way of life of people who lived in the more distant past in Britain*'. However, the school taught the Victorians in Year 4, and the KS1 teachers felt this was repetitive for the children. They wanted to find another period in the more distant past that would be suitable for their young pupils, one that we could bring alive for them. We decided on the Romans, because in KS2 the school focused on the Vikings (rather than the Romans or Anglo-Saxons).

The whole unit was focused on enactive learning – learning by doing. Over the ten weeks the children handled Roman artefacts, built a Roman road, and created Roman baths and a Roman market. They loved it. Parents reported that all their children talked about was the Romans, and were amazed at how much they knew about Roman life.

Town markets were a central aspect of life in Roman Britain, so to end our term's work on the Romans we decided to stage a Roman market. Through this activity the children could begin to answer such questions as: How did people shop in a Roman town? How did they dress? What food did they eat? Where did they buy it? Through enacting a day at the market, the children could experience a different shopping pattern from our supermarket-dominated one today.

The shopping/market approach can be used for any period of history and adapted for any age group. When we staged a Roman market with Year 3 children at a different school, we incorporated numeracy – the children had to price their goods in Roman *asses*, *sestertii* and *denarii*. (The British Museum's *The Romans activity book* gives a guide to Roman money and realistic pricing.)

Year group/class

Mixed Reception/Year 1 class, totalling 40 children.

The class works in adjoining rooms. It is taught together some of the time such as for the Roman topic, but separately for others such as formal literacy lessons.

Teaching time

Two mornings, a week apart, approximately four hours in total.

Learning objectives

For the children to:

- learn enactively about an aspect of daily life in Roman Britain
- develop knowledge and understanding of the similarities and differences between food and shopping now and 2000 years ago.

Key questions

- What food did the Romans eat?
- Where did they shop?
- What kinds of shops did they have?

Resources

Large carrier bag of present-day shopping, containing, for example: loaf of bread, tinned fish, bottle of sunflower oil, bag of walnuts, bag of apples, garlic cloves, onions, jug, wooden spoon, wristwatch, cushion or sweater, frozen chicken, vacuum-packed smoked mackerel.

Range of topic books about the Romans suitable for younger children (check that they contain a section about food and/or shopping and have good pictures).

Several colour photocopies of Roman markets, blown up to A3 size and displayed around the room, or for groups of children to examine at their tables (alternatively, you could put pictures onto a CD for the children to explore on the computer, or use an interactive whiteboard).

The teaching: lesson 1

Episode 1

Focus: Shopping nowadays.

I arrived with my carrier bag full of goods. We told the children that today we were going to talk about shopping. They settled down on the carpet. Mary, the teacher, drew two columns on the flip chart with the headings: **What it is** and **Shop**. I dipped into my bag and pulled out the bottle of sunflower oil. The children identified it and we discussed what it was used for in the kitchen. Mary wrote its name

in her ‘What it is’ column. I asked: ‘Where do you think I bought the oil? Which shop?’ Out poured the names of the local supermarkets and convenience stores. As we worked through the goods in the bag one by one, we realised how few shops the children visited: the right-hand ‘Shop’ column was dominated by one word – supermarket.

At the end we asked: ‘Would the Romans have had goods like these? How did they shop if they lived in a town as we do?’ The children weren’t sure, but thought the Romans might have had some of the same fruit and vegetables.

Episode 2

Focus: Developing reference skills – researching Roman shops, shopping and food.

Now we showed the children the pile of Roman topic books and the A3 market pictures – they would be detectives, looking in the books and at the pictures to see what they could find out. We posed three specific questions, written on the flip chart:

- What kinds of shops did the Romans have?
- What kinds of goods?
- What other things can we notice?

We divided the class up into groups of four, one group per table. On each table we placed some topic books, an A3 picture, and one of the items from my bag of shopping. The first task for each group was to discover if the Romans had the present-day item on their table.

Nicky, Mary and I circulated, joining in discussions about what the children could see in the pictures, or helping them to use contents pages or read text.

Episode 3

Focus: Discussion – reviewing our learning.

After twenty minutes or so we drew the children together again to pool what they had discovered. When we asked if they had found any goods the same as mine, the discussion became one about packaging: they had found fish in the Roman books, but not vacuum-packed or tinned. Similarly, although the Romans had oil, it was olive, not sunflower oil, and it was sold in *amphorae* (pottery jars), not bottles. The information poured out: they didn’t have carrier bags, they used baskets, cloth bags or jars. They didn’t have plastic. They didn’t have watches. They had pictures outside their shops showing what they sold. They had mirrors like us, and bread and butchers. They carried food in baskets on a donkey. The shops were open at the front. Our detectives had discovered a huge amount.

Two things the children found particularly interesting were that oysters were a popular Roman food, and that olive oil was not only used for cleaning people (they had discovered this last time – see Nuffield Primary History *Roman baths* lesson), but also for cooking with and for light. I had brought in a replica Roman lamp; we filled it with olive oil and lit the wick. It burned just like a candle – the children were impressed.

Episode 4

Focus: Preparation for the market next week.

We told the class that we were going to have a Roman market in our very forum (town square) – the Reception classroom. First we must decide which shops will be in our market. Could they tell us which shops the Romans had? Importantly clutching their topic books and pictures, the children described the shops they'd discovered and we listed them on the flip chart.

We had ten different shops:

fruit and vegetable seller

butcher

cloth and cushion seller

jeweller: rings, necklaces, hair clips and earrings

baker

fish seller

snack bar: fast food and drinks (yes, the Romans had them too)

pottery shop: jugs, bowls, plates, cups and oil lamps

wine shop

fancy goods shop: combs, mirrors, pots of make-up and creams

(We could also have had a leather shoe shop, a glassware shop, a knife shop and several others.)

Next we assigned stall-holders (about four children per stall – two to mind the shop while the other two shopped, taking turns).

The children were dead keen to dress like Romans, so we sent them home with letters asking them to bring next week:

either: large plain T-shirts to act as tunics, with optional rope or tie to tie round their waists

or: sheets to make into togas or long dresses for women.

sandals for their feet

baskets or cloth bags to hold their shopping.

Several parents volunteered to provide fruit, vegetables, nuts, cushions and cloths, which saved us having to provide all these items.

In the week before market day the children drew their own picture shop signs on large pieces of card, to attach to the front of their shops.

The teaching: lesson 2

Market day! Mary, Nicky and I had the day before bought the market goods not provided by parents, including Roman food for a post-market feast – dried and fresh fruit, bread, cooked sausages and chicken, olives, honey, smoked fish, nuts. Before the children arrived, we arranged the tables around three sides of the classroom, as in a Roman forum. We attached the children's shop signs to the fronts of their tables, and laid out the goods. For several we used what was readily available, such as straw ducks and plaster pigs for the butcher to sell. For the pottery shop we used the class crockery sets together with cups, jugs and plates we had brought from home. For the wine shop there was a large pottery jug of blackcurrant juice (red wine), together with pottery mugs. The children arrived, and Nicky took them into the Year 1 classroom to change into their Roman clothes. Meanwhile Mary and I put the finishing touches to the shops.

As the children filed in to begin the market, we gave each one a handful of the class's play money, for both shoppers and shopkeepers to use. The shopkeepers took up position behind their shop tables while shoppers gripped their baskets and headed for their chosen goods. When the shoppers had bought their fill, they took their turn behind the counter, swapping places with their fellow shop-owners, who in turn went off to bargain, buy and chat to friends.

After a happy, noisy hour most of the goods had been bought. We declared the market over and invited the town citizens to join us in a feast in the forum. We spread out a large cloth on the floor and placed plates and bowls of food in the middle. We gave the children paper plates and serviettes, and they sat and set to, eating lots of bread, fruit, nuts, sausages and chicken –only a few would try the olives or smoked fish.

The feast was about to end when Mary ambushed me. She announced to the children: 'Now Mrs Dean will show us how to eat an oyster, the Romans' favourite seafood!' She produced a large oyster, something I had never fancied eating. Trying to look thrilled, I stood up, put my head back and slid the oyster to the back of my throat. It was slimy, and tasted of the sea – not bad at all.

‘Delicious!’ I exclaimed. The children clapped, and the market, and our Roman topic, was over.

Learning outcomes

The children:

- gained much detailed knowledge about Roman food and drink, and about how and where people shopped in Roman times
- identified the similarities and differences between shopping, packaging and goods, now and then
- learnt how varied Roman food was and, enactively, how interesting it was shopping in a Roman town forum, with its social interaction and variety of shops.

Nuffield Primary History project

General editor: Jacqui Dean

Author of this unit: Jacqui Dean

© in this format Nuffield Primary History 2005

downloaded from www.primaryhistory.org