Romulus and Remus

The story of Romulus and Remus explains the foundation of Rome. In this lesson, students will read the story in the original Latin from three different authors. They will also have the chance to learn about Roman values that are exemplified in this foundation story.

Objectives

- To understand the story of Romulus and Remus.
- To examine the story of Romulus and Remus in Latin.
- To consider the importance of foundation stories and how they describe a society.

Materials

- coloring supplies

Supplements

Companion Site: www.ascaniusyci.org/companion/latin

1. “Romulus and Remus” slideshow (see Companion Site).
3. “Romulus and Remus Storyboard” worksheet (p. 188). One copy per student.
4. Recording (see Companion Site): story of Romulus and Remus.

Exploring the Foundation Story

1. Using the “Romulus and Remus” slideshow, tell the story of the founding of Rome to the students, one section at a time. Read the English translation on each slide with the students. When you have finished, click the mouse to underline one of the Latin words. Ask them to identify the English word that corresponds to the Latin word. They should be careful, because the order of the words in Latin is not always the same as the order in English! Once the students have made a guess, click the mouse again to reveal the answer: the corresponding English word will now be underlined. Repeat this process until you advance to the next slide, and continue with the story.

2. Discuss why a foundation story is important to a society. How is this story different from our own country’s foundation stories? What can the Romulus and Remus story tell us about the Romans? For example, the story indicates that the Romans were concerned with justice, occasionally became violent in their political struggles, and often considered the country more important than their family.

Practicing the Language

3. Pass out copies of “The Story of Romulus and Remus” handout and “Romulus and Remus Storyboard” worksheet. Have the students work on the storyboard worksheet in teams: they should draw a picture in each square to follow the plot of the story and label each picture with Latin words or phrases from the story (not necessarily making complete sentences). They should use “The Story of Romulus and Remus” handout as a reference when labeling their pictures.

Discussion

- How is the story of Rome’s foundation different from the story of our country’s beginning?
- What does the story of Romulus and Remus tell us about the Romans and their opinions of themselves as a people?
Background Information

Eutropius, Aurelius Victor, and Livy were ancient Roman historians. Eutropius wrote a survey of Roman history from the time of Romulus and Remus until A.D. 364. Aurelius Victor is sometimes considered to have written a set of biographies entitled “About Distinguished Men” (dē Virīs Illūstribus). Livy was one of the most prolific Roman historians: he wrote the Ab Urbe Conditā, which consisted of 142 books and covered the history of Rome from its founding until 9 B.C.

The Capitoline she-wolf sculpture (seen in slide 5 of the slideshow) depicts the she-wolf (lupa) as it is nourishing the young twin boys Romulus and Remus. It is a popular symbol of Roman society, as it represents the humble origins of the state’s founder. Copies of this sculpture may be found all over the city of Rome even today.

The story of Rome’s founding may be called an etiological myth, as it explains the origins of both the state and the society. The civilization derives its name directly from Romulus’ name. Several aspects of Roman culture might be said to derive from this story as well. The two brothers used an augury competition (in which both looked for birds in the distance) to make a decision; throughout much of Roman history, people often turned to augury and other forms of divination in order to determine whether a course of action would be favorable.

The walls were a very important feature of the city, as they protected the residents from enemies on the outside. Once during the early history of Rome, the girl Tarpeia was put to death after she let the enemy inside the city walls.

Just as Romulus resorted to killing his brother over a boundary issue, Roman political struggles often gave way to violence. Sulla, a Roman politician during the early first century B.C., was once driven out of the city by force. However, he soon gathered up an army and marched on the city of Rome to seize power.

The story also shows a concern for justice (the brothers restored their grandfather to power) and the priority of state matters over the family (Romulus killed his brother in order to protect the state). Encourage your students to find more themes in the story and predict values of the society that derive from these themes!
The Story of Romulus and Remus

From Eutropius:

Römānum imperium ā Rōmulō exōrdium habet, quī Rheae Silviae, Vestālis virginis, filius et Mārtis cum Remō frātre ūnō partū ēditus est.

The Roman empire has its beginning from Romulus, the son of Rhea Silvia, a Vestal, and of Mars, who was born in one birth with his twin brother Remus.

From Aurelius Victor:

Proca, rēx Albānōrum, Amūlium et Numitōrem filīōs habuit, quibus rēgnum annuīs vicibus habendum reliquit. sed Amūlius frātrī imperium nōn dedit et ut eum subole privāret, filiam ēius, Rheam Silviam, Vestae sacerdōtem praefēcit quae ā Mārte compressa Remum et Rōmulum ēdidit. Amūlius ipsam in vincula compēgit, parvulōs in Tiberim abiēcit, quōs aqua in siccō reliquit. ad vāgitum lupa accurrit eōsque überibus suīs aluit. mox Faustulus pastor coniugi educándōs dedit. quis postea Amūliō interfectō Numitōri āvō rēgnum restituērunt; īpsī civitātem condiderunt, quam Rōmus augūriō vīctor, quod ipse XII, Remus VI vulturēs vīderat, Rōmam vocāvit.

King Proca of the Albans had two sons: Amulius and Numitor, who inherited the kingdom to reign jointly. But Amulius did not let his brother rule; he made Numitor’s daughter, Rhea Silvia, a priestess of Vesta so that she would not bear him a grandson. But she gave birth to twins, Romulus and Remus, and their father was Mars. Amulius locked her up in chains and cast the small boys into the Tiber River, but the water washed them up onto dry land. A she-wolf ran to them as they cried and nourished them. Soon the shepherd Faustulus picked them up and gave them to his wife to be raised. Afterwards, when Amulius had been killed, they restored the kingdom to their grandfather Numitor. Then they founded a city on their own, which Romulus named Rome, after himself. This was because the brothers had left it up to an augury contest, and Romulus was the winner: Remus saw only six vultures, but Romulus saw twelve.

From Livy:

fāma est lādibriō frātris Remum novōs trānsiluisse mūrōs; inde ab īrātō Rōmulō, cum verbīs quoque increpitāns adīēcisset “sic deinde, quicumque alius transiliet moenia mea,” interfectum.

There is a story that Remus jumped across the new city walls to mock his brother; at that point he was killed by the angry Romulus. Over his brother’s dead body, Romulus yelled these words: “Let everyone die who dares to jump over my walls!”