

**ANCIENT ROME:  
IDENTITY: RAPE OF THE  
SABINE WOMEN**



# ANCIENT ROME: IDENTITY: RAPE OF THE SABINE WOMEN

## Description

Through the investigation of primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the details behind the Rape of the Sabine Women and how the myth became part of the Roman identity and sense of self.

## Subjects

World History, European History, Ancient History, Art, Art History

## Grade Level

11-12

## Duration

90 minutes

## Tour Links

- Forum Romanum, Rome
- Piazza della Signoria, Florence
- Louvre, Paris
- National Gallery, London

## Essential Questions

- Who were the Sabines?
- What is the story of the Rape of the Sabine Women?
- Why is the story of the Rape of the Sabine Women important to understanding the story of the Roman sense of self?
- How have artists over the centuries told the story of the Sabine women through their individual mediums?

## Academic Summary

It was in the fourth month after the founding of the city, as Fabius writes, that the rape of the Sabine women was perpetrated. And some say that Romulus himself, being naturally fond of war, and being persuaded by sundry oracles, too, that it was the destiny of Rome to be nourished and increased by wars till she became the greatest of cities, thereby merely began unprovoked hostilities against the Sabines; for he did not take many maidens, but thirty only, since what he wanted was war rather than marriages. But this is not likely. On the contrary, seeing his city filling up at once with aliens, few of whom had wives, while the greater part of them, being a mixed rabble of needy and obscure persons, were looked down upon and expected to have no strong cohesion; and hoping to make the outrage an occasion for some sort of blending and fellowship with the Sabines after their women had been kindly entreated, he set his hand to the task, and in the following manner...

Some say that only thirty maidens were seized, and that from these the Curiae were named; but Valerius Antias puts the number at five hundred and twenty-seven, and Juba at six hundred and eighty-three, all maidens. And this was the strongest defense which Romulus could make, namely, that they took only one married woman, Hersilia, and her by mistake, since they did not commit the rape out of wantonness, nor even with a desire to do mischief, but with the fixed purpose of uniting and blending the two peoples in the strongest bonds.

*"The Life of Romulus" in Plutarch's Parallel Lives (approx. 75 CE)  
Translated by William Thayer, University of Chicago*

For many Romans, the images of Romulus and Remus are central to their sense of self. Unfortunately, many of the narratives so central to the city's identity are shrouded in myth. One such story is the Rape of the Sabine Women. According to the legend, after Romulus killed Remus and founded the city, Roman men captured and forcibly raped 30 women from a neighboring town, impregnating them and forcing marriage upon the women in order to populate the new city of Rome. Rather than be sickened by the Sabine story, Ancient Romans embraced it, incorporating the Rape of the Sabine Women into their legends.

Little is known of the Sabine people themselves, other than that they were an ancient tribe from somewhere northeast of the Eternal City, and that their entire culture was absorbed into Roman culture after their assimilation. The entire Sabine population was granted full Roman citizenship in 290 BCE.

Through the investigation of primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the details behind the Rape of the Sabine Women and how the myth became part of the Roman identity and sense of self.

## Objectives

1. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the story of the Rape of the Sabines in Roman mythology.
2. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how the myth of the Rape of the Sabines became central to the Roman sense of self.

## Procedure

### I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: How do creation/founding stories help the people in any civilization gain a sense of who they are? Are there any American myths central to who we are? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of documents and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

### II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Story of the Rape of the Sabines and Roman Identity (20 min)
- Video – Myths behind the Story of Rome (5 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the articles and sources on the Rape of the Sabines, along with articles on how artists have portrayed the rape over the centuries, taking notes as appropriate. (30 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of these articles and sources for homework before class.
- Group Activity – Socratic Seminar: Discussion on the Rape of the Sabine Women. (15 min)

### III. Closure

- Exit Ticket / Assessment – Short Essay: Explain in detail how the Roman sense of self was defined, at least in part, by the story of the Rape of the Sabine Women. How have artists portrayed the women over the centuries?

## Extension

### On tour: Piazza della Signoria, Florence

While on tour, you will visit the Piazza della Signoria in Florence, where students will have the opportunity to see for themselves the center of Florence. On the corner of the square is the Loggia dei Lanzi, an open building with a series of wide arches holding up the roof. Inside the Loggia dei Lanzi are some of the most famous statues in Florence, including the Rape of the Sabine Women by Giambologna. This is the most famous of the artistic representations of the rape of the Sabines. Unfortunately, the statue itself is in trouble, as cracks have developed over the years in what was a single piece of marble. Restoration has helped, but has not completely solved the statue's problems.

## Web Links

### Lesson Plan Websites

- [penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Romulus\\*.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Romulus*.html)  
“The Life of Romulus” from Plutarch’s Parallel Lives at the University of Chicago website
- [www.stoa.org/diotima/anthology/wlgr/wlgr-privatelife233.shtml](http://www.stoa.org/diotima/anthology/wlgr/wlgr-privatelife233.shtml)  
Women’s Life in Greece & Rome: Private Life: the Rape of the Sabine Women
- [louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/rape-sabine-women](http://louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/rape-sabine-women)  
The Rape of the Sabine Women by Nicholas Poussin (oil painting on canvas) – Louvre Museum in Paris website
- [abcgallery.com/P/picasso/picasso65.html](http://abcgallery.com/P/picasso/picasso65.html)  
The Rape of the Sabine Women by Pablo Picasso (oil on canvas) – Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
- [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parallel\\_Lives](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parallel_Lives)  
Plutarch’s Parallel Lives – Wikipedia article
- [bluffton.edu/~sullivanm/lanzi/lanzi2.html](http://bluffton.edu/~sullivanm/lanzi/lanzi2.html)  
The Rape of the Sabine Women (statue in Florence, Italy) – on the Bluffton University (OH) Digital Imaging Project website. Fantastic website for history and art teachers.
- [scholarworks.gsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1041&context=history\\_theses](http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1041&context=history_theses)  
“A Sacred People: Roman Identity in the Age of Augustus” (2010) History Thesis, paper 40 at the Georgia State University Digital Archive website. Good paper linking Romulus and Remus to the development of Roman identity under Emperor Augustus. Although this paper is certainly too long for most students, there is good information here; especially valuable for teachers in planning for this lesson.
- [class.uh.edu/mcl/classics/rom/livy.html](http://class.uh.edu/mcl/classics/rom/livy.html)  
“Myths of Heroes – The Mythic Foundation of Rome.” Selected passages from Livy’s History of Rome – excerpts from Livy’s masterpiece specifically dealing with Romulus.
- [teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1](http://teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1)  
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video) – great 2 minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA – highly recommended for teachers.
- [nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/peter-paul-rubens-the-rape-of-the-sabine-women](http://nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/peter-paul-rubens-the-rape-of-the-sabine-women)  
The Rape of the Sabine Women (oil on canvas) by Peter Paul Rubens – The National Gallery (UK) website
- [slideshare.net/rfern/ancient-rome-1456519](http://slideshare.net/rfern/ancient-rome-1456519)  
Ancient Rome PowerPoint
- [youtube.com/watch?v=jToagTve4hs](http://youtube.com/watch?v=jToagTve4hs)  
Myths and Legends – The Founding of Rome (video)

## **Background Information**

- [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rape\\_of\\_the\\_Sabine\\_Women](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rape_of_the_Sabine_Women)  
“The Rape of the Sabine Women” – Wikipedia article.
- [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Seven\\_Hills\\_of\\_Rome.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Seven_Hills_of_Rome.svg)  
Map of the Seven Hills of Rome – Wikipedia image
- [passports.com/group\\_leaders/on\\_the\\_road/italy/country\\_profile](https://passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/italy/country_profile)  
On the Road: Italy (country profile) – from Passports Educational Travel
- [passports.com/group\\_leaders/on\\_the\\_road/italy/rome](https://passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/italy/rome)  
On the Road: Rome – from Passports Educational Travel
- [passports.com/group\\_leaders/on\\_the\\_road/italy/florence\\_sightseeing](https://passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/italy/florence_sightseeing)  
On the Road: Florence sightseeing – from Passports Educational Travel

## **Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans**

- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/italy/ancient-rome-rape-of-the-sabine-women](https://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/ancient-rome-rape-of-the-sabine-women)  
Ancient Rome – Rape of the Sabine Women
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/italy/ancient-rome-romulus-and-remus](https://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/ancient-rome-romulus-and-remus)  
Ancient Rome – Romulus and Remus
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/italy/roman-republic-punic-wars](https://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/roman-republic-punic-wars)  
Roman Republic (509 BCE – 27 BCE) – Punic Wars
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/italy/roman-empire-nero-and-the-great-fire-64CE](https://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/roman-empire-nero-and-the-great-fire-64CE)  
Roman Empire – Great Fire of Rome 64 CE
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/italy/roman-empire-pompeii-eruption](https://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/roman-empire-pompeii-eruption)  
Roman Empire – Pompeii and Herculaneum 79 CE
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/italy/roman-empire-pompeii-villa-of-the-mysteries](https://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/roman-empire-pompeii-villa-of-the-mysteries)  
Roman Empire – Pompeii: Villa of the Mysteries
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/italy/roman-empire-pax-romana](https://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/roman-empire-pax-romana)  
Roman Empire – Pax Romana
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/england/roman-britannia](https://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/roman-britannia)  
Roman Britannia – An Overview
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/england/roman-britain-hadrians-wall](https://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/roman-britain-hadrians-wall)  
Roman Britannia – Hadrian’s Wall
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/france/roman-gaul-gallic-wars](https://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/roman-gaul-gallic-wars)  
Roman Gaul – The Gallic Wars: Caesar’s Greatest Triumph
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/spain/hannibal-barca-of-carthage-second-punic-war](https://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/spain/hannibal-barca-of-carthage-second-punic-war)  
Hannibal of Carthage: Enemy of Rome

- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/turkey/byzantine-istanbul-constantinople](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/turkey/byzantine-istanbul-constantinople)  
Byzantine Empire – Constantinople: New Rome

### **Key Terms**

- Livy (Titus Livius Patavinus)
- Plutarch (Lucius Mestrius Plutarchus)
- Romulus and Remus
- Sabines
- Sense of Self
- Women in Ancient Rome

