

**ANCIENT ROME:  
IDENTITY: ROMULUS  
AND REMUS**



# ANCIENT ROME: IDENTITY: ROMULUS AND REMUS

## 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 story of Romulus and Remus. The mythical/historical narrative behind the founding of the Eternal City, and how the myth of Romulus and Remus is central to understanding how Romans saw (and still see) their sense of identity, and why these stories are important to the development of western civilization.

## Subjects

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

## Grade Level

11-12

## Duration

90 minutes

## Tour Links

- Forum Romanum, Rome
- Capitoline Museums
- Palatine Hill
- Aventine Hill

## Essential Questions

- Who were Romulus and Remus? Why are they linked to stories of Mars and a she-wolf?
- What is the story of the Founding of Rome by Romulus in 753 BCE?
- Why is the story of Romulus and Remus important to understanding the story of the Roman sense of self?

## Academic Summary

When Remus knew of the deceit, he was enraged, and as Romulus was digging a trench where his city's wall was to run, he ridiculed some parts of the work, and obstructed others. At last, when he leaped across it, he was smitten (by Romulus himself, as some say; according to others, by Celer, one of his companions), and fell dead there...

Romulus buried Remus, together with his foster-fathers, in the Remonia, and then set himself to building his city, after summoning from Tuscany men who prescribed all the details in accordance with certain sacred ordinances and writings, and taught them to him as in religious rite. A circular trench was dug around what is now the Comitium, and in this were deposited the first-fruits of all things the use of which was sanctioned by custom as good and by nature as necessary; and finally, every man brought a small portion of the soil of his native land, and these were cast in among the first-fruits and mingled with them. They call this trench, as they do the heavens, by the name of "mundus." Then, taking this as a centre, they marked out the city in a circle round it. And the founder, having shod a plough with a brazen ploughshare, and having yoked to it a bull and a cow, himself drove a deep furrow round the boundary lines, while those who followed after him had to turn the clods, which the plough threw up, inwards towards the city, and suffer no clod to lie turned outwards. 3 With this line they mark out the course of the wall, and it is called, by contraction, "pomerium," that is, "post murum," behind or next the wall. And where they purposed to put in a gate, there they took the share out of the ground, lifted the plough over, and left a vacant space. And this is the reason why they regard all the wall as sacred except the gates; but if they held the gates sacred, it would not be possible, without religious scruples, to bring into and send out of the city things which are necessary, and yet unclean.

Now it is agreed that the city was founded on the twenty-first of April, and this day the Romans celebrate with a festival, calling it the birthday of their country.

*"The Life of Romulus" in Plutarch's Parallel Lives (approx. 75 CE)*

*Translated by William Thayer, University of Chicago*

For most Romans, the images of Romulus and Remus are central to the story of the founding of the city. Unfortunately, the narrative, so central to the city's identity, is shrouded in myth. Were the twins descended from Mars (who, it is said, raped their mother), the Roman god of war? Were they orphaned and suckled by a she-wolf? Did Romulus kill Remus? If so, why did he do it? Perhaps more importantly, why would Romans choose to link their very sense of self to a man who had murdered his brother? Through the investigation of primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the details behind the story of Romulus and Remus, the mythical/historical narrative behind the founding of the Eternal City, and how the myth of Romulus and Remus is central to understanding how Romans saw (and still see) their sense of identity, and why these stories are important to the development of western civilization.

## Objectives

1. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the story of Romulus and Remus in Roman mythology.
2. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the story of how Romulus and Remus founded the city of Rome and why Romulus killed Remus.
3. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how the myth of Romulus and Remus 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 that are 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 Romulus and Remus (20 min)
- Video – Romulus and Remus (5 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the articles and sources from Livy and Plutarch on Romulus and Remus, 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 Romulus and Remus – how and why did Romans use this story to help define their sense of self? (15 min)

### III. Closure

- Exit Ticket / Assessment – Essay: Explain in detail how the Roman sense of self was defined, at least in part, by the story of Romulus and Remus.

## Extension

### On tour: Capitoline Museums

While on tour, students can see images of Romulus and Remus suckling on the She-Wolf all over the city. They are on gravesites, buildings, street posts, and even soccer shirts. To see the statue that inspires these images, go to the Musei Capitolini (Capitoline Museums) on Capitoline Hill (overlooking the Forum) and have students find the “Capitoline Wolf.” Scholars and art historians cannot agree on when it was made. Some say it is from the ancient Etruscans, while others believe it is from the middle ages. With such a huge date range, the debate goes on.

## 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
- [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.
- [www.class.uh.edu/mcl/classics/rom/livy.html](http://www.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.
- [www.mariamilani.com/ancient\\_rome/Romulus\\_and\\_Remus.htm](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/Romulus_and_Remus.htm)  
Romulus and Remus website
- [www.slideshare.net/rfern/ancient-rome-1456519](http://www.slideshare.net/rfern/ancient-rome-1456519)  
Ancient Rome PowerPoint
- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=jToagTve4hs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jToagTve4hs)  
Myths and Legends – The Founding of Rome (video)
- [project-history.blogspot.com/2009/03/romulus-and-remus-mythical-founding-of.html](http://project-history.blogspot.com/2009/03/romulus-and-remus-mythical-founding-of.html)  
Project History website – “Romulus and Remus – The Mythical Founding of Rome”
- [www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1](http://www.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.

### Background Information

- [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romulus\\_and\\_Remus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romulus_and_Remus)  
“Romulus and Remus” – Wikipedia article
- [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Seven\\_Hills\\_of\\_Rome.svg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Seven_Hills_of_Rome.svg)  
Map of the Seven Hills of Rome – Wikipedia image
- [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parallel\\_Lives](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parallel_Lives)  
Plutarch’s Parallel Lives – Wikipedia article
- [www.passports.com/group\\_leaders/on\\_the\\_road/italy/country\\_profile](http://www.passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/italy/country_profile)  
On the Road: Italy (country profile) – from Passports Educational Travel
- [www.passports.com/group\\_leaders/on\\_the\\_road/italy/rome](http://www.passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/italy/rome)  
On the Road: Rome – from Passports Educational Travel

## Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans

- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/italy/ancient-rome-rape-of-the-sabine-women](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/roman-empire-pax-romana)  
Roman Empire – Pax Romana
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/england/roman-britannia](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/roman-britannia)  
Roman Britannia – An Overview
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/england/roman-britain-hadrians-wall](http://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](http://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](http://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

- Augury
- Livy (Titus Livius Patavinus)
- Plutarch (Lucius Mestrius Plutarchus)
- Romulus and Remus
- She-wolf
- Sense of Self
- Tiber River

