

Teaching notes on MCR: Curse tablets

Slide 1

Learning objective: To make a replica Latin curse (or blessing) tablet. This lesson shows students about the *defixiones* found at the Roman baths in Bath and then goes on to show how to make some replica curses or blessings.

Slide 2

The slide shows a map of Britain, mouse-click brings up the location and name of Aquae Sulis. A town that was very important in Roman Britain, but it has a different name today – what is it? [mouse click - Bath]. Another mouse-click brings up a picture of the Roman Baths, one of the reasons it was such an important town. The baths were first built around 60CE and they're still there today. Mouse-click brings up a picture of the spring that feeds the baths. The water comes up hot from the ground, and for this reason both the Romans and the Britons thought that it was sacred.

Slide 3

When excavating the area around the spring in the 1970s and 1980s, archaeologists found little folded strips of metal. When they unfolded them, they found that they were covered in Latin writing. When they translated them, they discovered that they were curses (*defixiones*), thrown into the spring as a plea to the local goddess to make them come true. On mouse-click, we see the translation of one curse. What do you think has happened here to make someone write this curse? [someone has stolen a ring] Mouse-click brings up another curse translation. What do you think has happened here? [Somebody has lost their girlfriend Vilbia to another suitor!]

Slide 4



The next six slides run through the process of making our own *defixio*, but since we may not need to curse anyone in our lives (hopefully!), we can use the same technique to cast a benediction, or blessing. NB benediction = to speak well, malediction = to speak badly of someone.

This slide demonstrates the first step, using the Curse Generator to make a curse or benediction. Pupils choose an addressee from the first column, an adverb from the second and a verb from the third to make a curse.

Slide 5

Step 2: Using your whiteboard and marker, practice writing the curse/blessing in mirror writing. Mouse-click illustrates how mirror writing works by imagining a mirror reflecting the letters. The example on this slide says 'soror fortiter spera'. Some pupils take to mirror-

writing immediately, others need help. For those really struggling, they can use a piece of plain paper held against a window to check, rather than a whiteboard.

Slide 6

Another example of mirror writing, which reinforces that it's not just written back-to-front, but from right to left.

Slide 7

Step 3: Once you're happy with your mirror-written curse/blessing, use a very sharp pencil on a stack of newspaper or a magazine (to protect the table) to copy it out onto your slip of metal. The slips of metal come from one of these disposable roasting trays, or you can use old takeaway containers

Slide 8

Step 4: Flip the metal slip over to see the curse. If you've not pressed hard enough, or if your pencil is a bit blunt, you may need to go over the writing again to make a stronger indentation. Faster pupils can decorate their *defixio* with patterns or simple pictures (the example blessing here shows a heart). If you can get your class to part with their *defixiones*, they make a lovely display.

Slide 9

The plenary which takes the form of a set of questions:

Question 1 Can you name an English adverb? What about a Latin one?

Question 2 What's another English word for a blessing? [benediction]

Question 3 What did you write on your metal tablet? What does it mean in English? Is it a curse or a blessing? [a great chance for the class to share their work!]

