

Teaching notes on MCR: The Roman army

Slide 1

Learning objective: To discover what made the Roman army so effective and to make a mini onager (catapult).

Slide 2

Here's a map showing the size of the Roman Empire at its height in 117 C.E. (mouse-click shows the distance from border to border). Ask the class what they think one of the main reasons might have been for the Romans managing to have such a huge empire. There are always some fantastic answers from the pupils here, but someone almost always hits the nail on the head: they had an amazing army.

The Roman army was so amazing that when the Romans invaded other countries, their army often took on forces much, much larger and still won.

Slide 3

Three of the reasons why the Roman army were so successful.

1. They were big – at the height of the Empire, the army was made up of both Roman citizens and non-citizens from provinces in the Empire.
2. They were well-organised. There was a clear structure of organising the army into legions (4,000–6,000 men), cohorts (about 480 men) and centuries (about 80 men, led by a centurion). Their organisation also extended to precise battle manoeuvres in which the soldiers would be drilled, such as the testudo (tortoise), where soldiers would form their shields into a 'shell' to protect the fighting group.



3. They had impressive armour, weapons and battle tech, which we'll explore on the next slide.

Slide 4

Ask your students to look at this picture of a Roman soldier and try to list the seven things that make him an effective soldier. On mouse-click, they'll be revealed one by one. NB the shield is as much weapon as defence with the big metal boss in the middle. It's also cleverly

curved to protect more of the body. And shoes are listed as a critical piece of kit – you can't invade anywhere if you can't walk!

Subsequent mouse-clicks show some of the Roman army's also amazing war machines. Mouse-click shows the aries ('a-ree-ayss', battering ram). 'Aries' actually means 'ram' (as in male sheep), and the illustration shows how some of them actually were shaped like ram's heads (or were even topped with a ram's skull). This is why 'ram' in English has its two meanings. Aries is also the Ram in astrology. Next mouse-click shows the ballista, a machine a bit like a giant crossbow or trebuchet. The last mouse-click shows the onager ('onn-ay-gur', literally 'wild donkey'), essentially a huge catapult for throwing missiles at the enemy.

Slides 5—6

These slides guide the pupils through making a mini onager. The pupil worksheet also has the instructions written on it (as well as the optional cut-outs of the characters). Scrunched up pieces of paper make good missiles, as do mini marshmallows.

Slide 7

The plenary slide:

Question 1 How many miles would you need to go to journey from the very top to the very bottom of the Roman Empire at its height? [about 2,500 miles]

Question 2 Name one element of the Roman soldier's armour or weapons that made him so deadly. [sword, javelin, dagger, shield (which could be used as a weapon)]

Question 3 What is the name of the weapon you made today? [onager, which means 'wild donkey']