

Teaching notes on MCR: Time

Slide 1

Learning objective: To discover how the Romans measured and described time, and to see how we have inherited some features of this in modern times

Slide 2

A warm-up game of Word Roots Challenge showing some Latin vocabulary for time-related words.

On mouse-click, an English derivative (and its definition) of one of these Latin words will appear on the screen. Pupils have to work out from which one the English word is derived. On second mouse-click, the English word will make its way to its root word. As an extension, pupils can explain the connection between the root word and its English derivative, or even think of more English words deriving from the Latin ones.

Slides 3-5

A few enquiry questions to frame our exploration of how both we and the Romans conceptualise and describe time.

Slide 3: The first question, “Why is a year the length it is?” is accompanied by a picture clue. On mouse-click, the answer will be revealed, namely that a year is the amount of time it takes the Earth to orbit the Sun.

Slide 4: “Why is the day the length it is?” is also a question with an astronomical explanation. Again, a picture clue appears and then an explanation on mouse-click. Interestingly, there is no reason for the day to be divided into 24 hours – this is a man-made convention.

Slide 5: “How do we measure time in a day?” should be something with which students are familiar as they’ll likely know about the twelve and twenty-four hour clock systems. Of course, the standardisation of time is something that could only happen once accurate clocks were built, from about the 14th Century CE. The Latin roots of the terms ‘a.m.’ and ‘p.m.’ are explained, which leads us on to...

Slide 6

...a visual representation of how the Romans divided their day (‘dies’) into twelve hours, a convention that exists to this day. However, the Romans started counting their hours from when light first appeared. This is because of the technology they used to measure the passing of time, which relied on sunlight.

Slide 7

The Romans' use of sundials is explained in this slide, with mouse-clicks showing how sundials work. This does of course mean that hours were longer in summer when the days are longer in the northern hemisphere (and shorter in the winter).

Slide 8

Broadening out from how the hours of the day are measured, we now think about how we define our days of the week. In modern time, our seven days of the week come from the Norse tradition, which we be shown in detail on mouse-click.

Slide 9

This is in fact based on a Roman tradition, and here are the names of the seven Roman days of the week. We have even kept the Roman god Saturn in the modern name 'Saturday'.

Slide 10

...shows a fabulous wall painting from Pompeii, where many paintings, architecture and artefacts were preserved by the volcanic eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE. These depictions of gods sit above a shop entrance to show which days of the week the shop was open.



Students can try to work out from the visual clues which days the shop was open. Answers are revealed one-by-one on mouse-click.

Slide 11

Zooming out another level, we now look at months of the year. This time we'll go straight into looking at the Roman months as we still use these in Anglicised form today. Mouse-click animations explain the changes to the Roman calendar which have resulted in September ('seventh month'), October ('eighth month'), November ('ninth month') and December ('tenth month') now being the ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth months.

Slide 12

Students are asked to think about how we define the year we're in. On mouse-clicks, the students are led through the development of this system. The system we're used to is based in the Christian tradition, but there are many cultures and nations that have different systems for dating the year, such as the Islamic and Jewish faiths, and countries such as China, Japan and Bangladesh. An interesting extension/homework task could be to research these different year dating systems.

Slide 13

Romans had a couple of different ways of defining the year they were in. One is similar to the way we do it today, but instead of taking the birth of Jesus as year zero, they place this date at the founding of Rome in 753 BCE. This date is expressed as 'Ad Urbe Condita' or 'AUC'. Another way of indicating the year is to refer to it by the highest ranking person at the time. In the Republic, this was the consuls, and during the Empire, this was the emperor. The Romans were very good at keeping public records (known as 'fasti') and so had a reliable record of who was in power and when.



The pupils are then cued on to their written task, where they need to match up some time-related English vocabulary to its meaning using lesson recall or etymological clues.

Slide 14

The plenary slide:

Question 1 Which Roman god gave their name to the month we now call January?
[Janus/Janus] What was he the god of? [doorways and transitions, and it's also where we get the English word 'janitor']

Question 2 What does p.m. stand for and what does it mean? [post meridiem, after midday]

Question 3 Name one famous Roman who had a month named in their honour. [Julius Caesar (July), Caesar Augustus (August)]

A note on writing modern dates in Latin

As you can see from the above lesson, writing a modern date in an authentically Roman style would be very difficult because you would have to both change the year date to AUC by adding 753 and also use the Roman convention of fixing a point in the month in relation to the beginning (the Kalends) or the middle (the Ides). A good compromise is to express the modern day of the month in Latin or numerically in Roman numerals and to write the modern year in Roman numerals. Here's a table to help:

day of the week	day of month (choose numeral or ordinal)		Month ('of')	year
	numeral	ordinal (f to agree with dies)		
dies Lunae	I	prima	Ianuarii	MMXXIII
dies Martis	II	secunda	Februarii	MMXXIV
dies Mercurii	III	tertia	Martis	MMXXV
dies Iovis	IV	quarta	Aprilis	MMXXVI
dies Veneris	V	quinta	Maii	MMXXVII
dies Saturni	VI	sexta	Iunii	MMXXVIII
dies Solis	VIII	septima	Iulii	MMXXIX
	IX	nona	Augusti	MMXXX
	X	decima	Septembris	
	XI	nona	Octobris	
	XII	duodecima	Novembris	
	XIII	tertia decima	Decembris	
	XIV	quarta decima		
	XV	quinta decima		
	XVI	sexta decima		
	XVII	septima decima		
	XVIII	duodevicensima		
	XIX	undevicensima		
	XX	vicensima		
	XXI	vicensima prima		
	XXII	vicensima secunda		
	XXIII	vicensima tertia		
	XXIV	vicensima quarta		
	XXV	vicensima quinta		
	XXVI	vicensima sexta		
	XXVII	vicensima septima		
	XXVIII	duodetricesima		
	XXIX	unodetricesima		
	XXX	tricesima		
	XXXI	tricesima prima		

Some examples:

Thursday 6th July 2023

- Dies Iovis sexta Iulii MMXXIII
- VI Iulii MMXXIII
- VI.VIII. MMXXIII

December 25th 2024

- Dies Mercurii vicensima quinta Decembris MMXXIV
- XXV Decembris MMXXIV
- XXV.XXII.MMXXIV