



## What did the Romans eat?

In this activity children will discuss how people in the past grew, prepared and preserved their food and will do an experiment to compare different ways of preparing food. They will then prepare a “feast” using Roman recipes.

The activity encourages children to think about where the food they eat comes from and how it gets to them. They will also think about how food and cooking is different now to how it was in the past. They find out about how food was transported, thinking about trade routes and methods of transportation, and how food was preserved before the advent of refrigeration. For example the Romans transported oysters in barrels of mud and salt water which meant they could travel great distances but still be fresh and edible. Finally the activity provides the children with some basic Roman recipes to try, either in the classroom or at home.

This activity goes well with the ‘Roman Poo’ activity.

### You will need:

- Modern food packaging detailing country of origin
- Traded goods worksheet
- Outline maps of the world
- Coloured pencils
- Salt
- Lemon juice
- A warm room / heat lamp or oven
- Trays
- Petri Dishes
- Apple or other hard fruit
- Ingredients for Roman recipes - see individual recipe lists.

### Activity:

Begin by asking the children what they have eaten today. Where did the foods come from? If the reply is Tesco's draw out where the foods would have come from originally – looking at packaging with countries of origin on it will help here. Ask the children to think about who grew or produced the food. Do they grow any foods at home? How would people in the past have produced their food? Would they have had foods from other countries? What do they think people in the past ate? Did they eat the same foods as we do today?

Look through the Roman recipes. Where would the ingredients have come from? Could they have all been grown or produced in Roman Britain? Items such as the dates couldn't have been grown here due to our climate, so how would they have been brought here? Look at the list of other traded items and plot on the outline maps where goods were traded from in the Roman empire. How do the children think goods would have been brought over land, what about over the sea? What happens to food if it is left for a long time? How do we keep food fresh today? Draw out the ideas of refrigeration, pickling, drying, vacuum packing, smoking and canning. Would all of these methods have been available to people in the past?

Prepare some thin slices of apple or other suitable fruit and explain that you are going to experiment with how food may have been preserved in the past. In a Petri dish cover one slice with lemon juice, one slice with salt, place one slice under a heat lamp/in a low temperature oven or on a warm window sill and leave another out in the room with no treatments. What do the children predict will happen over the course of one or two weeks? Keep a record of observations. Which was the most successful method? Why might this be? Draw out the ideas that foods need to either have moisture taken out of them (smoking, drying or salt methods), air excluded from them (vacuum packing, canning) or have some method of slowing/halting the process of decay (pickling, acidic conditions or refrigeration).

Finally, prepare the Roman dishes and taste them! You may wish to eat them as if you were at a Roman banquet. To do this you will need to organise the room with three low couches (benches could be used) arranged in a u shape around a central low table. The fourth side is left open so slaves can serve the guests. Three people would recline on the couches supporting themselves on their left elbows. Each guest brought their own napkins, one to wear around their neck whilst the other was placed alongside their dish for them to wipe their fingers on. The Romans didn't use forks and instead ate with their fingers, using spoons for sauces and knives for spearing and cutting meat.

### Useful questions:

- Why does food rot?
- How did people in the past stop food from rotting?
- Where did people buy goods?
- How do different people around the world eat their food? (e.g. with cutlery, with fingers, with chopsticks)

### Research Opportunities:

- Further work could be done on the design and construction of boats, carts and other modes of transporting goods
- Compare the Roman period with other time periods, discussing what kind of foods were available and where they were traded from and to
- Research when different foodstuffs (including plants and animals) were introduced into Britain. Which foods did the Romans bring with them? What new foods and plants became available when explorers discovered the Americas?

## Useful Websites:

[www.historyonthenet.com/Romans/food.htm](http://www.historyonthenet.com/Romans/food.htm)  
[www.hadrians.com/rome/romans/food/roman\\_dinner.html](http://www.hadrians.com/rome/romans/food/roman_dinner.html)  
[http://romans-in-britain.org.uk/arl\\_roman\\_cooking-pt1.htm](http://romans-in-britain.org.uk/arl_roman_cooking-pt1.htm)  
[www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/romanway\\_recipes.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/romanway_recipes.shtml)  
[www.historyonthenet.com/Romans/trade.htm](http://www.historyonthenet.com/Romans/trade.htm)

	National Curriculum	QCA Unit
<b>KS 1</b>	Geography: 2c, d; 3e History: 2b; 4a, b; 6b D&T: 2f; 5c	D&T: 1C
<b>KS 2</b>	Geography: 2c, d; 3g; 7 History: 2a, b; 4a, b; 6; 8a; 9 Citizenship: 2j; 4b D&T: 2f; 5c	History: Unit 6 Geography: unit 9 Citizenship: Unit 5 D&T: 3B; 5B; 5D

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## creativeminds

The Creative Minds project works with museums libraries and archives across the Yorkshire region, to provide young people with learning opportunities in Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths (S.T.E.M.). This ground-breaking project is the first of its kind in the country and is managed by MLA Yorkshire. This pack was developed by Creative Minds with funding from Yorkshire Forward.

