



Roman 'text' messaging!

Today, if we want to send a message over a distance quickly we can use a mobile phone or email. In Roman times you would have to do some kind of signalling. The Roman army used several systems including torches. Signalling points would be placed on high ground and then a message relayed to each station using a code until the message reached its destination; a message that would take a couple of hours if sent with a messenger would be sent in minutes! The Roman Polybius suggested that words should be abbreviated to speed up the sending of messages. Is this the earliest record of texting? This activity gives you an opportunity to send a 'Roman text message' using flags.

You have:

Sheets of A4 card
Felt tips or crayons
Sellotape
Scissors
Garden canes/thin sticks
Pens

Activity

Make the flags

- Cut card into a triangular shape (diagonally across an A4 sheet, any smaller is too small to see)
- Decorate the flags if desired
- Secure the triangle flag to the garden cane using sellotape

Send a message

Divide into two groups. The first group, A, should have at least 3-5 people and the other, B, at least 1-2.

Both groups should look at the coded grid key —this is a copy of a real grid used by ancient Romans to send messages. There are numbers running across the top and down the side, with rows of letters covering the alphabet (except Z which the Romans did not use).

For each letter of your message you want to send team A will need to hold up two sets of flags.

Team A, choose a team captain to command the flag bearers and have a go at sending one letter. Let's choose 'H'. Using the grid, work out the co-ordinates of that letter. It should be III (3) and II (2). So your team will need to hold up first 3 flags and then 2 flags. The captain, to help you send the letter 'H' could say in a clear commanding voice '3' and team members 1-3 need to hold up their flags, then pause for a second and say 'down' to tell them to point their flags at the floor again. Then the captain should say '2' and team members 1 & 2 hold up their flags and then the captain says 'down' again. You could think of a sign to show that you are finishing or starting a word.

Team B who are receiving the message should write on the recording page the numbers of flags shown and work out on the grid which letter has been sent using co-ordinates. This will require good communication and teamwork!

Now try sending a whole message.

Useful Questions

- Imagine you are in the Roman army and you want to send a message to a neighbouring fort, what would you ask for?
- If you are feeling really adventurous, perhaps you would like to try some Latin words?
- Think about where you live. Each signal station needs a clear view to the next one. If you were using this system to send a message from your home to your school, where would you put the signal stations?

	National Curriculum	QCA Schemes of work/List of topics
KS 1	Mathematics, Ma2	Interpreting data
	Literacy En2	Skills – increasing vocabulary
	History 1, 2, 3, 4, 6	N/A
KS 2	Mathematics, Ma2	Interpreting data, Coordinates
	Literacy En2	Skills – increasing vocabulary
	History 1, 2, 3, 4, 9	Unit 6A

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



Roman signalling key

First flag	I	II	III (3)	IV	V
Second flag	(1)	(2)		(4)	(5)
I (1)	A	B	C	D	E
II (2)	F	G	H	I	J
III (3)	K	L	M	N	O
IV (4)	P	Q	R	S	T
V (5)	U	V	W	X	Y

Message record sheet

Record how many flags you have seen for each letter.

Letter 1	.....flags	.....flags	letter.....
Letter 2	.....flags	.....flags	letter.....
Letter 3	.....flags	.....flags	letter.....
Letter 4	.....flags	.....flags	letter.....
Letter 5	.....flags	.....flags	letter.....
Letter 6	.....flags	.....flags	letter.....
Letter 7	.....flags	.....flags	letter.....
Letter 8	.....flags	.....flags	letter.....
Letter 9	.....flags	.....flags	letter.....
Letter 10	.....flags	.....flags	letter.....
Letter 11	.....flags	.....flags	letter.....
Letter 12	.....flags	.....flags	letter.....
Letter 13	.....flags	.....flags	letter.....
Letter 14flagsflags	letter.....
Letter 15flagsflags	letter.....

The message is:

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Roman Numerals

I 1

II 2

III 3

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