

# Everything You Need to Know

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## OVERVIEW

In this two-phase project, students research Roman dress of late first century B.C.E./early first century C.E. Italy and create small-scale versions of clothing for cloth dolls (or teddy bears) or life-size clothing for themselves. Teachers can adapt the project and focus on the costume of other cultures for which reliable evidence exists.

The project is especially suited to a Latin or History class. Students first learn about Roman dress and collect information about specific types of clothing and accessories. Then they gain hands-on experience making clothing and accessories for a particular “Roman person.” Explicit instructions about materials, patterns, and techniques are provided here to make the effort less daunting. Through reference to trade, travel, the military, sports, slavery, and more, the teacher can incorporate multicultural accoutrements and address multiple perspectives.

A follow-up lesson takes students through composing Latin dialogues and performing scenes of Roman daily life using the dressed dolls or teddy bears as puppets.

## GRADE LEVELS

This activity was designed for seventh graders (ages 12–13), but can easily be adapted for other age groups. For younger students, the teacher can provide pertinent dress and status information rather than require research. Older students can be given increased responsibility for research quality and authenticity. High-school students might clothe bears as awards for younger students or create life-size garments for wearing to a Roman Feast (see *Reclining and Dining: A Greco-Roman Feast*) or to Junior Classical League conventions.

## GOALS

Students will develop an appreciation for the etiquette of Roman dress and understand how clothing and accoutrements communicate age, gender, job, and status within society. They will become comfortable identifying, producing, and handling items of Roman costume (or that of another chosen culture), and learn Roman social stratigraphy and the ways social status determined daily activities and affected interpersonal relationships. Students will also gain an appreciation for historic recreation based on archaeological evidence. The

teacher may choose to focus on developing students’ research techniques and Latin ability.

## MATERIALS AND PREPARATION

See the lesson for a detailed list of supplies. Tom Tierney’s *Greek and Roman Fashions* (Dover, 2001) is an inexpensive coloring book with a variety of clear images, and Barbara F. McManus’s *Virtual Roma* website (<http://www.vroma.org/~bmcmanus/clothing.html>) provides an interactive exploration of dress, social rank, and family. Both are invaluable classroom resources.

## Supplies

- 12” dolls or teddy bears (these come in a variety of styles and colors)
- fabric suited to different types of clothing and clothing quality.
- ribbon, cord, and yarn
- adhesives (low temperature glue guns and/or tacky glue)
- markers
- sewing supplies and sewing box
- miscellaneous notions and craft supplies, limited only by the teacher’s imagination, such as twigs, straw, and aluminum foil

## BASIC PROCEDURES

### Learning about Roman dress

Once you have introduced the basic elements of dress, the typical members of a family, and the basic levels of Roman society (2 days), assign each student a “Roman person” from the following: slave, young girl, upper class boy under 14, married woman, adult male citizen, and senator (incorporate additional characters as desired). Distribute the student handout, patterns, and *Grading Rubric* and go over them as a class, clearly establishing expectations and project goals (1 day). In class and as homework, students will begin to gather information about the dress, social level, and daily activities of their assigned person, keeping track of their sources, preferably in bibliographic format (3–4 days). Students submit a detailed list of clothing and accessories relevant to their character, including information about colors and materials, using appropriate Latin terminology and explaining what each item communicates to society.

## LESSON PLANS

**Making the clothing**

Day 1: for the “hands-on” phase, provide the students with cloth dolls (or teddy bears) and a pattern. Costumes can be sewed, glued, or some combination of the two. All students must create a *tunica*. Using the pattern, students cut the basic 8” x 11” *tunica* from cloth such as homespun or muslin. They fold the cloth in half crosswise to make a rectangle of half the length of the entire piece of cloth.

Day 2: using a simple running stitch, students sew the side seams from the base of the armhole down. A width of two to three fingers (approx. 1–1½ inch) is a good measure for the armhole. The width of a pinky finger (approx. ¼–½ inch) from the side edge of the *tunica* is a good measure for the side hem. Students must be reminded to work on the wrong side of the garment and reverse it to hide the seams. To cut the neck hole, students fold the garment in half lengthwise, find the center, and snip off a SMALL triangle of fabric from the top of the center fold. They may use a shallow “v” or semi-circular shape, starting out with a small cut and increasing the size as needed.

Day 3: students hem the sleeves, neck, and armholes using a simple running stitch. Then they dress the doll, tying and blousing the *tunica* with thin cord or rope appropriate to their character’s status.

Days 4–6: from here on, students work in groups according to their characters. They continue to create external garments and accessories based on their own research or information provided by the teacher (and their imaginations), using stitches, low temperature glue guns, and craft supplies.

**FOLLOWING UP**

Latin teachers may want to use the dolls as puppets or performers in plays written by the students. For display purposes, students can also describe their character on a placard or write conversational Latin phrases in a balloon to be mounted over their dolls.