

Dolls in Tunics & Teddies in Togas: A Roman Costume Project

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OVERVIEW

Students research Roman dress and create small-scale versions of clothing for cloth dolls or teddy bears in this two-phase project, especially suited to a Latin or History class. We provide explicit instructions about materials, patterns, and techniques to make the teacher's effort less daunting. Students first learn about Roman dress and collect information about clothing and accessories. Then they gain hands-on experience making *tunicae*, *togae*, *pallae*, *stolae*, *soleae*, and accessories. Students ultimately develop an appreciation for the etiquette of Roman dress and an understanding of the relationship between clothes, gender, and status in the Roman Empire.

Although this project focuses on Roman clothing of late first century B.C.E./early first century C.E. Italy, for which a great variety of evidence exists, the teacher can instead address the costume of other times and cultures for which reliable evidence exists, including Etruscan, Republican, and Byzantine. Through reference to trade, travel, military interaction, and slavery, the teacher can also incorporate multicultural perspectives. Students can research Roman cultural contact outside Italy for a given period, select appropriate characters, and outfit their dolls with regional clothing and accessories. Some may wish to focus on the costumes and accoutrements of soldiers, equestrians, and gladiators. A follow-up project takes students through composing Latin dialogues to performing scenes of Roman daily life using the dressed dolls or teddy bears as puppets.

GRADE LEVELS

This activity was originally designed for a class of seventh grade students (ages 12–13), but can be adapted easily for grades 5–12. For younger students, the teacher can provide

pertinent dress and status information, rather than require research. S/he can give older students increased responsibility for research and hold them to higher standards of costume quality and authenticity. High-school students can clothe bears as awards for younger students or as charitable donations, or create life-size garments for wearing to a Roman Feast (see the AIA lesson plan entitled *Reclining and Dining: A Greco-Roman Feast*) or to Junior Classical League conventions.

GOALS

While students should become comfortable identifying, producing, and handling items of Roman costume (or those of another chosen culture), the primary goal is to learn how clothing and accoutrements communicate age, gender, job, and status within a society. Students will learn the social stratigraphy of the given society and the ways social status determined daily activities and affected interpersonal relationships. Students will also gain an appreciation for recreating ancient clothing on the basis of archaeological evidence.

Students will know:

- the basic components of male and female Roman costume, both for children and adults.
- the major social ranks of Imperial Rome and the dress reserved for each gender and rank.
- some of the activities considered appropriate for each gender and rank.
- The appropriate Latin names for clothing and accessories.

Students will be able to:

- sew a simple running stitch.
- make a tunic and a stola.
- wrap a toga and a palla.
- gauge social status by analyzing elements of costume.

MATERIALS AND PREPARATION

Most supplies can be ordered online or purchased at a good fabric store that carries both sewing and craft supplies. Buying in bulk will reduce costs, although it will be necessary to purchase some items such as dolls, teddies, and fabric each year. Donations from parents and students can stretch your

budget. If carefully hoarded, needles, glue guns, and leftover supplies and scraps can last many years.

It is helpful, but not necessary, to have sample clothing and dolls in different stages of completion as examples for students. Because students can choose to design many different types of clothing once the initial tunic is done, the materials should be well organized and accessible so that they can work as independently as possible. The teacher should read and photocopy the handouts on procedures, clothing, patterns, and grading for the class.

Supplies

Dolls

Small muslin cloth dolls are available from several companies, including online, in several sizes (we recommend 12"). Inexpensive teddy bears bought in bulk from a craft store are a nice alternative, and come in similar sizes. Only one pattern is needed, as no distinction is made for size differences based on age or gender.

Fabric

- Homespun (rough weave), unbleached muslin for the *tunica interior* worn by everyone
- Lighter unbleached muslin for long *tunica exterior*
- Soft white cotton for *togae*
- Thin polyester (silky feeling or sheer) in deep blues, greens, reds, and purples and bright yellows for *stolae* and *pallae*
- Craft foam sheets, felt, scrap leather, "pleather," upholstery fabric and/or adhesive backed cork sheets in tan, black, or brown for footwear and accessories

Ribbon, cord, and yarn

- Dark purple satin in 1/8" and 1/4" widths
- Gold braid, Greek key/meander patterned ribbon, etc. optional for hair pieces and girdles
- Cording, string, and twine for *soleae* and belts
- Yarn in black, brown, blonde, and auburn for hair

Adhesives

- Low temperature glue guns (use carefully, and replace with tacky glue as appropriate)
- Glue gun refill sticks
- Fabric glue (tacky glue)

Markers

Fine- and ultra fine-tip markers in a variety of colors, including black, for drawing features on faces

Sewing supplies

- Needles
- Safety pins
- Thread (white and colors to match fabrics)

- Tape measures
- Straight pins
- Pincushions
- Fabric scissors (if possible, reserve some scissors for "Fabric Only!" Trying to cut fabric with scissors dulled by paper cutting can be very frustrating). Oversee cutting as needed.

Sewing box

The organization of the supplies is important. A series of open plastic trays or removable plastic drawers, clearly labeled, makes supplies easily accessible to students.

Miscellaneous notions and craft supplies: limited only by the imagination of the class!

- Beads and buttons for jewelry (small brass buttons are ideal for bullae and signet rings)
- Newspaper or butcher paper for making patterns and covering glue gun workspaces
- Pencils, rulers, scissors
- Beans, grain
- Twigs, wooden sticks, straw
- Aluminum foil for creating metallic accessories, armor, and weapons
- Copper or silver wire for creating torques and jewelry
- Burlap and other heavy-gauge fabrics
- Baskets
- Fake leaves, grapes, other fruit in miniature sizes
- Cork sheets

Sample Sources

- Joann's Fabrics (www.joann.com)
- Michael's Arts and Crafts (www.michaels.com)
- Home Sew Mail-order (dolls) (www.homesew.com)
- Dick Blick Art Materials (www.dickblick.com)
- Sax Arts and Crafts (www.saxarts.com)
- Utrecht Art (www.utrechtart.com)
- The Art Store (www.shopheartstore.com)

CLASS TIME

Total project time depends on the number of students in the class, the number of teachers or assistants working with the class, and the depth of the research component. Two or more class periods should be devoted to introducing items of Roman costume and discussing how they pertain to gender and social status, since it is important that students understand the correlations between them. The more thoroughly Roman clothing basics are covered by the class as a whole, the easier it will be for students to carry out the project and conduct any subsequent research independently. For a class of 20 students, creating the costumes and dressing the figures should take five to six 45-minute class periods, if the teacher has adult assistance. Creating the dolls with a class of 20 students with only one teacher can take nine 45-minute class periods.

WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE?

Both literature and art provide evidence for Roman clothing and accessories during the Empire. Visual sources include portraiture and monumental sculpture, such as Il Arringatore and the figures on the Ara Pacis, paintings from towns such as Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Oplontis, and mosaics such as the so-called “Bikini Girls” and others from the Casale Villa in Piazza Armerina. The death portraits from the Fayum in Roman Egypt also provide numerous images of fashion, jewelry, and hair trends. Writers, including Ovid, Cicero, and Livy, describe customs of dress and decoration in their poems, speeches, and histories. Quite a bit of actual textile remains still exist, and artifacts include rags, blanket scraps, and tunic remnants made of wool, linen, cotton, and silk. However, these come mainly from the Roman provinces in North Africa rather than Italy itself.

Costume References

The activity originally used lessons on the Roman family, clothing, hairstyle, and jewelry from *Ecce Romani* Books I and II. The teacher can use applicable material from the class Latin or History text. Barbara F. McManus’s *Virtual Roma* website (<http://www.vroma.org/~bmcmanus/clothing.html> and <http://www.vroma.org/~bmcmanus/clothing2.html>) offers a stimulating exploration of dress, social rankings, and family relations in Roman society. Tom Tierney’s *Greek and Roman Fashions* is a paperback coloring book with a variety of clear images; it is inexpensive enough that the teacher may want to purchase multiple copies for classroom use. The *World of Roman Costume*, edited by Judith Lynn Sebesta and Larissa Bonfante, provides valuable literary and visual evidence of Roman dress. Articles on the *toga* as national garment and symbolism in women’s dress are appropriate for middle and high school student research. The *Resources* section of this lesson provides more sources for information and images of Roman clothing and accessories.

PROCEDURES**Phase I: Learning about Roman Dress**

Once the teacher has introduced the basic elements of dress, the typical members of a family, and the basic levels of early Imperial Roman society (2 days), the research phase can begin.

Step 1 (1 day). Each student is assigned a “Roman person” from (at a minimum) the following: household slave, young girl, upper class boy (under 14), married woman, adult male citizen, and senator. Other categories, such as merchant, gladiator, or person from outside Italy, can be included at the teacher’s discretion. To achieve coverage of all roles, it is best for the teacher to assign them and to keep track of the assignments. Once roles have been recorded, the teacher should take students to the *Virtual Roma* website, hand out the student handout, the *Grading Rubric*, and any other desired

handouts. Review all the information as a class, addressing student questions and clearly establishing the expectations and goals of the project.

Step 2 (3–4 days). Middle School students research the clothes, social level, and daily activities of their assigned person, going beyond the basic information in the handouts they received. They gather information about the types of clothes different Romans wore and how they embellished themselves, including their shoes, hairstyles, jewelry, tools, and weapons. Students should keep track of their sources and hand in, at a minimum, a bibliography. The research can be done in class and/or as homework. More guidance will probably be needed for younger students during this phase, so class time can be utilized to model research techniques and to refine the information students have gathered.

Step 3. By the end of the seventh day, students should have written a complete, detailed list of all items of clothing and accessories their characters will wear. This written assignment is handed in for formal grading. Students should describe colors and materials, use the appropriate Latin terminology (if terms are known), and explain the reasons for each item (e.g., “My senator will wear a *toga praetexta* with wide purple stripes (*clavi lati*), which indicate his senatorial status.”)

Phase II: Making the Clothing

This is the “hands-on” phase of the project, in which the students create the clothing and accessories for their dolls or teddy bears. The teacher must provide the students with dolls or bears and a *tunica* pattern template. All students will create a *tunica*. Thereafter, students will make external garments and accessories based on their characters’ needs.

It is important to note that this part can be done entirely by sewing or entirely by using glue, or the teacher may choose any combination of the two that suits the students’ abilities and the available time. It seems valuable to incorporate at least some sewing skills. In general, it is effective for all the students to sew (by hand) the basic *tunica*, and then for them to proceed with whichever techniques work best. As long as the teacher uses low temperature glue guns and demonstrates how carefully they should be handled, students as young as ten can use them. The quality of the end product will depend on individual skill, hand-eye coordination, and technique.

Interdisciplinary connections: mathematics

There are many opportunities in this project for math connections. If time allows, students should do the calculations to create patterns and create decorations to scale. A doll or teddy bear that is 12” tall is equivalent to a person who is 6’ tall, so the scale is 2” = 1’. Students can measure and cut fabric for *tunicae*, *togae*, *stolae*, and *pallae* to practice skills with measurement, ratio, and proportion.

Tunica (3–4 days)

Step 1. Everyone should receive a copy of the tunica pattern handout. The *tunica* is made from a single piece of cloth. To assist younger students, or to shorten the duration of this phase, the teacher can cut the cloth for the students ahead of time. Otherwise, students use the pattern and scissors to cut the basic tunica (8" x 15") from cloth such as homespun or muslin.

Step 2. Once the 8" x 15" piece is cut, fold the cloth in half widthwise to make a rectangle of half the length of the entire piece of cloth.

Step 3. The neck hole can be cut by folding the garment in half lengthwise to find the center and snipping off a SMALL triangle of fabric from the top of the center fold. (Fold the cloth into a vertical rectangle and cut off a tiny bit of the upper right hand corner.) Students may use a shallow "v" or semi-circular shape for the neck. (The student should start out with a small neck hole, try the *tunica* on the doll, and increase the size of the cut as needed.) *Caveat:* The teacher must not let students cut the neck hole too big. They can cut away fabric incrementally, but they cannot replace what has been cut away! Also, teacher should remind students that the tunica will be belted and "bloused" over the belt, which is why it starts out quite long.

Step 4. Students sew the side seams from the base of the armhole down to the bottom of the garment, leaving a width of three to four fingers (approx. 1½–2 inches) 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. The side seam is sewn with a simple running stitch, as small a stitch as student skill will allow. *Caveat:* Some students will have done some sewing before and may try to use an overhand stitch, which is not as good. Remind students that they are working on the wrong side of the garment and that it will be turned inside out to hide the seams.

Step 5. Edges should now be hemmed. Garment openings can, but need not, be hemmed, so hemming can be made optional for younger grade levels, or to conserve time. The students should turn the tunica inside out to sew the sleeves, neck, and armholes using a simple running stitch.

Step 6. The students dress the doll in the completed tunica and tie it with thin cord or rope appropriate to their character's status. Students should also blouse the *tunica* according to their character's gender and/or status.

Exterior Garments and Accessories (3–4 days)

At this point, the teacher should group the students according to their roles. This will make organizing them and supporting their sewing efforts a bit easier. The students can help

one another within their groups as they continue to create the external garments and accessories of their characters using stitches, low temperature glue guns, and craft supplies. Students can use their imaginations but are limited only to what they have discovered in character appropriate in their research. Their final products should exhibit both creativity and authenticity. *Caveat:* If there is only one teacher, the students need to exercise some patience, as the garments at this point are all different. Guidelines for the individual garments and accessories are provided in the student handout.

Hair is created out of yarn and glued on; it can be long or short. A technique that results in neat hair involves cutting multiple strands to the same length and affixing them lengthwise from the forehead, over the top of the head, to the nape of the neck. Multiple layers of hair can be attached in this way. Girls' hair should be pulled back in a braid or ponytail. Married women's hair should be drawn into a bun and decorated with ribbon or braid. Men and boys' hair tended to be kept short, but this could change depending on the emperor.

For shoes or *soleae*, students should draw 2 ovals, each slightly larger than the sole of the doll's foot, on craft foam, pleather, upholstery fabric, or scrap leather. They should cut out the ovals and, from the same material, 2 thin straps (¼ in.) of appropriate length to reach from the sole of the foot, around the top to the other side. The straps should be glued in place on the foot first and then the soles on top on them.

Faces are drawn on with markers. *Caveat:* Students should practice on paper, since there is no "white out" for cloth dolls, and mistakes cannot be erased. Fine or extra fine markers work best for smaller facial features such as lips, eyes, and ears.

If you would like to use the dolls as puppets, help students individually or pair them up to affix dowels. Students must pull up the garments to expose the doll's back and hot glue a dowel (⅜" to ½" diameter, ~2' long) onto the back from the base of the neck to the bottom underneath the clothing.

If the dolls are going to be displayed, they can be pinned to a bulletin board. Have each student type a placard with a description modeled on this one:

My name is _____ [Latin name of character], and I am a _____ [role such as senator, slave, citizen, matron, etc.] in 80 B.C.E. I am wearing _____ [list garments and accessories, if present]. I was created by _____ [student's name]. Alternatively, students can write dialogue balloons to mount over the dolls' heads.

PITFALLS

Aside from the warnings noted above, if the teacher decides to show the video *Let's Wrap* to the class as an introduction

LESSON PLANS

to the project, the tape should be previewed and cued to the particular period of dress (Etruscan, Imperial, Byzantine) on which the project will concentrate. Limiting the students' visual exposure to one relevant time period will keep their minds focused on the proper clothing and improve their accuracy in dressing the dolls.

Using hot, messy glue guns can pose a challenge. Set aside a large, stable surface for glue guns, line it with newsprint or butcher paper, and have extra paper available for students to wipe drips from the glue guns. Glue gun stands are helpful in avoiding burns and preventing drips. Low temperature glue guns are just as effective as the high temperature ones, and are a bit safer. Nevertheless, warn the students to avoid contact with the glue, as even low-temperature glue can burn. Also, be sure to let students know in advance that part of their grade is determined by their participation in cleaning the work space.

During the production process, a teacher may encounter difficulties in keeping all students at a similar point in the process, and any absence from class can impede progress. If a student is absent from more than one class, the teacher should try to make arrangements for that student to catch up outside of the regular class period. The teacher must provide a firm timeline or schedule of expectations, informing the students in advance that they will have a particular number of class periods to complete each item of clothing and to dress the puppet, and that any additional time required individually will be taken outside of class.

ASSESSMENT

Students are graded on the thoroughness and accuracy of

their research and on the authenticity of their costumes. See the *Grading Rubric*.

FOLLOWING UP

To display the costumed dolls, students can mount them on a wall and post a placard identifying the character's name, age, role, status, and setting (in English or Latin Latin). Students also may write conversational Latin (appropriate to a doll's gender, age, and status) to be mounted in speech balloons over the dolls.

Latin teachers may want to follow up by using the dolls as puppets or as performers in skits written by the students. Students review their research on the Roman family and social strata and conduct additional research on Roman daily life to determine a setting. They learn about a typical day in the life of a Roman in urban versus rural settings and how the Romans told time and divided the day. They also learn how the Romans named themselves and then give their dolls gender and age appropriate names. They continue to develop the identity of their individual characters, determining what activities could make up their daily routine.

Then they break into family groups to decide on a setting, brainstorm their scenes, and create a rough draft. Their scenes must reflect Roman daily life during the Empire, and lines should be appropriate to the status of each character. Social roles must be made clear in the skit through dialogue or blocking. Students next move on to block their scenes with puppets, memorize lines and blocking, design backdrops, and rehearse in the puppet theatre a few times. Ultimately, students perform the Roman puppet show (ideally, once in Latin, once in English) for video and/or a live audience.