

# Classroom Lesson Plan on Roman Marriage

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## *Introduction:*

This unit is intended for a middle-school level although if high school students have not studied Roman marriage this unit could be used with supplementary additional information if desired. This unit aims to introduce aspects of Roman marriage including the engagement process, preparation for the wedding, the ceremony, and married life together; it does not attempt to cover any part of divorce. The unit is designed to be approximately six weeks long including the final project, which is to actually act out a Roman wedding. Each segment is designed to give the most important information about the specific subject material. There is, of course, more information that can be provided, but the constraints of the regular curriculum necessitate some brevity. If this unit is used for upper class students as an introduction to Roman marriage, elements of the ceremony can be added that I have omitted, such as the obligation of a wife to please her husband and the process that the new bride must go through once she reaches her new husband's house (for further information see the starred selections of the bibliography). Ideally, this unit would be presented to a culturally heterogeneous mix of students so that the class as a whole may draw upon similarities and differences in various cultures. The unit is designed to be taught in conjunction with the normal curriculum mandated by the school or district. There is a short PowerPoint presentation that follows the order of the unit outline. The images of real artifacts from ancient Rome reinforce the unit material and provide a wonderful opportunity for discussion.

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*Learning Goals/Objectives:*

- To introduce students to the world of Roman marriage.
- Students will be able differentiate various accepted forms of marriage.
- Students will be able to compare marriage customs of today (in their own respective cultures) with those of the Romans.
- Students will be able to reenact a Roman marriage including unique traditions of the Romans.
- Students will better understand the Roman world as a whole and the Roman family by understanding how marriage functions within the society.
- Students will better understand women by understanding societal expectations of marriage including ages for marriage and rights and responsibilities of a married woman.

*Content area standards, concepts, and skills this unit supports:*

LOTE/Latin for the 21st Century Standard 1 – Students will be able to use a language other than English for communication. Checkpoint A, Checkpoint B

LOTE/Latin for the 21st Century Standard 2 – Students will develop cross-cultural skills and understandings. Checkpoint A, Partial Checkpoint B

Standards for Classical Language Learning Goal 1 – Communication/Communicate in a Classical Language (1.1 and 1.2)

Standards for Classical Language Learning Goal 2 – Culture/Gain Knowledge and Understanding of Greco-Roman Culture (2.1)

Standards for Classical Language Learning Goal 4 – Comparisons/Develop Insight into Own Language and Culture (4.1 and 4.2)

*Any other standards/skills this unit supports:*

Grade 8 ELA Standard 1: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for information and understanding.

Grade 8 ELA Standard 2: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for literary response and expression.

Grade 8 ELA Standard 4: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for social interaction.

*Target Grade:*

Eighth-grade students.

*Time Needed:*

This unit optimally requires six or seven forty-minute periods. Alternatively it can be adapted to fit into fifteen to twenty-minute blocks at the end of class periods instead of devoting an entire day to each topic.

*Instructional Materials Needed:*

- PowerPoint presentation for each segment of the marriage outline to introduce new cultural material
- Computer and a means of projecting a PowerPoint presentation
- Passages of real Latin adapted or glossed regarding marriage to accompany different segments of the unit
- Classical cookbook creations, i.e. recipes prepared by the teacher for the class to taste during the presentation
- Paper
- Poster Board
- Construction Paper
- Markers
- Colored Pencils
- Latin Dictionaries
- Instructions for Project (included in this lesson plan)

*Methods/Techniques:*

This module relies heavily on comparing and contrasting, with short written assignments in which the students will participate in a dialogue with the teacher. Students will also be encouraged to share their observations with the entire class so that all of the students can learn from the various viewpoints and experiences of each other. This unit is intended to pique the curiosity of the students about Roman wedding customs. Their curiosity will be harnessed to promote continued interest in what they will learn next regarding Roman marriage. As the final assessment for this unit is reenacting a Roman wedding, students will be constantly reminded of the sequence of events for a Roman wedding. Mini assessments, including short written assignments and short quizzes, will be used to ensure students have an understanding of the sequence of events in a Roman wedding prior to the culminating project.

*Assessment:*

Students will be given short quizzes on the material discussed in each segment so that the teacher can ensure there is an understanding of the material presented. As the unit will be approximately six weeks long, there will be at least three quizzes given. Students will also be expected to participate in a group project at the end of the unit.

*Analysis:*

This unit is important to help students grasp the differences between contemporary marriages and those in Roman times. The unit is set up to logically flow from the earliest stage of marriage, i.e. the engagement, to examples of life after marriage, both good and

bad. The unit does not attempt to cover divorce or any of the laws governing divorce proceedings in the Roman world.

Understanding the customs of the Roman wedding ceremony will help students better understand modern-day patterns for marriage. By the end of this unit, students will be able to trace certain contemporary practices back to the Roman period. This creates a link between their lives and the lives of Romans, which should increase interest in the classical world as a whole.

Furthermore, by incorporating cultural segments such as Roman marriage into the curriculum, the teacher is fulfilling the principles discussed for the course -- most notably for this particular unit, increasing the knowledge of the Greco-Roman world in order to better understand our own modern world.

## Unit Outline on Roman Marriage

Each major heading (engagement, preparation, ceremony, and life together) will take approximately a week to present. The major sections will cover about four weeks. The last two weeks planned for this unit will be used toward preparation and presentation of the final project. I have included unadapted Latin passages that can be used for any levels. These passages are from starred sources in the annotated bibliography at the end.

### I. Betrothal (*sponsalia*)

- a. *Conubium* –the right of legal Roman marriage was a right of citizenship
- b. Contract and dowry
- c. Age – differed for males and females
  - i. Legal age for marriage
  - ii. Actual age of marriage

### II. Legal consequences of marriage for the Roman bride

- a. Marriage *cum manu*: control of wife transferred from *paterfamilias* to *maritus*
  - i. *Confarreatio*– immediate transfer of control
  - ii. *Coemptio* – immediate transfer of control
  - iii. *Usus* – transfer of control after one uninterrupted year of marriage
- b. Marriage *sine manu*: control of wife remained with *paterfamilias*

### III. Preparation

- a. Items Needed/Discarded
- b. Clothes
  - i. Saffron veil and shoes
  - ii. Wreath of flowers
  - iii. Straight tunic
  - iv. Girdle
  - v. Knot of Hercules
- c. Legal formalities

### IV. Ceremony

- a. When and where?
- b. What is entailed?
  - i. Vows
    1. *Ubi tu Gaius, ego Gaia*
    2. Clasp of hands: *dextrarum iunctio*
  - ii. Number of witnesses based on the type of marriage
- c. *Pompa*
  - i. Procession from bride's house to groom's house
  - ii. Proceeded by a torch and boys
  - iii. Yelling of insults by guests
  - iv. Carrying over the threshold
  - v. *Matrona (pronuba)* escorts bride into bridal chamber
  - vi. Party continues outside of the *cubiculum* for guests

### V. Life Together

- a. *Concordia* NOT *amor* (see Pliny the Younger, *Letters* 8.5.1-2)
- b. Not always happy
  - i. Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Deeds and Words* 6.3.9
  - ii. Augustine, *Confessions* 9.9

## Roman Marriage

### Lesson 1

#### Engagement and Marriage

##### I. Betrothal (*sponsalia*)

- a. Both bride and groom must be Roman citizens in order for *conubium* to exist
- b. Dowry had to be negotiated prior to the engagement
- c. Both bride and groom had to consent to the engagement, as well as the *paterfamilias* of each (if he was still alive)
- d. Minimum legal age for marriage
  - i. 14 for males; 12 for females
  - ii. Girls were often married in their teens
  - iii. Males married later and were often considerably older than the bride
- e. Engagements could be made between families very early in a child's life, sometimes at birth, for political or financial reasons
- f. In upper-class families, at least, there was usually a party given by the girl's father to celebrate the engagement and inform friends

##### II. Legal consequences of marriage for the Roman bride:

- a. The wife ceased to be a member of her birth family and became a legal member of her husband's family, under the control and guardianship (*manus*) of her husband; modern scholars call this "marriage *cum manu*." There were three methods for accomplishing this transfer:

###### i. *Confarreatio*

1. This method was very ancient and reserved for members of the upper classes
2. Typically the most lavish and expensive wedding
3. Special ritual involving an ancient type of grain called *far*, which was made into a special cake (*farreum*)
4. This ritual immediately transferred the bride from the control (*potestas*) of her *paterfamilias* to the control (*manus*) of her *maritus*

###### ii. *Coemptio* – "Bride purchase"

1. This method was available to members of all classes
2. Legal procedure involving a fictional "sale," where the groom paid a copper coin of low value for the bride
3. This symbolized ancient weddings where brides were paid for
4. This procedure immediately transferred the bride from the control (*potestas*) of her *paterfamilias* to the control (*manus*) of her *maritus*

iii. *Usus*

1. This method was available to members of all classes
  2. It involved an automatic, passive transfer of the wife from the control (*potestas*) of her *paterfamilias* to the control (*manus*) of her *maritus* after the wife had remained with her husband for a full year without interruption
  3. This was based on an ancient law transferring ownership of an object to the person who remained in uninterrupted possession of that object for a full year
  4. Wife could prevent the transfer of control by spending three consecutive nights away from her husband's home during the year (*trinoctium*)
- b. The wife remained as a member of her birth family and was not a legal member of her husband's family; she remained under the control and guardianship (*potestas*) of her *paterfamilias* while he was alive and under the guardianship (*tutela*) of another male who was formally appointed after the death of her *paterfamilias*. Modern scholars call this "marriage *sine manu*." By the last century of the Republic, this was by far the most common type of marriage; by the Empire, *confarreatio*, *coemptio*, and *usus* had become effectively obsolete.

## Lesson 2

### Preparation

#### I. Items Needed

- a. *Annulus pronubus*, an iron engagement ring
- b. *Tabulae nuptiales*, also called *tabulae dotales*, marriage contract specifying dowry arrangements

#### II. Items Discarded

- a. *Toga praetexta*
- b. Childhood toys

#### III. Bridal Costume

- a. Saffron veil (*flammeum*) and shoes (*lutei socci*)
- c. Wreath of flowers (*corona nuptalis*)
- d. Straight tunic (*tunica recta*)
- e. Belt tied in Knot of Hercules (*nodus Herculis*)
  - i. Supposedly only a woman's husband could undo this knot
- f. Hairstyle (*seni crines*)
  - i. Hair is divided into six braids
  - ii. These may be covered with a saffron hairnet (this is disputed)

~PowerPoint has a recreation of the bridal costume



## Lesson 3

### Ceremony

#### I. When and where?

- a. Many days were avoided for fear of bad luck
  - i. *Dies religiosi* (sacred days)
  - ii. *Dies festi* (religious festival days)
  - iii. Kalends, Nones, and the Ides of every month
- b. Best days were *dies hilares* in the second half of June. Why June do you think? [Juno protected marriage bonds which is why couples wanted to be married then]
- c. Ceremony took place at the home of the bride's *paterfamilias*

#### II. What is entailed?

- a. If someone was invited to a wedding it was his or her *officium* (duty) to attend
- b. Vows (Plutarch, *Moralia*:  
<[http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Roman\\_Questions\\*/B.html#30](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Roman_Questions*/B.html#30)>)
  - i. *Ubi tu Gaius, ego Gaia*
    1. Gaius and Gaia were the names always used regardless of the individuals involved
    2. Gaius and Gaia were thought to bring good luck to the newly married couple
    3. Some scholars report that Gaius and Gaia were used because it was harder to identify the individuals involved in the marriage transaction
  - ii. Clasp of right hands: *dextrarum iunctio*  
(<[http://www.vroma.org/images/mcmanus\\_images/marriagerelief3.jpg](http://www.vroma.org/images/mcmanus_images/marriagerelief3.jpg)>)
    1. *Pronuba*, a married woman who has been married only once (*univira*) and is in a long-term stable relationship, joined the hands of the bride and groom
    2. See PowerPoint for examples of *dextrarum iunctio* with the *pronuba* joining hands:
- c. Friends and family attended and served as witnesses who attached their seals to the *tabulae nuptiales*
  - i. *Confarreatio* required ten witnesses
  - ii. *Coemptio* required at least five witnesses
- d. After the *tabulae nuptiales* was sealed by the appropriate number of witnesses, a sacrifice would be offered. This sacrifice was usually a pig.
- e. *Pompa*
  - i. Procession from the bride's house to the groom's house
    1. The bride was "stolen" from her mother, showing symbolically the transfer to a new family
    2. This custom also recalls the snatching of the Sabine women (see Plutarch, *Moralia*)

<[http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Roman\\_Questions\\*/B.html#31](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Roman_Questions*/B.html#31)>)

3. The bride carried a spindle and distaff with her to represent her responsibility to provide for her new household
  - ii. Proceeded by a torch and boys
    1. Boys' parents had to be married, reputable citizens
    2. Torch is called a *spina alba*; it was thrown away once the groom's house was reached, similar to the bridal bouquet today
  - iii. Yelling of insults by guests
    1. Guests would throw walnuts during the procession
    2. These acts encouraged fertility in the newlywed couple
  - iv. Entering the new home
    1. Before a bride entered her new house she would rub the doorway with lard
    2. She would then wreath the door in wool
    3. These symbolized domesticity and her role as mother and wife
    4. She would often be carried over the threshold of the door (by her attendants, not by the bridegroom) because tripping was an ill omen for the marriage (see Plutarch, *Moralia* <[http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Roman\\_Questions\\*/B.html#29](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Roman_Questions*/B.html#29)>)
    5. The bride would receive water and fire (in a torch) from the groom, symbolizing her integration into her new home
  - v. *Matrona (pronuba)* escorted the bride into the bridal chamber  
[The following details should be left out for younger classes]
    1. *Pronuba* prays with the bride for a blessing over the marriage
    2. She helps the bride undress and removes all her jewelry
    3. She puts the bride into her husband's bed, *lectus genialis* (marriage bed)
    4. *Pronuba* offers a sacrifice to the fulfillment of the marriage, i.e. procreation/attempting to procreate children
    5. *Pronuba* then leaves the room
    6. Only after the *pronuba* exits does the *novus maritus* (new husband) enter and complete the marriage
  - vi. The wedding party continues outside of the *cubiculum* for the guests
  - vii. In the atrium of the groom's home stands a *lectus genialis* which represents the bed for both the husband's *genius* and the wife's *juno*
- f. *Repotia*
- i. This event takes place the following day
  - ii. This is a drinking and dinner party to celebrate the new couple
  - iii. Is this similar to today in any respects?

## Lesson 4

### Life Together

#### I. *Concordia* was important NOT *amor*

- a. Love did occur at all levels of society (see *CIL*1.1221: <[http://www.hs-augsburg.de/~harsch/Chronologia/Lsante01/Hermia/her\\_elog.html](http://www.hs-augsburg.de/~harsch/Chronologia/Lsante01/Hermia/her_elog.html)> and <[http://www.vroma.org/images/raia\\_images/philematium.jpg](http://www.vroma.org/images/raia_images/philematium.jpg)>)
- b. Pliny the Younger, *Letters* 8.5.1-2

#### II. Not always happy

- a. Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Deeds and Words* 6.3.9, in translation
- b. Augustine, *Confessions* 9.9, in translation

## Instructions for Group Project

Each student will choose a sub-area of Roman marriage from one of the four below for which they will be responsible in the reenactment of a Roman marriage:

The Engagement

The Preparations

The Ceremony

The After-Party

The requirements for full credit of the project include:

- Designing materials for and/or acting in the performance of the wedding ceremony.
- Writing a one page double-spaced essay on what they learned and liked the most throughout this unit (font should be size 12, preferably Arial; margins for the paper are 1" on all sides, including top and bottom).
- Writing a short paragraph about what could have made the project better. Does the PowerPoint need more pictures? Was it presented too fast or too slow? Did this cultural unit distract too much from the material in the book? etc.

NOTE: This will be used as a means of self-assessment. Modifications can be made for the future use of this project if desired.

If there are any questions please ask *quam celerrime!*

## Annotated Bibliography

~Please note: the sources with the asterisks are the most useful for finding further information on the topic of Roman weddings and various subdivisions of that topic.~

\*Balme, Maurice, and James Morwood. On the Margin. New York: Oxford UP, 2003. 16-19.

This book has some excellent primary source material for women and Roman brides. It gives all the necessary information to find the source if one wanted to use it in a presentation.

Bush, Archie C. "Marital Patterns." Studies in Roman Social Structure. Washington, D.C.: University P of America, Inc., 1982. 1-32.

This chapter analyzes from a sociological standpoint the institution of marriage. The first chapter is the important chapter to look at which explains various ways that the aristocratic class kept power within their own extended family. There are various illustrations that show this relationship although they are quite confusing.

Cherry, David, ed. "Women, Marriage, and Family." The Roman World : A Sourcebook. New York: Blackwell Ltd., 2001. 39-62.

This chapter provides the reader with a variety of primary sources to view the institution of marriage. There are letters from Pliny about his late wife. Other sources talk about marriage in general. And yet, there are other sources with inscriptions from funerary monuments. This is a great way to quickly find material related to the topic of marriage that is not in the original language.

Cooper, Kate. The Virgin and the Bride : Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity. New York: Harvard UP, 1996.

This book as a whole deals with the transition of the place of women as Rome became a Christian state. For the most part, this book only applies to the later Roman Empire, i.e. under the influence of Christianity. Past laws and social practices are considered when evaluating perceptions of women in the Christian era.

Mr. Donn. "Wedding Customs." Ancient Rome for Kids. Jan. 2006. 27 Oct. 2008  
<<http://rome.mrdonn.org/weddings.html>>.

This site is geared toward young learners. It includes some free lesson plans and activities also geared toward younger students.

Elaine Fantham, Helene Peet Foley, Natalie Boymel Kampen, Sarah B. Pomeroy and H. A. Shapiro. Women in the Classical World : Image and Text. New York: Oxford UP, 1995.

This book also examines the lives of women in the Roman world. Marriage, childbirth, and various other topics are encompassed in an easy to read resource.

Fraschetti, Augusto. Roman Women. Ed. Augusto Fraschetti. Trans. Linda Lappin. New York: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

This book gives examples of individual women to convey the different types of women that existed in Roman society. If one is looking for a case study, this is a great resource for Roman women who portray certain characteristics, good or bad.

Gatehouse, Lucette. "Marriage in Ancient Rome." 1999. 27 Oct. 2008  
<<http://victorian.fortunecity.com/lion/373/roman/roman.html>>.

This site's benefit is a link to primary sources relating to Roman marriage. Of course, all the primary sources are in translation.

LaFleur, Richard A., ed. "Latin in the Middle School." Latin for the 21st Century from Concept to Classroom. By Leaann A. Osburn. New York: Addison-Wesley Educational, Incorporated, 2001. 70-89.

This book has a great chapter on using Latin in a middle school setting. LaFleur discusses effective solutions for group projects and ways to keep children active and involved in the learning process.

La Follette, Lawtitia. "The Costume of the Roman Bride." The World of Roman Costume. Ed. Judith L. Sebesta and Larissa Bonfante. New York: University of Wisconsin P, 2001. 54-64.

This chapter describes in detail the dress of a Roman bride. The descriptions are detailed enough that an entire costume could be reconstructed from this chapter. It further explores the significance of various pieces of the bridal costume.

Mousourakis, George. A Legal History of Rome. New York: Routledge, 2007. 95-97.

This book is written from a historical law perspective. It is focused on aspects of law and briefly discusses Roman laws regarding marriage.

Patricia, and William. "A Roman Wedding." 26 Oct. 2008  
<<http://www.janeraeburn.com/wedding/index.html>>.

This site shows a couple that modeled their own modern day wedding after a Roman wedding. This might be interesting to show students, as there are reenactment pictures.

Pomeroy, Sarah B. Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves. Schocken Books, 1975.

This book in general tries to address women of all classes. It discusses Roman marriage in relation to lower classes, upper classes, freedwomen, and slaves. Various other aspects related to women are also addressed.

\*Powers, Jennifer G. "Ancient Weddings." Classics Technology Center. 1997. 25 Oct. 2008 <<http://ablemedia.com/ctcweb/consortium/ancientweddings.html>>.

This site also hosts a description of customs surrounding the Roman marriage ceremony for both Greek and Roman marriages. It contains links to other sites of interest such as *Diotima*. There are also literary references to contemporary authors in both Latin and English.

\*Raia, Ann R., and Judith L. Sebesta. "The World of Marriage." Companion to the Worlds of Roman Women. 20 Oct. 2008 <<http://www2.cnr.edu/home/sas/araia/marriage.html>>.

This website has a host of links to glossed Latin inscriptions, literary texts, essays, and other valuable resources regarding Roman women. It also includes links to *VRoma* with images of ancient artifacts.

"Roman Weddings." United Nations of Roma Victrix (UNRV). 27 Oct. 2008 <<http://www.unrv.com/culture/roman-weddings.php>>.

This website gives a brief overview of Roman customs related to marriage.

Sebesta, Judith L. Bride. 1990. "The World of Marriage." Companion to the Worlds of Roman Women. 15 Nov. 2008

<[http://www2.cnr.edu/home/sas/araia/sebesta\\_bride.jpg](http://www2.cnr.edu/home/sas/araia/sebesta_bride.jpg)>. This is a great photo representing a Roman bride in full dress, a reenactment by a student in Dr. Sebesta's class. This is also in the PowerPoint presentation.

Shelton, Jo-Ann. "Marriage." As the Romans Did : A Sourcebook in Roman Social History. New York: Oxford UP, 1998. 37-48.

This chapter gives excellent primary sources speaking about Roman marriage. It includes evidence about happy marriages and cases of spousal abuse.

\*Smith, William. A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities, online s.v. *matrimonium* <[http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/secondary/SMIGRA\\*/Matrimonium.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/secondary/SMIGRA*/Matrimonium.html)>

Squire, Susan. "Do Roman Wives Have It All?" I Don't: A Contrarian History of Marriage. Grand Rapids: Bloomsbury, 2008. 67-85.

This is a fantastic quick chapter about the changing role of women with regard to marriage rites. It briefly speaks about changes in the society as the Empire approaches and gives reasons for the decline in population.

Thompson, Steven. "Was Ancient Rome a Dead Wives Society? What Did the Roman Paterfamilias Get Away With?" Journal of Family History 31 (2006): 3-27.

This article analyses what in reality a *paterfamilias* was able to do. It examines the law on the books versus the law in practice.

\*Treggiari, Susan M. Roman Marriage : *Iusti Coniuges* from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian. New York: Oxford UP, 1991.

This book is perhaps the most complete resource regarding Roman marriage. It examines all of the various types of marriage and how they change over time.

VRoma Project's Image Archive. 25 Nov. 2008

<[http://www.vroma.org/images/mcmanus\\_images/marriagerelief3.jpg](http://www.vroma.org/images/mcmanus_images/marriagerelief3.jpg)>.

Sarcophagus relief: wedding ceremony of *dextrarum iunctio* (160-80 CE)

<[http://www.vroma.org/images/raia\\_images/philematium.jpg](http://www.vroma.org/images/raia_images/philematium.jpg)>

Funerary relief dedicated by a freedman to his wife, his freed slave (80 BCE)

Submitted by Sarah Hull, 2009