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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2008 Volume III: Democracy in Theory and Practice

Why Rome Fell and Is the United States Next?

Guide for Curriculum Unit 08.03.07, published September 2008

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In this unit students learn about the causes of fall of the Roman Empire and compare those factors with some of the challenges America faces today. In this way students examine conditions toward the end of the Roman Empire in relation to our American society today, ultimately drawing lessons, if any, for the United States to learn from Rome. This unit is designed to meet established History-Social Science content standards for California public schools for seventh grade students. The overarching standard applicable for this unit calls for students to analyze the causes and effects of the vast expansion and ultimate disintegration of the Roman Empire. In addition, students will be able to understand and explain problems that contributed to the decline of the Roman Empire through analyzing American political cartoons as an entry point into gaining an understanding of the complexities for why Rome fell, which can extend to why civilizations end in general. Students will also be able to identify democratic practices in Rome and the United States as both aspired to mold their government to follow democratic principles. Through learning the definition of democracy students will be able to judge whether or not these ideals were achieved or merely aimed for. Lastly, students will be able to compare and contrast reasons for the fall of Rome to conditions in the United States today. After students are grounded in popular theories for the fall of Rome and can clearly decipher between ideological ideals and practices, in this case democracy, they will be well-equipped to participate in a culminating class debate over whether or not the United States is doomed to follow Rome's demise, through using as evidence all they have learned about both societies.

(Developed for World History and History, grade 7; recommended for World History and Social Studies, grades 7, 9-10)

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