



Symbols on U.S. Coins

SOCIAL STUDIES

3-5



BIG QUESTION

How are the coins we use today related to Roman coins from ancient times?



TIMING

60 minutes



SUMMARY:

Students will learn about the evolution of coins by identifying features used in Roman times that have been carried into modern times. Then students will create their own Roman-inspired coin.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Students will learn about the evolution of coins and the different features we see today on coins such as symbols, inscriptions, and busts.
- Students will create their own Roman-inspired coin, which will include a bust and symbols on the obverse and reverse, the edging, the mintmark, and the date.



MATERIALS:

- Ancient and Modern Coin worksheets
- Books and webpages that provide ancient coin information and images, such as:
 - *Roman History From Coins* by Michael Grant
 - *Handbook of Ancient Greek and Roman Coins* by Zander Klawans
 - Numismatic Museum online collection: <https://artsandculture.google.com/partner/numismatic-museum>
 - American Numismatic Society collection: <http://numismatics.org/search/results>



PROCEDURE:

Discuss modern coins and introduce ancient coins (10 minutes)

1. Introduce the activity by displaying a penny (or project a large image of a penny) for the whole class to see. Ask your students what it is, and what we use it for. Explain to your students that if they look closer at coins, they will see that each one is a piece of artwork that tells us about a country's culture.
2. Ask students to describe what they see on the penny. Some answers might include a face, a date, words, or the edge/rim.
3. Tell students that they are going to look at how the design of the penny came to be. Let students know that the first coins were used thousands of years ago and that we are going to take a look at ancient coins to see if they are the same or different than the coins we use today.

Compare modern and ancient coins and symbols using worksheet (20 minutes)

4. Distribute handouts with images of ancient and currently circulating U.S. coins.
 - First, review the parts of a coin with your students using the graphic and definitions of key terms on the first page of the worksheet.
 - Then ask students to review the images of ancient Roman coins.
 - Ask students to write down at least 3 observations about the Roman coins and how they are both similar and different to modern coins.
 - As a class, discuss the similarities and differences between the ancient coins and the circulating coins. Some symbols and similarities you can share:
 1. Leader's bust or portrait: Roman coin features emperors such as Augustus and U.S. coins feature presidents.
 2. Oak branch: Symbolize strength and independence, featured on both the dime and Roman coin.
 3. Wreath: Symbolizes victory, used in both Roman and modern coins.
 4. Olive branch: Symbolize peace and is used in both Roman and modern coins.
 5. Size and Shape: Coins are roughly the same size and made from similar metals today as they were in Roman times.
 6. Text: All of the coin examples feature writing or inscriptions of some kind.
 7. Modern coins include a year and a mint mark so you can tell when and where the coin was made.
 8. Eagle: The Bald Eagle is the national bird. In Roman times, the eagle was a symbol representing power and was an emblem for the army.

Draw modern or ancient coin (30 minutes)

5. Tell your students that they will be creating their own coin to represent an aspect of our culture that they feel is important. Tell students they can choose to design their coin to look older like a Roman coin, or they can choose to make their coin appear more modern. Discuss possible coin topics as a class.
6. Have your student create sketches of the front (obverse) and back (reverse) of the proposed coin. The coin sketches should include a portrait and date on the front and a legend, symbol, and denominational amount on the back.

ASSESSMENT:

Use the students' participation in the discussion, their ability to recognize similarities and differences on coins, and ability to create their own coin to assess whether they have met the lesson objectives.



DIFFERENTIATE:

- When comparing ancient coins to modern coins with your class, you could also have your students examine modern foreign coins to see if they too use symbols to represent their culture or their history.
- In groups, ask students to research one Roman coin and present to the class who is on the coin, why they were important to the Roman Empire, and what the other symbols on the coin represent.
- If teaching virtually, ask students to use the Making Change game to create a coin instead of drawing on paper.
- Project an image of a modern U.S. coin using the Mint website



RELATED:

- U.S. Mint Online Game [Making Change](#)
- [Mint Minute video](#)
- [About the Mint](#) page and Circulating Coin pages:
 - [Penny](#)
 - [Nickel](#)
 - [Dime](#)
 - [Quarter](#)
 - [Half Dollar](#)
 - [Dollar](#)
- [Coin Glossary](#)
- [History of U.S. Circulating Coins](#)



STANDARDS:

[National Core Arts Standards](#)

Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

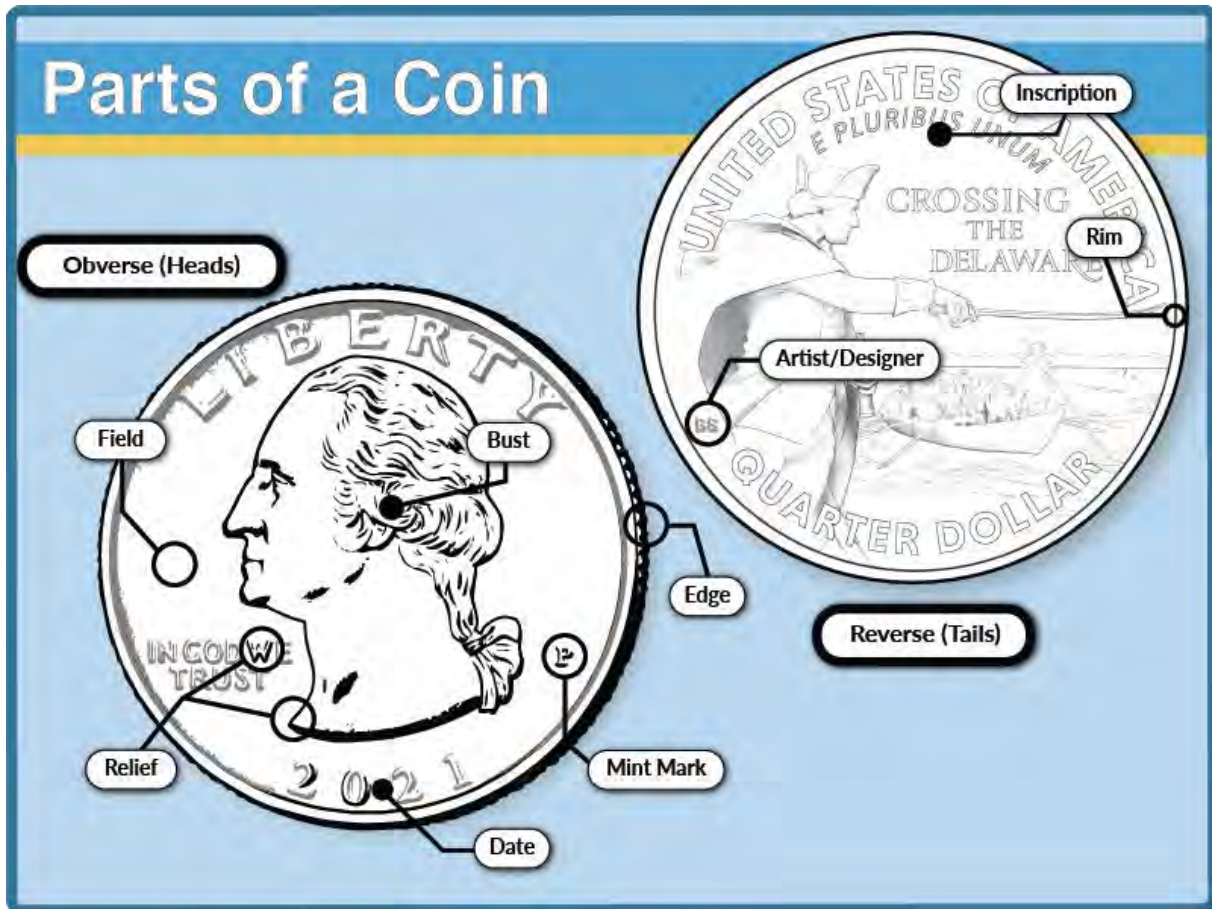


From Ancient Times to Today: Symbols on U.S. Coins

Name: _____

Date: _____

Directions: Review the parts of a coin and terminology. Then, on the next page, examine the images of ancient coins and modern coins. Finally, create your own ancient Rome-inspired coin.



- The outer surface, which can have lettering, reeding, or designs on it, is called the **edge**. Near the edge is the raised area called the **rim**.
- Both sides of the coin feature designs and artwork, often including an image of a person from the neck up, known as a **bust**.
- The blank area of background on a coin is called the **field**. The term **relief** refers to the depth of the markings on the coin and how much they are raised above the field.
- Small letters show where the coin was minted, known as the **mint mark**, and the initials of the **sculptor** or **artist** who designed and/or sculpted the coin. Other writing on a coin includes the **date and the inscription**.

Examples of Ancient Roman Coins

Modern Coins

1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



7.



Each black dot is a hint! What symbols or inscriptions are the dots pointing to?

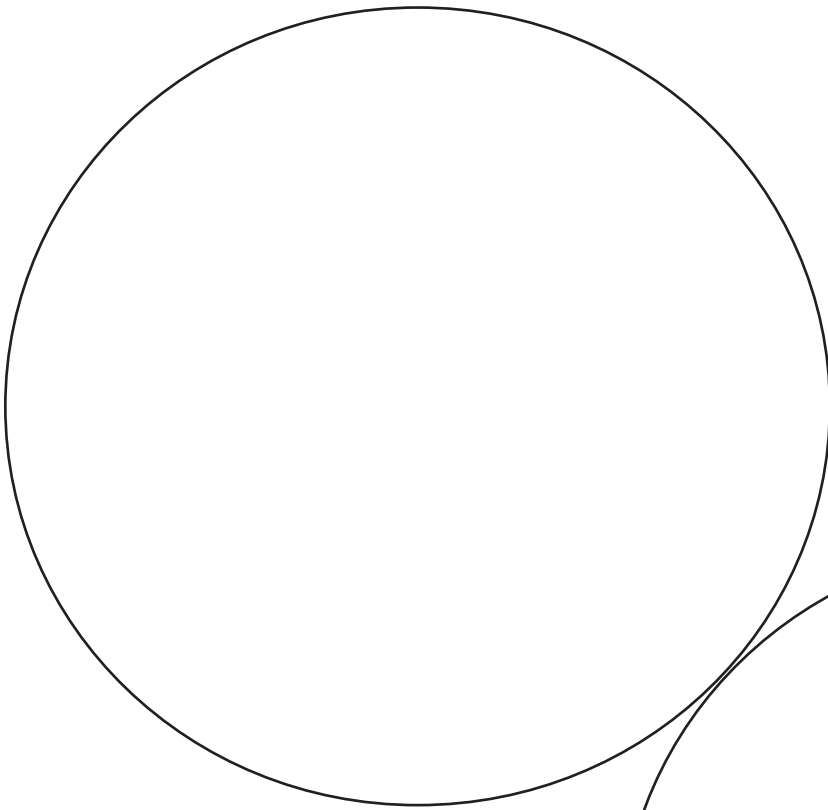
Can you find the similarities and differences between the Roman and modern coins?

1. Rome, c. 13-12 B.C., 2. Rome, date unknown, 3. Rome, 20-18 B.C., 4. Rome, 10-15 B.C. 5. Rome, 68 B.C., 6. 2019 Dime, 7. 2021 Half Dollar coin

Sources: Coins 1-3 are modified from Roman History from Coins: Some Uses of the Imperial Coinage to the Historian, Michael Grant; coin 4 is modified from the American Numismatic Society collection; coin 5 is modified from The British Museum collection.

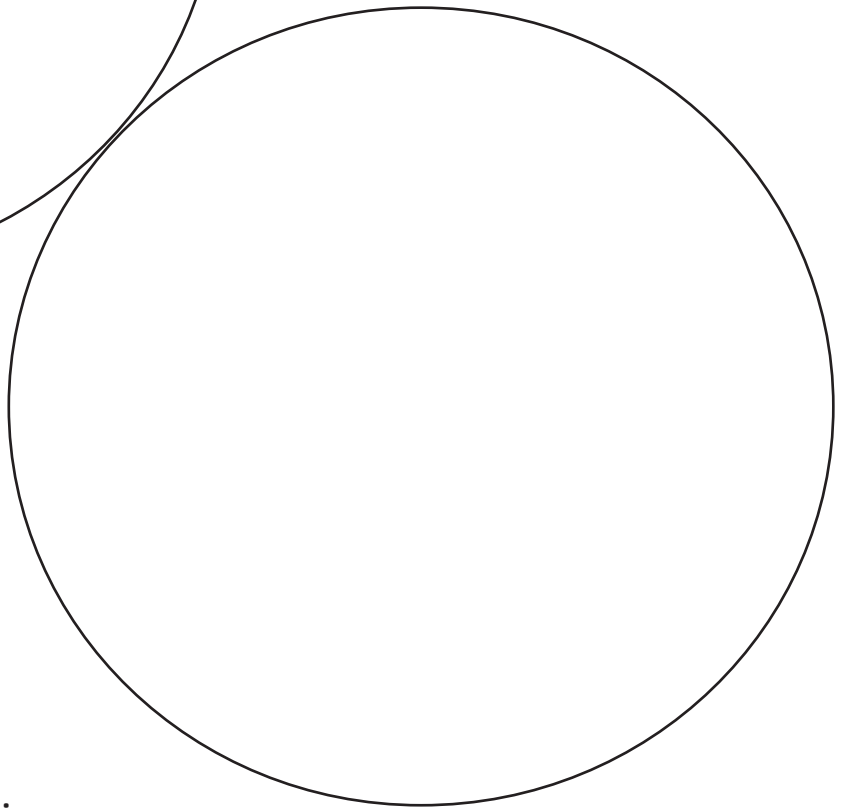
Design Your Own Ancient Roman Coin

Draw your coin in the space below or use the back of this paper if you need more space! Try to give your coin as many of the parts listed on page 1 as you can.



Obverse (Front)

Reverse (Back)



The Roman symbols on my coin are:

The modern symbols on my coin are:

My coin represents _____ about American culture.