

Name _____ Per _____

Patricians and Plebeians

In the very earliest days of the Roman Republic, most people were farmers; no one was extremely rich or extremely poor. However, as time passed, the gap between rich and poor became greater. A small but powerful class called the patricians gained control of the government. Patricians were those who could trace their families back to the first senators. Using their power, they created laws that discriminated against plebeians, the poorer class of Rome. In addition to making all the laws, patricians were the only people who could be judges, so they were also the ones who interpreted the law and presided over trials.



These wealthy Romans had a lot of free time on their hands. One of their favorite things to do was spend time at the public baths, which were not only for hygiene, but served as a private club for the patricians. They also enjoyed many banquets and parties where they ate exotic foods such as jellyfish and animal brains, richly seasoned with honey, onions, fruits, and thick and creamy sauces.

Most Romans, however, were not rich and their lifestyles were very different from the patricians. Plebeians ate simple foods such as cheese, bread, and some vegetables. They had little leisure time, as they had to spend their days working and farming. Besides having little spare time, plebeians also had little money to afford local entertainment such as races or fights at the Coliseum.

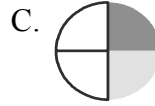
Although plebeians were citizens and could vote, they held low status in Roman society. They could not hold public office so they had no way to change the laws. Plebeians were not allowed to marry into the patrician class, so they could not move up the social ladder. Over time, however, the plebeians slowly increased their power by making demands and refusing to work until patricians gave them what they wanted. Then they gained the right to marry patricians and to hold a few offices in the government. They even forced the patricians to write down and display the laws for all to see, to ensure the laws would be applied fairly to all Roman citizens.

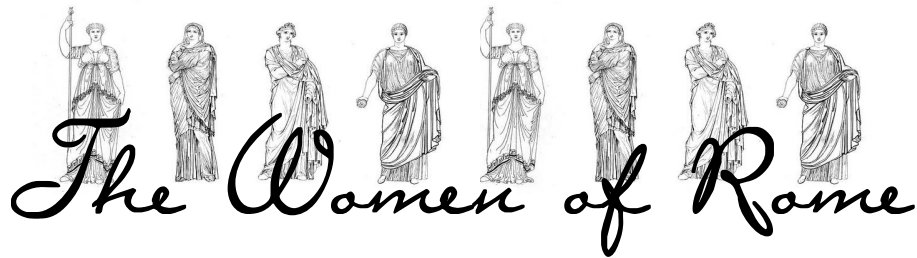
What privileges of the patricians do you think BEST enabled them to keep power?

Do you think the plebeian strategy of refusing to work was a good one? Why or why not?

What are some other historical examples of people struggling to increase their rights?

Which of these diagrams do you think BEST demonstrates the make up of Roman society? Explain.





The Women of Rome

Although Rome was a patriarchal society, the women there were much better off than in some other ancient societies. Most marriages were arranged by the woman's family, some happily. Women were the center of the household social life. They had the freedom to gather in public, visit shops, and attend games, temples, and theaters. They could also own property and operate businesses, but in most cases did so only if their husbands died or were unable to work. The role of the "matrona" or "mother" was usually to care for the home and family. Within this role, many women learned how to read and write in order to oversee the education of their children and increase their usefulness to their husbands and other male relatives. Though they sometimes expressed political opinions, they could not vote and exerted no real political power.

There was one notable exception to the general treatment of Roman women. In 216 B.C. Rome was unstable, having been shaken by invasions. The government, in an effort to bring stability to the land and raise money for the army, passed the Oppian Laws to prohibit women from buying luxury goods such as jewelry. In addition women were not allowed to wear multi-colored dresses or ride in carriages. During the war, women wanted to be supportive so they went along with the new laws. However, after the war ended and the laws remained, they poured into the streets and stormed the Forum where government leaders were meeting to demand the laws be repealed.

Marcus Porcius Cato, a statesman, wrote: "What kind of behavior is this, running around in public and blocking streets and talking to other women's husbands? ... It is not right even in your own homes for you to concern yourselves about which laws are passed or repealed here ... Our fathers have willed that women should be in the power of their fathers, of their brothers, of their husbands. Remember all the laws by which our fathers have bound down the liberty of women, by which they have bent them to the power of men. As soon as they are our equals, they become our superiors." Despite Cato's words, the Oppian Laws were repealed and women in ancient Rome proved that there was strength in numbers.

How did the Oppian Laws affect Rome and its women?

Short-term Effects	Long-term Effects

THE ROMAN REPUBLIC

ASSEMBLY OF CENTURIES

- 2 consuls who oversaw the work of other government officials
- Acted as judges
- Directed the army during wartime
- Elected for 1 year terms
- Both consuls had to agree before any action could be taken
- In emergencies one could become a "dictator" for 6 months to allow for quick decision-making
- Consuls chose Senate members
- Branch also included other elected judges and censors (people who kept track of taxes people paid)

THE SENATE

- Advisors to the consuls and other government officials
- Senators held office for life
- Could approve or veto laws passed by the Assembly
- Decided how money would be spent
- Made decisions about relations with other countries
- Influenced consuls and the army
- In emergencies Senate chose a dictator

THE ASSEMBLY OF TRIBES

- Citizens grouped into tribes based on where they lived
- Voted on laws suggested by government officials
- Could declare war and make peace treaties
- Elected the consuls
- Elected other government officials
- Could veto Senate laws and other acts

Based on information in the diagram, which government branch do you think was most powerful? Explain your answer. _____

CHECKS & BALANCES

A system of checks and balances prevents any one part of a government from becoming too powerful. Each power of the government is balanced the powers of another part.

DIRECTIONS: Study “The Roman Republic” chart to find and record all the ways power was checked and balanced. Then, answer the questions below.

Power & Who Held It	How It Was Checked & by Whom

Explain why the Roman Republic allowed for a “dictator” to be appointed.

Do you think having this option was a good idea? Why or why not?

Overall, do you think the Roman Republic ran smoothly? Why or why not?