



The Arch of Septimius Severus
Monuments and Historical Memory

Introduction	
<p>A common architectural feature of the Roman Empire was the triumphal arch, an archway structure often spanning a road. The triumphal arches commemorated military victories or the ascension of a new emperor. At least 36 triumphal arches were erected in Rome, the capital of the empire. In 203 CE, the Senate erected a highly decorated triple triumphal arch to celebrate victories of Septimius Severus and his two sons Caracalla and Geta in two Parthian wars. In this lesson, students will virtually visit Rome to gain a broader understanding of the ways in which Rome commemorated the past through the erection of monuments.</p>	
<p>Standards Connections:</p> <p>Describe the political and social institutions of the Roman Republic and analyze why Rome was transformed from republic to empire.</p> <p>Evaluate the major legal, artistic, architectural, technological, and literary achievements of the Romans and the influence of Hellenistic cultural traditions on Roman Europe.</p>	<p>Compelling Question:</p> <p>How do societies enshrine historical memories?</p>
<p>Lesson Objectives:</p> <p>Students will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participate in a class discussion about the value of monuments in establishing and preserving historical memory.• Analyze the architectural and visual features of the Arch of Septimius Severus, the interior of the Curia Julia, and the Victory Statue.• Compare and contrast how societies in the Roman Empire and the United States commemorate history through monuments.	
Materials	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Roman Forum, Rome Reborn Virtual Reality Application• Oculus Go Headset• Access to www.padlet.com (visible to whole class) or Post-It Notes• Two Sources (Source A: Excerpt, Herodian; Source B: Reconstruction of Relief)	
Learning Plan	
<p>Activities</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Start the lesson by providing students with historical (https://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/B040/history) and contemporary (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MHLOP9iXHeM) images of the Sailors and Soldiers' Arch in Brooklyn, New York. Provide students with a brief background of Arch (https://www.brooklynhistory.org/photos-of-the-week/the-soldiers-and-sailors-memorial-arch/), and have students identify details on the arch. Afterward, engage in a classroom discussion on the reasons why nations and communities might decide to commemorate history and more specifically, wars. Discuss with students how memorials serve as a link between the past and the present and can be used as an important and sometimes controversial source of information about the values of a society.2. After this warm up discussion, inform students that they will be visiting the ancient Rome virtually to experience how examine how Romans erected structures to celebrate success in their wars.	

3. Direct students to visit the Arch of Septimius Severus, and click on the “Introduction to the Arch of Septimius Severus” button to listen to Professor Bernard Frischer describe the life of Septimius Severus and describe the history behind the Arch. Ask students to carefully observe the elements of the Arch, such as the inscription and the relief on the sides of the Arch, and also use the Time Warp function within the application to compare and contrast the past with the present.
4. Have students complete their virtual visit and return to the classroom. Using either a digital collaboration application such as Padlet (www.padlet.com) or more traditional collaboration tool such as Post-It Notes, ask students to identify questions they had about the Arch, Septimius Severus, or the Roman Empire during their visit.
5. The teacher should use the answers to student questions to engender a discussion of some of the major themes described during the visit such as the Five Good Emperors (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Five-Good-Emperors>), the Parthian War (<https://www.ancient.eu/article/502/the-arch-of-septimius-severus-rome/>), and the Severan Dynasty (https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/seve/hd_seve.htm).
6. After this discussion, group students into dyads, and provide each dyad with copies of two sources. The first source is an adapted excerpt from the Roman historian Herodian, who recounts Severus’ war against Parthia. Have the dyads engage in a close reading of the text and annotate the document. Students should circle or underline key words, put question marks by ideas, and summarize the key historical events recounted by Herodian. The second document is a rendering of one of the reliefs found on the Arch of Septimius Severus reconstructed by the Rome Reborn graphics team. Have students analyze the rendering using the Artwork Analysis Tool provided by the National Archives (<https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/artwork>). Ask the student dyads to compare and contrast Herodian’s account of the Siege of Ctestiphon with the relief found on the side of the Arch of Septimius Severus using a graphic organizer. During this time, students can return to the Roman Forum virtual reality application to more closely inspect the features of the Arch.
7. Conclude the lesson with a whole-class discussion on the ways in which societies ensure historical memory. The teacher should help students compare and contrast contemporary edifices such as the Soldiers and Sailors’ Arch and historical edifices such as the Arch of Septimius Severus.

Assessment Suggestions

Have students complete a Venn Diagram that compares and contrasts the use of monuments to establish historical memory in the United States and the Roman Empire.

Extensions

As a whole-class, view the video “History in Dispute: Charlottesville and Contemporary Monuments” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jcHjg4HY0JU>) and engage in a discussion that addresses how societies should address historical memory that enshrines oppression.

Severus' War Against Parthia

[3.9.1] [197] Severus now remained in Rome for a long time, during which his sons were partners with him in governing the empire. He was then seized with a desire to win glory for victories not only over fellow countrymen and Roman armies but also barbarians.

[3.9.2] When he arrived there his intention was to invade Armenia also. But the king of the Armenians forestalled him by sending money, gifts, and hostages to support his plea for peace and by promising pacts and good will. After affairs in Armenia had thus turned out to his satisfaction, Severus marched against the Hatrenian kingdom.

[3.9.3] After passing through the region between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and the country of the Adiabenes, Severus hurried on into Arabia Felix, the country which produces the fragrant plants we use in our perfumes and incense. When he had destroyed many towns and villages there and had plundered the countryside, he came into the territory of the Hatrenians, where he encamped and laid siege to the city of Hatra.

[3.9.4] This city, located on top of a lofty mountain, was surrounded by a high, strong wall manned by many bowmen. After making camp, Severus' soldiers pressed the siege with all the power at their command, endeavoring to capture the city. Engines of every type were brought up to the wall, and all the known tactics were tried.

[3.9.5] The Hatrenians fought back bravely; pouring down a steady stream of stones and arrows, they did considerable damage to the army of Severus. Making clay pots, they filled them with winged insects, little poisonous flying creatures. When these were hurled down on the besiegers, the insects fell into the Romans' eyes and on all the unprotected parts of their bodies; digging in before they were noticed, they bit and stung the soldiers.

[3.9.6] The Romans found the air at Hatra intolerable, stifling from the hot sun; they fell sick and died, and more casualties resulted from disease than from enemy action.

[3.9.7] When the army, for the reasons mentioned above, had abandoned all hope and the siege was at a stalemate, with the Romans losing instead of gaining ground, Severus led his troops away unsuccessful, fearing that he would lose his entire army. The soldiers were unhappy that the siege had not turned out as successfully as they wished;

[3.9.8] accustomed to victory in all their battles, they believed that failure to win was actually defeat. But Fortune, by furthering his affairs at this time, provided Severus a measure of consolation; he did not return home without some success, and the truth is that he accomplished more than he had expected.

[3.9.9] The army, sailing in a large number of ships, was not borne to its intended destination on Roman-held shores, but after the current had carried the fleet a great distance, the legions disembarked on Parthian beaches at a spot within a few days' march of the road leading to Ctesiphon, where the royal palace of the Parthians was located. There the king was spending his time peacefully, thinking that the battles between Severus and the Hatrenians were no concern of his.

[3.9.10] But the troops of the emperor, brought by the current to these shores against their will, landed and plundered the region, driving off for food all the cattle they found and burning all the villages as they passed. After proceeding a short distance, they stood at the gates of Ctesiphon, the capital city of the great king Artabanus.

[3.9.11] [28 January 198] The Romans fell upon the unsuspecting barbarians, killing all who opposed them. Taking captive the women and children, they looted the entire city. After the king fled with a few horsemen, the Romans plundered the treasuries, seized the ornaments and jewels, and marched off.

[3.9.12] Thus, more by luck than good judgment, Severus won the glory of a Parthian victory. And since these affairs turned out more successfully than he had any reason to hope, he sent dispatches to the senate and the people, extolling his exploits, and he had paintings of his battles and victories put on public display. The Senate voted him the titles formed from the names of the conquered nations, as well as all the rest of the usual honors.

Source B: Relief, Arch of Septimius Severus (Rome Reborn Reconstruction)

The Arch of Septimius Severus, one of the best preserved structures in the Forum, was awarded by the Senate in 203 CE to the emperor and his sons to celebrate their Parthian victories. One of the most interesting features of this monument is the erasure of Geta's name from the inscription that fills the attic. Severus had first chosen Caracalla, his elder son, as heir to the throne but later named Geta to be a co-ruler with Caracalla. Upon his father's death in 211 CE, Caracalla put an end to the long-standing feud between the two brothers by murdering Geta. He then subjected his brother's name to a *damnatio memoriae*, the "erasure of memory (or record)," involving the destruction of a person's statues and images, and the elimination of his name from inscriptions. The "son of Marcus" as part of Severus's title and the name "Marcus Aurelius" as part of Caracalla's are the result of Severus's self-proclaimed "posthumous" adoption by the long-dead Marcus Aurelius (From Peter Aicher, *Rome Alive: A Source Guide to the Ancient City*).

