

Ancient Rome: CLASS SYSTEM

Each person in the Roman Empire had a specific role. There were two distinct Roman **classes**: the **plebeians** and the **patricians**. Patricians were the upper class, while everyone else was considered a plebeian. A third social class were **slaves**. They made up about a third of Rome's population, but had no say in the government. All adult males in the Roman Empire were considered **citizens**, no matter their class. In both the patricians and plebeians, the oldest male was the **paterfamilias**, or head of the family. Old age was honored and women had no rights. Both classes had slaves if they could afford them. The same gods were worshipped by all class system. The same festivals and holy days were observed by all classes. There were many differences in the classes though.

PATRICIANS

The ruling class of the early Roman Empire were known as **patricians**. They controlled the government. In order to be a patrician, a person had to be born into a patrician family. Even though they were only a small percentage of the Roman population, the patricians held all the power as the wealthy land owners.



PLEBIANS

Anyone else in Ancient Rome was a **plebeian**. They were the farmers, craftsmen, laborers, and soldiers of Rome. They were sometimes just called "plebs." Plebeians could not hold office early on, but could be elected as leaders by 367 BCE. Plebeians were not allowed to marry patricians either.

REVOLT

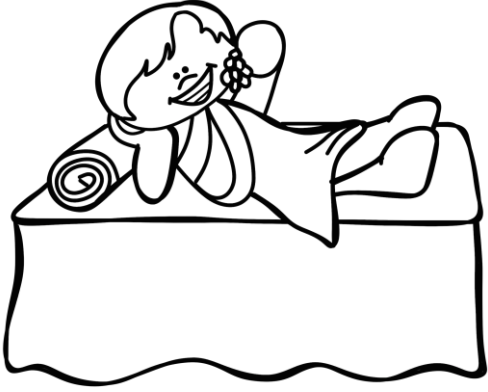
Around 484 BC, the plebeians started to fight against the rule of the patricians in what came to be known as the "**Conflict of the Orders**." The plebeians gained more rights over the 200 years through protesting by going on strike, leaving the city for a while, refusing to work, or refusing to fight in the army. Plebeians eventually gained a number of rights, including the right to run for public office and marry patricians.

LAW OF THE TWELVE TABLES

The **Law of the Twelve Tables** was one of the first concessions the patricians gave plebeians. These laws were publicly posted for all to see and protected some basic rights of all Roman citizens, regardless of their social class.

TRIBUNES

The plebeians were eventually allowed to elect their own government officials. "**Tribunes**" represented the plebeians and fought for their rights. If they disagreed with a new law passed by the Roman senate, they had the power of **veto** (meaning "I forbid" in Latin). **Cicero**, one of Rome's most famous senators, was a plebeian. He was the first of his family to be elected to the senate.



NOBLE POSITIONS

There were fewer legal differences between plebeians and patricians over time. Plebeians could be elected to the **senate** and even become a **consul**. Plebeians and patricians were allowed to marry and wealthy plebeians became part of Roman nobility. Despite these changes in the law, patricians still held a majority of the wealth and power in ancient Rome.

SLAVES

Slaves in ancient Rome were the lowest class. Most slaves came from outside the Roman Empire. Romans bought slaves from other civilizations. They also captured enemies in battle and brought them home as slaves. Slaves had the most dangerous and difficult jobs. Slaves were important in Rome's success. They were considered property and did not have any rights or protection by the Roman law. Most slaves did not get any pay, but some slave owners treated their slaves like family. Some owners paid their slaves or even set them freed.

FREEDMEN

Freed slaves were known as **freedmen**. They formed their own class. Most became **merchants** who bought and sold goods in markets. Some freedmen grew very rich, but were not allowed to become senators.

Name _____

Ancient Rome: CLASS SYSTEM

IDENTIFY: Use the word bank to identify each description.

Law of 12 Tables	patricians	veto	plebeians
Public Office	slaves	Conflict of the Orders	Cicero

	1. A third social class who did not have rights
	2. Fight of the plebeians against the patricians
	3. Famous plebeian Senator
	4. Upper class in ancient Rome
	5. Means "I forbid" in Latin
	6. Publicly posted rights for Roman citizens
	7. Group who fought to have equal rights with patricians
	8. Plebeians could not hold this in early Rome

MULTIPLE CHOICE: Choose the best answer.

9. Which of the following is **NOT** a similarity between the plebeians and patricians?
- A. They worshipped the same gods.
 - B. They celebrated the same holidays.
 - C. They could both hold public office in early Rome.
 - D. They had slaves if they could afford them.
10. Which of the following would be the **LEAST** necessary to include in a summary about Ancient Rome's class system?
- A. There were two distinct groups: the plebeians and the patricians.
 - B. A third social class were slaves, who had no rights.
 - C. The plebeians earned more rights over the years.
 - D. Cicero, Rome's most famous Senator, was a plebeian.
11. Which of the following was **NOT** a victory in progress for the plebeians from early Roman times?
- A. Plebeians were able to own land.
 - B. Marriage between plebeians and patricians was permitted.
 - C. Plebeians were able to be elected to public office.
 - D. Many plebeians became part of Roman nobility.
12. Which of the following was **NOT** true about the class system of ancient Rome?
- A. Slaves had a say in government policies.
 - B. Women had no rights in ancient Rome.
 - C. Holy days were observed by all classes.
 - D. The two distinct classes were the plebeians and the patricians.
13. What was the **main** purpose of the Law of the Twelve Tables?
- A. To outline consequences for breaking the law.
 - B. To give plebeians more rights than the patricians.
 - C. To protect some basic rights of all Roman citizens.
 - D. To outline the role of Rome's senators.

