



4 Lesson Four

Romans Recline to Dine

Enduring Understanding

Communication is important to every culture and art is a form of communication. Frescoes are a form of cultural expression.

Essential Questions

How do archaeologists use frescoes to analyze how people lived in the past? What can frescoes in villas teach us about Roman culture? Why would a Roman create a permanent wall painting?

What Students Will Learn

- Art is a form of communication.
- The decoration of walls was meant to convey the wealth and sophistication of the villa's owner.
- Romans recline to dine in a triclinium.

What Students Will Do

- Use observation, inference, and evidence to interpret an ancient Roman fresco from a triclinium in Villa A at Oplontis.
- Read an art historian's interpretation of the frescoes, then compare and contrast with student's interpretations.

Assessment

Students create a drawing that communicates something important they learned about the culture of the Romans.

Materials

For Each Student

- "The Frescoes of the Triclinium in Villa A" art historian interpretation (page 60)

SUBJECTS: art, social studies, science

CCSS: R.7, R. 10, SL.1, SL.2, SL.4, L.6 I

SKILLS:

- **Bloom's Taxonomy:** evaluation, synthesis, analysis
- **Facets of Understanding:** interpretation, application

DURATION: 45- 60 minutes

CLASS SIZE: Any

- "Missing Fresco Mystery" drawing sheet (page 61)

For Each Group

- Image of fresco from the triclinium (page 37)
- "Fresco: Analyzing the Data" data collection sheet (page 59)
- Image of fresco reconstruction from the triclinium

For the Teacher

- PowerPoint presentation with images of the frescoes and triclinium
- "Primary Sources on Dining in Ancient Rome" (page 58)

Background Information

Communication is an important basic need of culture. Communication allows individuals to interact with each other through customs, roles, rules, or rituals, thereby defining and establishing the characteristics of a particular culture. Culture is created through communication, and preserves and passes along cultural characteristics from one place and time to another.

Art is one form of communication. Artists create art to communicate ideas, thoughts, or feelings about their culture. Art at its simplest

The Frescoes of the Triclinium in Villa A

By Regina Gee
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Room 14 is dated to approximately 50 BC. The frescoes feature columns and walls painted in deep shades of cinnabar red, light green, brown, pink, gold, and purple. Room 14 is a grand triclinium with decorative walls and a mosaic floor. The room has two spaces connected by the unifying design of floor-to-ceiling wide piers running along the long walls which support the painted piled-up shields, weapons, and armor.

In the entrance, there is a high podium with tall vertical yellow-gold marble panels painted with landscapes. In the main room, there is a deep podium forming the base for columns. In between the columns are low walls, niches or woodwork gates. The design is enlivened by objects including hanging shields, silver vessels, incense burners, a bow and quiver, bowls and baskets of fruits, torches, and birds.

Each yellow panel has a different series of scenes. The scenes include towers, walls, temples and shrines, with altars, and statues of gods on pedestals. The

scenes are often enlivened by small sketchily-painted figures, alone or in small groups. In several instances, the artists take the same elements—shrine, tree, round pedestal—and vary the details for visual interest. For example, the east wall shows a scene containing a tall rectangular woodland shrine with a garland. On the north wall there is a sacred tree with a split trunk that grows up and out along one side of the shrine and a large round altar stands in front. On the west wall, the round altar shape has been transformed into a pedestal for a statue of Nike, god of victory, and three figures.

The owners of Villa A had frescoes dated to 50 BC in seven rooms. There is proof that the owners desired to keep these rooms preserved even as the villa expanded over time. The style of the 50 BC frescoes is very grand with continuous floor-to-ceiling designs all painted in deep shades of red, gold, green, and purple. The columns are painted to imitate luxury, to look like marble with jewels and gold. The painted structures have some sort of central focus: a bronze tripod, a sacred tree, or a small ornate shrine holding a bronze or gold statue of a god.

