

BLACK PEOPLE IN ROMAN BRITAIN

Pathway Guide by Mark Robinson (based on the original Reteach list *Black People in Roman Britain* by Joshua Preye Garry)

Please note that all timings are suggestions only so feel free to adapt or change them according to the needs of your students and your timetable. (Times in brackets refer to classroom time.)

Enquiry questions

1. Why has the history of Black people in Roman Britain been neglected?
2. Why were the lives of Black people in Roman Britain not recorded?
3. How far was the Roman Empire inclusive and tolerant?
4. To what extent can links be drawn between the experience of Black people in Roman Britain and modern Britain today?
5. How can the past be seen in different ways in order to better represent all British people?

Curriculum and specification mapping

- **KS3 curriculum:** the study of an aspect or theme in British history that consolidates and extends pupils' chronological knowledge from before 1066
- **OCR Ancient History specification:** Britannia: from conquest to province, AD 43–c. 84
- **OCR Classical Civilisation specification:** Content of Roman City Life

Not much planning time available

Introductory task:

Video clip on 'Beachy Head Lady' (5 mins)

Prep time: 0 mins

Paired activity: Answer comprehension questions on the video clip (10 mins)

Prep time: 0 mins

Research task: The geographical scope of the Roman Empire (45 mins)

Prep time: 20 mins

Developing understanding:

Growing up in Roman Britain (45 mins)

Prep time: 15 mins

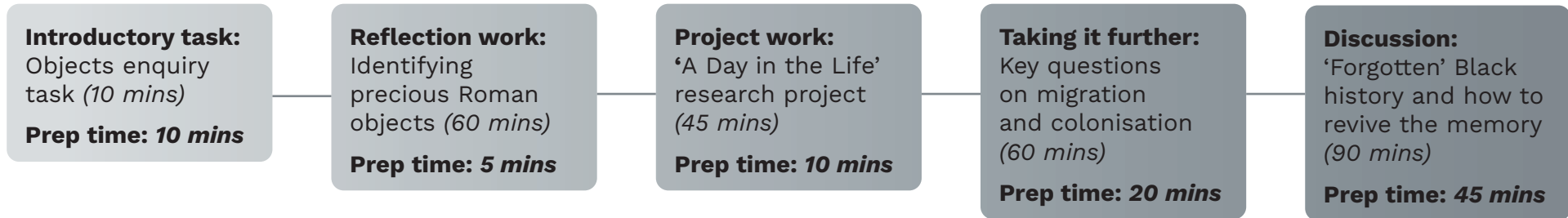
Assessing understanding:

The two Roman ladies quiz (15 mins)

Prep time: 0 mins or 20 mins

- **Introductory task:** Watch the 'Beachy Head Lady' BBC clip on the female skeleton dating from 125–240 AD. This provides an excellent context to the era and the topic. https://era.org.uk/api-resource/?resource_id=26692&share_key=8dd61219-d831-43e3-8168-9d317caba804
- **Paired activity:** Students work in pairs to understand the nature of the context by completing the question sheet on the Reteach website: <https://reteach.org.uk/subject/history/black-people-in-roman-britain> (The teacher answer key is also available on the website.)
- **Research task:** Use a map of the Roman Empire and a modern-day map. Ask students to research how many modern-day nations are covered by/bordered the Roman Empire. Record this on a blank modern-day map. Discuss the extent to which Black people would have been an integral part of the Roman Empire.
- **Developing understanding:** Using the links from the Reteach lists *Our Migration Story*, *Black and British: A Forgotten History – Beachy Head Lady* (the video), create an answer to the question 'What would it have been like to grow up as a Black African in Roman Britain?'. Students should research 'Beachy Head Lady' and 'Ivory Bangle Lady' and draw posters to illustrate their lives.
- **Assessing understanding:** Create a factual quiz on 'Beachy Head Lady' and 'Ivory Bangle Lady'. Possible formats could include:
 1. Ordering exercise: Key events of Roman Britain's history, incorporating details on the two ladies.
 2. Student-generated quizzes: One half of the class creates questions on 'Beachy Head Lady', the other half on 'Ivory Bangle Lady' and then each group tests the other.
 3. 'Quiz, Quiz, Trade': Students review information with their peers by asking and answering questions.
 4. A basic factual knowledge test
 5. Make a plan of how this quizzing technique could be used over a three-week period to prepare for a history test.

Some planning time available



- **Introductory task:** Read Chapter 1 of *Empire's End - A Roman Story* by Leila Rasheed in which the protagonist Camilla buries a 'silver box of memories'. In pairs, work out the meaning and significance of the five items in the box, and the symbols on the box itself.
- **Reflection work:** Students should identify five items that they would bury in a box to represent themselves. They should then go on to think about what items could represent the lives of Black people in Roman Britain, creating their own 'digital box' of five items. These could be sourced from the British Museum's collection of Roman objects, which can be explored on Google Streetview: https://artsandculture.google.com/streetview/british-museum/AwEp68JO4NECkQ?sv_h=307.99753064511447&sv_p=-7.056012655920327&sv_pid=-mOyP9dwRKuMr_r9Kd8fiA&sv_lid=3582009757710443819&sv_lng=-0.12622130020807276&sv_lat=51.519341404918606&sv_z=0.6911292499459274 and the Museum of London: <https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/museum-london/permanent-galleries/roman-london> or from a local museum/Roman site. As an extension task, those who finish quickly could design a box to contain the objects.
- **Project work:** The 'Beachy Head Lady' video clip asks the question: 'What would it have been like to grow up as a Black African in Roman Britain?' Split students into small groups of three or four. Based on a class of 30 students, this equates to 10 groups. Five groups could research the area that the 'Beachy Head Lady' came from (living in the countryside), and the other five groups could research where the 'Ivory Bangle Lady' came from (Roman York/Eboracum). Students should use the principle put forward by Mary Beard in the video clip that the Romans did not discriminate by skin colour. Each group should create 'A Day in the Life' of both places, incorporating the different activities and people from each setting. The two women's lives can be woven into this.

- **Taking it further:** Use the questions from the ‘Our Migration Story’ website (<https://reteach.org.uk/subject/history/black-people-in-roman-britain>) to frame enquiry questions around the topic:

1. Traditionally we think of Roman soldiers and administrators as incomers and colonisers. Why would women and children also move across the Roman Empire? How does that compare to other periods of history?
2. Burial practices differ from culture to culture, but many practices involve burying people with highly valuable goods that the living will never see again. Why do you think these kinds of rituals are so common? What might it have meant for the Ivory Bangle Lady’s contemporaries to bury her in this way?
3. Roman migration to Britain was, in very important ways, the migration of a colonising force. Does the description of their settlement, above, replicate any features of other colonial migrations you have studied or read about? What is similar? What is different?

- **Discussion:** Read extracts from the two books on the Reteach list *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* by Peter Fryer and *Black and British: A Forgotten History* by David Olusoga.

Students should discuss the following questions:

1. Why is there such a limited record of the lives of Black people in Roman Britain?
2. Why does the title of Olusoga’s book include the phrase ‘*A Forgotten History*’? In what ways has the history of Black people in Roman Britain been ‘forgotten’?
3. Brainstorm with your class ways that the Black people of Roman Britain could be better remembered. How could textbooks, museums and other settings promote a more accurate history?

Longer planning time available

Overview: ‘On the Wall or not?’ starter activity
(10 mins)

Prep time: 0 mins

Research:
Hadrian’s Wall
(45 mins)

Prep time: 15 mins

Project work:
Aballava and the Aurelian Moors
(75 mins)

Prep time: 45 mins

Extension: Pliny and Black people in the British imagination
(90 mins)

Prep time: 30 mins

Taking it further:
Decolonising and reshaping the curriculum
(90 mins)

Prep time: 60 mins

- **Overview:** Students undertake an activity on Hadrian’s Wall by completing the table below to give background to the topic as a whole.

‘On the Wall or not?’ Which of these places was a fort on Hadrian’s Wall? Write Yes or No in the spaces.	
1. Housesteads	
2. Mais	
3. Londinium	
4. Roma	
5. Banna	
6. Coria	
7. Vindolanda	
8. Aquae Sulis	
9. Aballava	
10. Verona	
11. Byzantium	
12. Pons Aelius	

(Answers: 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 9, 12)

- **Research:** Find out the modern names for these forts on Hadrian's Wall, and then research details about the wall and why it was built.
- **Project work:** At the site of the Roman fort of Aballava, there is a plaque that reads: 'The first recorded African community in Britain guarded a Roman fort on this site, 3rd century AD.' Find out about the Roman fort of Aballava (Burgh-by-Sands) and its role in Hadrian's Wall. Create maps and plans of the area that the Aurelian Moors came from, their route to Cumbria and the fort itself.

What would it have been like being one of the Aurelian Moors? What motivated men to join such a force? How might their presence in Cumbria have a long-term impact on Roman Britain?

- **Extension:** *Black and British: A Forgotten History* by David Olusoga quotes a passage from the Roman author Pliny:

'Of the Ethiopians there are many different types of men. Some live towards the East, and have neither nose or nostrils, but the face all full. Others have no upper lip, they are without tongues, and they speak by signs, and have only a little hole to breathe by, and they drink with an open straw... In a part of Africa are people called Ptoemphane, for their King they have a dog, at whose fancy they are governed... Towards the West there is a people called Arimaspi that only have one eye in their foreheads, they are in the desert and wild country. The people called Agriphagi eat panthers and lions and the people called Anthropophagi, eat human flesh.'

1. Why was Pliny interested in the people of Ethiopia?
 2. Think of reasons why Pliny's description of the Ethiopians is so inaccurate.
 3. This passage was first published in England in 1550. What impact do you think it might have had upon attitudes towards Black people in Britain at the time?
 4. How have those attitudes continued up to the present day?
- **Taking it further:** David Olusoga wrote: 'We were colonised long before we were colonisers.' Listen to the podcast on the Reteach list and apply Joshua Garry's 'How to decolonise the curriculum' ideas (timestamp: 12:25–18:00 mins). Work with your students to reshape your own curriculum and address the following questions on Black people in Roman Britain:
1. Evidence: How can we look beyond just written evidence on Roman Britain?
 2. Interpretations: How can we view the Roman past differently?
 3. Significance: How have things been remembered about Roman Britain?
 4. The Archive: What has been given pre-eminence in things that are preserved from Roman Britain?