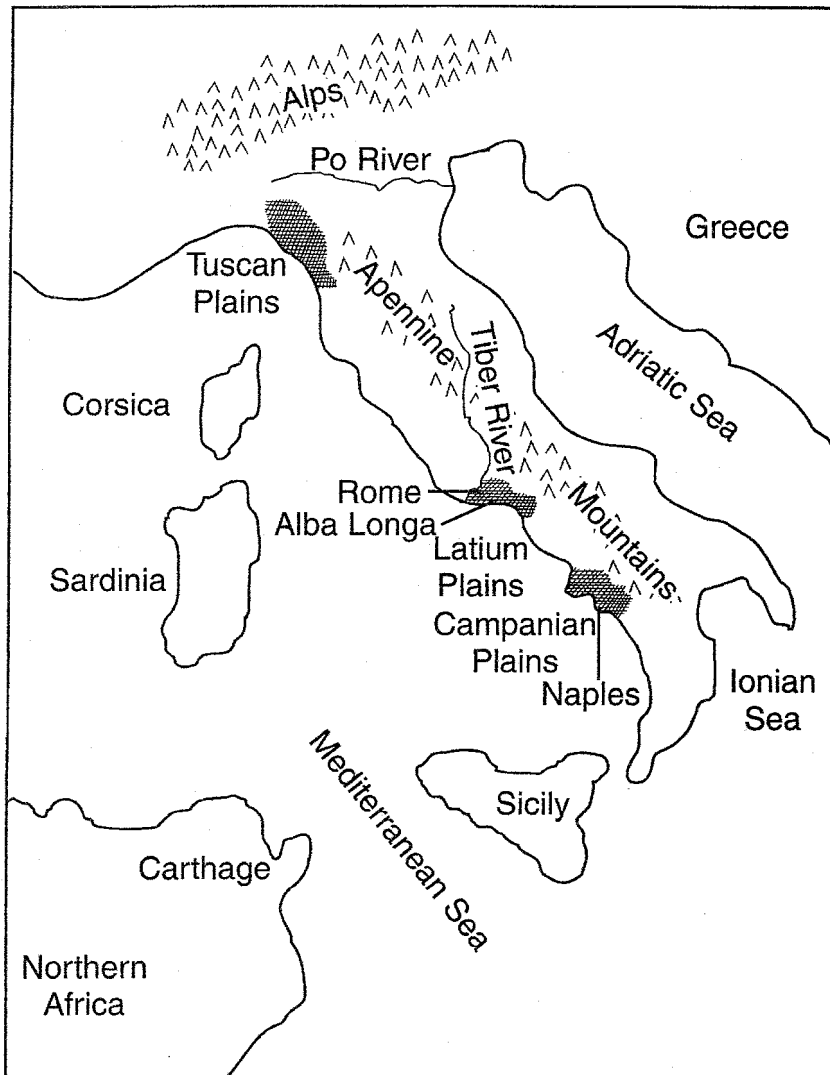


The Geography of Ancient Rome

Italy is a rocky, mountainous peninsula 600 miles long and 150 miles wide. The **Apennine Mountains** form its “backbone” and stretch from north to south, with the **Tiber River** cutting through them in central Italy. Along the northern border, the **Alps** serve as a natural boundary. The three major bodies of water surrounding Italy are the **Adriatic Sea**, the **Ionian Sea**, and the **Mediterranean Sea**. Romans developed many trade routes to other regions in the Mediterranean region. Greece is only 50 miles away, across the Adriatic Sea, and Africa is only 100 miles from the west coast of **Sicily**.

Along the western coast of Italy, at the base of the Apennine mountain range, lie three plains areas. Here are where most early people settled. The **Tuscan Plains** in the north, drained by the **Po River**, were a fertile farming region. The **Latium Plains** became the home of **Alba Longa** and **Rome**, bustling cities near the Tiber River and the seacoast, hub of the Roman Empire’s trade business. The southern plains area, the **Campanian**, boasted Italy’s best harbor.

The Italian peninsula was perfect for a consolidation of power within Italy and an expansion of power from Italy to other parts of the area. It was in the Latium Plains that an Indo-European tribe called Latins first settled. These people were the early ancestors of the Romans. Their first city, Alba Longa, was established around 1000 B.C. Their most important city, Rome, was founded in 753 B.C. by Romulus.



The Geography of Ancient Rome (cont.)

What did the early settlers look for when deciding where to build their cities, and how did the site chosen for Rome fit these criteria?

Fresh Water—Fresh water is essential for all life—people, animals, and crops. Rivers also provide a means for trade and transportation.

Sea Access—Ports are necessary to safely harbor the ships used for trade and military expansion into other lands.

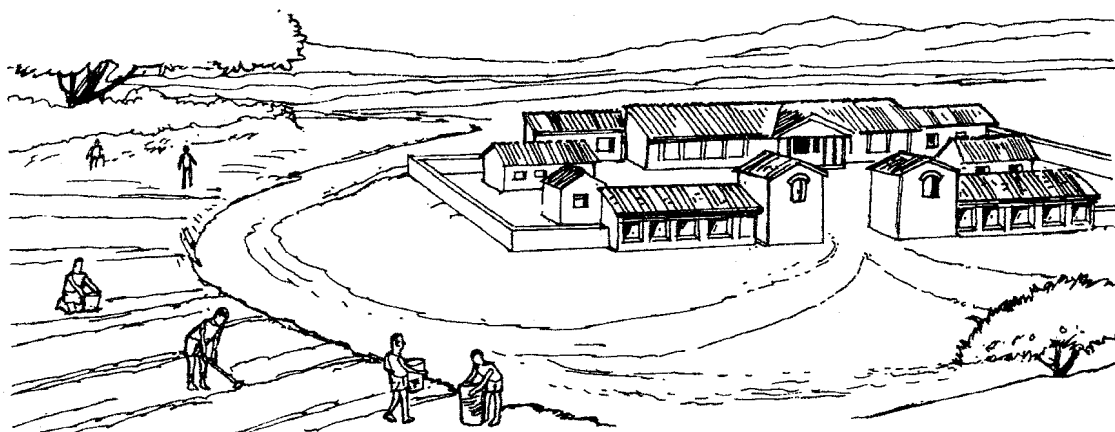
Good Land—For a city to flourish, it must be out of flood range and have land good for farming, grazing, and hunting.

Protection—The site chosen for a major city must offer protection from invaders by land or by sea. It must also provide room for growth and expansion.

Rome was built 15 miles inland on the crest of seven hills covered with forests of oak and chestnut. Small streams ran through the valleys, and flanking the seven hills was the large Tiber River, whose steep banks served as additional natural protection. The Mediterranean climate of hot, dry summers and wet, mild winters proved ideal for people, plants, and animals. The rich volcanic soil was perfect for raising crops.

From Rome's vantage point the Roman Empire began and grew. Many large cities were established, but most of the people lived in **farming communities** and worked the land. These communities consisted of small villages, farmsteads, and hamlets. Farm workers produced the food, materials, and fuel that the large cities needed. It was a difficult life of endless work for men, women, and children.

The very rich in Ancient Rome owned vast estates of fertile farmland. Here they built magnificent **villas** to which they would flee to escape the heat and congestion of the cities where they conducted their business. The estates were cared for by slaves, whose lives were grindingly hard and far removed from the peaceful and luxurious country life their owners enjoyed.



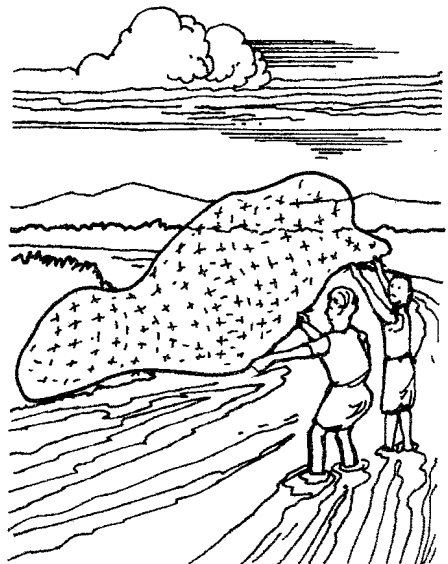
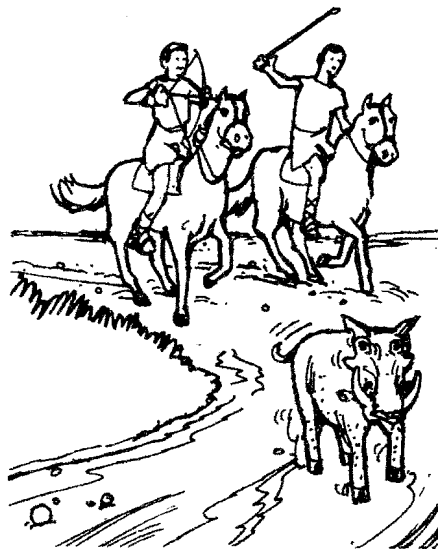
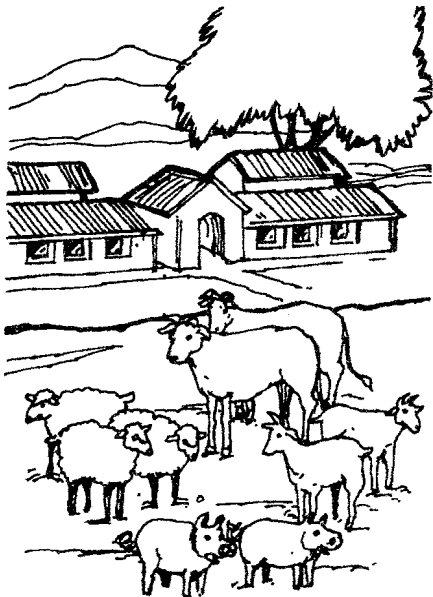
On farmland near the warm shores of the **Mediterranean Sea** farmers grew many grains, such as emmer wheat, which was made into bread and used in other foods. It was highly nutritious, with almost twice as much protein as modern wheat today. But as the Roman Empire grew, it could not feed all of its people alone, so wheat and other grains were imported from Egypt and other areas in northern Africa.

The Geography of Ancient Rome (cont.)

The most prized crops were grapes and olives, both of which grew well in the rocky soil and warm climate. Grapes were fermented and made into wine. There were few other beverages available, so wine was widely consumed throughout the Mediterranean region and was therefore a valuable trade commodity. Olives were grown to be eaten and also to be processed for their oil. Olive oil became a basic essential for Mediterranean cooking. It was also used as fuel in lamps and for cleaning the body.



Large ranches with pigs, cattle, goats, and sheep were able to thrive in regions unsuitable for planting. Large cattle ranches provided meat, leather goods, and dairy products. Goats and sheep produced milk, cheese, meat, and the wool used for clothing. Hunting wild animals such as boar and deer was a favorite, though dangerous, sport for many Romans. In addition to offering good hunting, the forests were valuable for their wood for building and for fuel. Fish and waterfowl were plentiful. In short, because of Italy's natural resources—and its hard-working people—the Ancient Romans were able to establish and maintain a far-reaching civilization that lasted nearly 2,000 years.



Vocabulary and Comprehension

Write the following words on the chalkboard for students to copy into their vocabulary books. Remind students to define and illustrate each word.

Apennine Mountains

Alba Longa

Alps

Adriatic Sea

Campanian

Ionian Sea

Latium Plains

Mediterranean Sea

Po River

Sicily

Rome

Tiber River

Tuscan Plains

farming communities

villas

Use all or some of the following questions for whole-class discussion, small-group work, or individual assessment. Allow students to refer back to the story while working.

1. What are the mountain ranges of Italy, and what benefits did they provide the Ancient Romans? *(The Alps and the Apennine Mountains provided protection and natural resources.)*
2. What main advantage did the Italian peninsula offer for establishing an empire? *(The seas opened trade to many new areas and provided a way for the military to go to and conquer other lands.)*
3. Why were new settlements built along rivers? *(Rivers provided fresh water for people, plants, and animals; they also provided a means of trade and transportation.)*
4. Why was the location of Rome so ideal? *(Rome's location on the Tiber River provided a means for trade and transportation and was a source of fresh water; the volcanic soil was fertile; it was far enough inland to provide protection from enemy invasion; access to the sea made it good for a trade and military center.)*
5. What different types of farms flourished on the Italian peninsula? *(Farms for growing wheat, olives, and grapes; ranches for raising cattle, pigs, goats, and sheep.)*
6. How was life different for those who owned large farming estates and those who actually worked the land? *(Working the land was hard labor and was performed by slaves; the estate owners worked in the cities and came to the country to relax, not to work.)*

Make a Physical Feature Map of Ancient Rome

Use the map on page 21 and the directions below to make a map showing the physical features of Ancient Rome.

1. Locate, draw, and label the Apennine Mountains and the Alps. Color these two mountain ranges brown.
2. Label the Mediterranean Sea, the Adriatic Sea, and the Ionian Sea. Color the seas blue.
3. Locate, draw, and label the Tiber River and the Po River. Color the rivers blue.
4. Locate and label the islands of Corsica, Sardinia, and Sicily. Color the islands yellow.
5. Locate, draw, and label the Tuscan Plain, the Latium Plain, and Campanian Plain. Color the plains green.
6. Color the rest of the Italian coastline yellow.
7. Locate and label Northern Africa.
8. Locate, indicate, and label the cities of Rome, Alba Longa, and Naples.
9. Make a compass rose on your map showing north, south, east, and west.
10. Make a map key showing what each symbol and color represents on your map.
11. Make a scale showing that 1 inch equals 100 miles.
12. Cut out your map and glue it onto a sheet of colored construction paper.
13. At the top clearly write The Geography of Ancient Rome and your name.

Map of Ancient Rome

