



## Latin Lives In The Third Grade At St. Louise de Marillac School

**Quod donum majus reipublicae offerre possumus**

**Quam adolescentes docere et instruere?**

*“What greater and better gift can we offer the republic  
than to teach and to instruct our young?”*

**Cicero**

Some people say that Latin is a dead language, but not at St. Louise de Marillac School. Third graders are studying the history, culture, and art of the ancient Romans and are bringing Latin to life. When introduced at the elementary level, the study of Latin helps students to expand their vocabulary and sentence patterns. Despite the benefits of the study of Latin, in many districts it is not part of the required school curriculum, no funding is available for programs, and there is a critical shortage of primary and secondary school Latin teachers.

By incorporating the history, customs, mythology, and art of ancient Rome with the study of Latin word roots in the English language, students introduced to Latin at the elementary level will develop skills and strategies to build curiosity and become better citizens by exposing them to a different way of thinking and living.

### **CICERO’S GIFT UNWRAPPED**

I decided to introduce Latin in the third grade and share Cicero’s “gift” when I found Minimus a text by Barbara Bell (Cambridge University Press) that is written specifically for students in third to fifth grade. <http://www.minimus-etc.co.uk/index.shtml> I learned through the internet that teachers without Latin background were using the text successfully in England and were experiencing wonderful results. I wanted to be part of the excitement! After sharing my idea about introducing Latin in just minutes a week with parents, the response was overwhelming. Parents and relatives of the third graders donated the needed funds for the textbooks and dictionaries for our class. My goal was to be able to introduce Latin to third graders and help them to realize how much fun it could be so that when they enter high school they would not hesitate to chose Latin to study. My “dream” for the program at school was to be able to present a skit in the spring to show parents and the younger students what we had been working on all year. I wanted to have all of the children in costumes for the presentation. I asked if anyone had old fabric for togas or was willing to sew togas if given a pattern. By the April 1<sup>st</sup> production, I had 62 togas, enough for two third grade classes. (A great site for Roman clothing information and more is Vroma at <http://www.vroma.org/~bmcmanus/clothing.html>) Students, parents, and friends helped with props and the backdrop as well. It was truly a group effort.

The third grade students presented a little skit that I wrote where the students taught the audience a few Latin words like “ridete” (smile), plaudite (applaud), and salve (hello). Along with the skit, the third graders sang songs including “Dona Nobis Pacem,” they played recorders, and performed a dialogue from Barbara Bell’s text, Minimus. We celebrated after the production with a complete Roman feast, “ab ovo usque ad mala” or “from egg to apple.”

Over the past year, the third graders have been studying the language, culture and history of the ancient Romans. With materials I received from Pompeiiana I was able to show the students a reproduction of a wax tablet with a stylus and a lucerna. I worked the wax tablet in our skit, "Latina Vivit" to show the 200 people in the audience that one example of Latin alive today was the use of a stylus and that the wax writing tablet was really the first Palm Pilot and the stylus is still called a stylus today!

I also received wonderful support from Ancient Coins for Education program.

<http://ancientcoinsforeducation.org/> With materials from ACE, I was able to design several lessons for the children. Third graders are uncovering the past as they work to clean a Roman coin that is over 1,000 years old. The children are using worksheets to record the changes that they see in the coins each week. They children also learned about the game, "Navia aut Capita." This is an ancient version of the coin toss game, "heads or tails." "Capita" from "caput" which is "head" in Latin. The obverse of Roman coins frequently had the "head" or bust of an emperor on them. "Navia" comes from the Latin word "navis" which is "ship" in Latin. On the reverse of some ancient coins you can find an image of a ship. A sestertius of Hadrian is a good example of such a coin.

My students participated in National Latin Teacher recruitment week <http://www.promotelatin.org/> sponsored by the National Committee for Latin and Greek in March. During this special week, I invited several guest speakers into our classroom. Joe Luvara, a local attorney and a former History teacher presented a slide show about Roman culture. Scott Stickney, treasurer of the Pennsylvania Classical Association <http://www.dickinson.edu/prorg/pca/> and Latin teacher spoke about the Latin language, and Father Mike Caridi of St. Louise parish, spoke about Latin roots in the Catholic church.

### **JOIN THE EMPIRE'S CLUB**

Because of the interest and support I have received from many classical organizations, we have started a little Roman Empire in the third grade. I am hoping to expand the "empire" and share the many benefits of introducing Latin with other elementary school teachers without Latin background by holding a workshop on May 17, 2003, at the Ramada Inn Pittsburgh South in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The workshop is being sponsored in part by the Pennsylvania Classical Association, Dickinson College Department of Classics, and the National Committee for Latin and Greek and is approved for Act 48 credits. National and local speakers will discuss ways to introduce Latin across the curriculum. I will also be presenting what I have been doing at the American Classical League Summer Institute in Buffalo, New York. <http://www.acclassics.org/index.html> I have been learning new things everyday along with my students. Studying Latin is great fun, the support from the classical organizations is unbelievable, and for a language that some refer to as "dead" it is not only alive and but speaks for itself! "Latina Vivit!"

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