

Reading Power: Decoding Roman Imperial Coin Legends

Overview

Level: AP Latin / Latin III-IV.

Duration: One 45-minute class period + homework.

Standards: Common Core RH.11-12.1-2 · ACL/ACTFL · AP Latin framework.

Students expand the abbreviations in an authentic imperial legend, translate the titulature, and write a museum label for their own coin.

Learning objectives

1. Expand the core imperial abbreviations without a crib sheet.
2. Translate a full obverse legend into idiomatic English.
3. Explain what the titulature claims about the emperor's authority.
4. Cite the coin properly: catalog number, holding museum, URL.

Procedure

1. Warm-up (5 min): Show one coin on the board. Ask what the class can already read. Expect IMP and AVG; write the guesses down, right or wrong.
2. Mini-lesson (10 min): How imperial titulature works: name, victory titles, priesthoods, tribunician power, consulships, pater patriae. Stress that the order is nearly fixed — that is what makes it readable.
3. Independent work (20 min): Each student opens their own coin card and writes the legend out in full words, then translates it.
4. Share-out (10 min): Two students present. Discuss variant readings and why the die-cutter dropped letters.
5. Homework (—): A 3-4 sentence museum label for the coin, in the register a museum would actually print.

Abbreviation handout (core list)

IMP — imperator — victorious commander; in the imperial period, the emperor

AVG — augustus — the emperor's formal title since 27 BC

CAES — Caesar — dynastic name; from the 2nd century AD, the designated heir

TR P / TR POT — tribunicia potestate — tribunician power, renewed annually

COS — consul — followed by the iteration number

P P — pater patriae — father of the country

P M / PONT MAX — pontifex maximus — chief priest

GERM / DAC / PARTH — Germanicus, Dacicus, Parthicus — victory titles

DIVI F — divi filius — son of the deified

S C — senatus consulto — by decree of the senate (bronze coinage)

Rubric (25 points)

Expansion accuracy (10): Every abbreviation expanded correctly.

Translation (5): Idiomatic English, correct grammatical relationships.

Museum label (5): Accurate, clear, and written for a general reader.

Citation (5): Catalog number, holding museum, and URL given.

Coin examples (catalog numbers; images live on canoanumis.org)

Trajan, aureus, RIC II Trajan 4: <https://canoanumis.org/en/coins/ric-ii-trajan-4/>

Nero and Agrippina, RIC I (2nd ed.) Nero 1: <https://canoanumis.org/en/coins/ric-i-second-edition-nero-1/>

Differentiation and assessment

Support: give the abbreviation handout face-up and shorten the legend to the obverse.

Extension: ask the student to date the coin from the iteration numbers alone.

Language learners: the museum label may be drafted in the home language first.

Graded version

With a free pilot each student gets a unique coin, answers are checked against catalog data where the task allows it, and scores flow into your LMS gradebook. Request a pilot:

<https://canoanumis.org/edu/pilot/>

This plan online: <https://canoanumis.org/edu/lesson-plans/reading-power/>

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