Activity 1 make a mosaic

BBC

HANDS ON HISTORY

THE ROMANS

Make a marvellous mosaic



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Activity 1

2 hours

Those clever Romans were ahead of their time in so many ways.

These days we make our pictures on TV, computers and in print using lots of coloured dots or pixels to build up the image. The Romans had their own version using coloured stone tiles (a bit like tiny versions of the tiles you might find in your bathroom or kitchen) to create colourful mosaics on floors and walls.



Here is a Roman mosaic from a distance and close up.



Bignor Roman Villa, Sussex

Making your own mosaic is a great family activity with lots of different jobs. Share out the preparation so that one family member doesn't have to cut up all the small pieces of card!

You will need:

- Piece of stiff paper or card
- Ruler
- Scissors
- Pencil
- Glue
- Coloured 'tiles' (made from card or paper)
- Cups to hold your tiles
- A bit of patience!



Activity 1



1. Make the base

Start by deciding how big you want your finished mosaic to be. A4 size works well to start with but you can go bigger if you want.

Use a piece of card or thick paper – the thicker the better, as the glue may make your base soggy.

Use a ruler and pencil to divide the page into a grid of 1cm squares. Romans wouldn't have made a grid, but this is really useful for first-time mosaic makers. On an A4 sheet you will get 21 squares along the short edge and 30 along the long edge creating a grid of 630 squares. So you'll need 630 tiles for your finished mosaic – plus a few spares.

Six hundred and thirty squares may seem like a lot, but on an ordinary-sized Roman mosaic (around 6m x 8m) there might be half a million tiles in total, and bigger mosaics would have had many more.

2. Create your design

A simple, clear design works best for mosaics. You can take a Roman theme – below are a few ideas to get you started. Alternatively, a geometric pattern using shapes and lines can be very effective. You could even make a mosaic of your name.





Activity 1 make a mosaic

Create your design

Use some plain paper to sketch out some designs first. Once you are happy with your design, draw it onto your gridded base. Use the grid as a guide for the width and length of different parts of your design where you can, this will make things easier later when you come to add your tiles.



Which colours?

Now decide which colours you are going to use. It's best to choose around four to six colours, as it can get a bit tricky with more.

Roman floor tiles were made from cut stone, not painted, as paint would have worn off. So the tiles would have been the natural colours found in rocks.

Mark out the different coloured squares on your grid ready for when you add the tiles later, using the following letters to represent each colour:

B – blue **G – green** **R – red**

Y – yellow **BR – brown** **BL – black**



3. Make the mosaic tiles

You can make your tiles in a variety of ways:

- Use paint, pens or coloured pencils to colour plain card before you cut it into tiles.
- Use coloured card from craft shops, or from old files or other stationery.
- Collect packaging boxes and cut the colours you need from the card.

Whatever you choose to use, make sure that it's thick enough not to soak up all the glue.

Once you have your coloured card, use your ruler to draw another 1cm x 1cm grid to create tiles to match the size of the squares on your base grid. Use your scissors to cut out the tiles carefully. You don't have to be too precise with the edges – a slightly rough look is more authentic.

Collect each set of coloured tiles in different pots ready to make your mosaic.



Roman fact

The Roman name for mosaic tiles is tesserae.

Top tips

If you have a computer, you can print out a 1cm x 1cm grid onto your paper by drawing out a grid in Word or similar computer software. For younger children you can buy ready-to-use paper squares from craft shops.

If you don't fancy making the fiddly tiles at all, you can create the look of a mosaic by completing sections one and two of this activity and then use paints, pens or coloured pencils to draw 'tiles' straight onto the grid!



4. Make your marvellous mosaic

Use a glue stick to assemble your mosaic. Apply glue to a small area of the base sheet and then press on a few tiles at a time before moving on to the next section. Make sure you cover any pencil lines that are visible with your tiles.

Cut your tiles to fit curves and any awkward spaces – just like the Romans did!

If you are left with a lot of white space around your main design, you can either leave it white (you may want to use a rubber to erase the pencil lines that are left) or choose another colour to fill all the gaps with tiles.

And that's it. Leave your masterpiece of Roman design to dry before displaying it on your wall – or use it in your Roman Villa model. You'll find the Roman Villa building instructions on the Hands on History website.





For groups and schools:

Mosaics make a great group activity. Teams or individuals can make different coloured tiles with each team responsible for part of a larger mosaic built up in sections on sheets of card. Alternatively you can break the group up into different teams, one to create the base and grid, one cutting all the tiles and another drawing out the design. They can then all work together to stick the tiles onto the base.

If you're making a lot of tiles you can use this as a 'free time' activity for when group members finish other tasks early or have spare time. For a Roman-themed event, create an impressive gladiatorial or Roman life scene, or localise your mosaic by picking an important local story, place name or character to depict.

Many historic sites offer free or discounted pre-booked trips to schools or groups. You can find out more on our partners' websites:
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www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
www.cadw.wales.gov.uk
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