

Roman Roads: Straight to the Point

Year 4 · Romans in Britain · 1 hour

Today we find out why Roman roads were so straight, then build and map our own.

Learning objective and success criteria

To understand why the Romans built roads in Britain and how they built them.

I can say why the Romans needed roads.

I can name the parts of a Roman road.

I can explain why the roads were built so straight.

Key vocabulary

Point to each word as you use it in the lesson. This box is for everyone, and the word bank group keeps it on the desk.

road straight layer drainage army troops trade mile
bridge surfaced trench foundation

Starter: 10 minutes. Where would you march?



Show the class a map of Roman Britain with the main roads marked in a different colour.

Ask: what do you notice about the shape of these lines?

- Turn to your partner. Why do you think Roman roads are so straight?
- Which Roman road is closest to our school?
- Why might a road go to a place you have never heard of?

Teaching input: 10 minutes. Why roads?

Roman roads were built for the army first: troops could march quickly to stop trouble. Then traders used them, and letters and orders travelled along them too. Explain the build in four steps: dig a trench, add big stones at the bottom, add smaller stones and gravel, then surface it with flat paving and camber the top so rain runs off. Straight was faster, and it meant fewer corners for ambushes.

- Dig a trench and mark out a straight line.
 - Pack in big stones for a foundation.
 - Add smaller stones and gravel.
 - Put flat stones on top and slope the middle so water drains away.
-
-
-
-

Main activity: 25 minutes. Choose your challenge

Set the three tasks out on tables. Everyone starts with the same task card, then moves on when they are ready.

Group A: build a Roman road

Use the tray, sand or soil, stones, gravel and card. Build the road in four layers, in the right order, and label each layer with a small flag. Keep the top flat and sloping.

- Layer 1 goes at the bottom. Which one is it?
- Why is the biggest stone at the bottom and not the top?
- Show that your road drains water by pouring a little water on the middle.

Draw your finished road and label the layers

Group B: map a route

Choose two places on the map of Roman Britain and plan a road between them. Keep it as straight as you can, and write one sentence saying why you went straight instead of around.

- Mark your start and finish. Draw the road.
- How many times did your road bend? Count them.
- Write: We went straight because...

Group C: the road builders' report

You are a Roman engineer writing to the governor. Explain your road in three short paragraphs: why it is needed, how you built it, and why straight is best.

- Paragraph 1: why we need this road here.
- Paragraph 2: how we built it, layer by layer.
- Paragraph 3: why a straight road is better than a winding one.

Plenary: 10 minutes

Two children share one layer of the road and why it matters. Then a quick hands up: if a road is straight, what three things does that give the Romans?

- Name one thing Roman roads were used for.
 - Name one layer and what it did.
 - Finish the sentence: Roads were straight so that...
-
-
-

Teacher notes

Word bank group: give them the vocabulary box and the sentence starters from Group B, and let them say their answer out loud before writing. Greater depth: ask them to spot why straight roads also helped trade and messages. Timing is loose, the build takes longer than the map.

Answers

For the teacher

1. Starter: roads are almost completely straight, they link towns and forts, they meet at London.
2. Group A: big stones at the bottom so the road does not sink into the mud, flat paving on top so carts roll easily, cambered surface so rain runs into the ditches.
3. Group B: pupils may note almost no bends, straight meant fewer days marching.
4. Group C: expected points include speed for the army, trade and messages, four layers, straightness making journeys quicker and safer.
5. Plenary: speed for troops, trade and messages; straight roads mean shorter journeys and fewer corners to be attacked from.