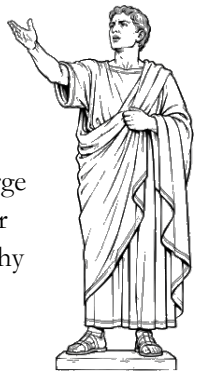
Name: _____

Date: _____

# THE PATRICIANS AND THE PLEBEIANS

According to Roman tradition, Rome was ruled by Tarquin the Proud, an Etruscan king from the region northwest of Rome now called Tuscany, until Roman patricians, noble families known as "city fathers," rose up and drove him out in 509 BCE, establishing a republic in his place.



In ancient Rome, land was the greatest source of wealth. The patricians inherited large estates that had belonged to their families for generations. They became enormously wealthy and no longer had to work for a living.

## Consuls and the Senate

Wary of ever again handing one person that much power, the patricians replaced the king with two consuls who shared equal authority. The consuls served for one year and could not be reelected. The consuls held veto power over one another. Veto means "I forbid" in Latin, the language of the Romans. By dividing power between two leaders, the patricians ensured that power would no longer be concentrated in the hands of one person.

While the consuls managed the day-to-day affairs of the city, the Senate guided Rome's long-term policies. Senate comes from a Latin word meaning "elder" because Romans believed older men possessed the wisdom and experience to advise the government.

## The Plebeians Demand a Voice

The plebeians were Roman citizens who were not members of the noble patrician order. The word plebeian comes from the Latin plebs, meaning "the people." By the early years of the Roman Republic, many wealthy merchants, farmers, and craft workers resented being excluded from the consulship and the Senate and demanded a voice in Roman government.

The Senate declared war on neighboring tribes in 494 BCE, but the plebeians refused to serve. A legend says they withdrew to a nearby hillside and would not return until given the right to elect their own leaders. Historians later called this the Struggle of the Orders.

The patricians and the plebeians negotiated a settlement that allowed the plebeians a voice in Roman government. The plebeians elected tribunes, who represented their order against mistreatment by the consuls or the Senate. Tribunes could veto a law passed by the Senate or the consuls.

## The Twelve Tables

The patricians and the plebeians agreed on the Twelve Tables in 449 BCE. The laws were written down and displayed in public so citizens could know their rights and no longer be judged under secret laws. For the first time, government officials as well as ordinary citizens were subject to the same written laws.

Over the next two centuries, the plebeians gradually gained political rights. The Struggle of the Orders ended in 287 BCE, when laws passed by the plebeians became binding on all Romans.

## Slavery

The patricians and the plebeians gradually came to share power in Rome, but a third group had no voice in how the city was ruled. They were the slaves. Many people captured in war became slaves. Others were former criminals. Some very poor Romans sold themselves or members of their families into slavery to keep from starving. Roman law considered slaves to be property, so slaves had no legal rights. As many as one-third of the people living in Roman Italy were slaves. The Roman economy depended on slave labor.

## The Forum

The Senate usually met in a building overlooking a marketplace called the Forum. Senate meetings ended at sunset, so a senator could sometimes stop a law from passing by talking continuously until the meeting adjourned.

## The Republic Ends

The Roman Republic never officially ended. During the first century BCE, powerful leaders such as Julius Caesar and Caesar Augustus gradually took authority away from the Senate and the tribunes. After about five hundred years as a republic, Rome would once again be ruled by one man.

©Mike Dowling, mrdowling.com. All Rights Reserved.

Name: _____

Date: _____

## Fill in the Blanks

The Romans overthrew their last *E__r__s__an king in 509 BCE and established a r__p__b__ic. Wealthy nobles called p__t__i__i__ns controlled the government. They elected two c__n__u__s, who shared power and could v_____ one another. The S__n__te were patrician elders who guided Rome's long-term policies. Most Roman citizens, called p__e__e__a__s, were e__c__u__ed from the highest offices. In 494 BCE, they r__f__s__d to fight in a war until they gained a v__i__e in government. The plebeians elected t__i__u__es, who could v_____ the actions of the c__ns__ls or the S__na__e. In 449 BCE, the Romans adopted the T__e__ve T__bl__s, making the laws p__b__ic so citizens would no longer be judged under secret laws. Many people were slaves, and the Roman e__o__o__y depended on their labor. During the first century BCE, powerful leaders such as J__l__us C__es__r and Caesar A__g__s__us gradually ended the Roman R__p__b__ic by concentrating power in one r__l__r.

## Answer in Complete Sentence

*1. Use a dictionary to define "patri-," the root of patrician. List at least two words with this root.

2. Why did the patricians choose to have two consuls instead of a king?

*3. Was every order (or class) represented in the Roman Republic? Explain your answer.

*4. Suggest a class rule that most students would agree to, but would be vetoed by the teacher. (You do not have to use complete sentences for this answer.)

*This is a higher order learning question. You must answer the question to the best of your ability, but any reasonable answer will be graded as correct.

©Mike Dowling, mrdowling.com. All Rights Reserved.