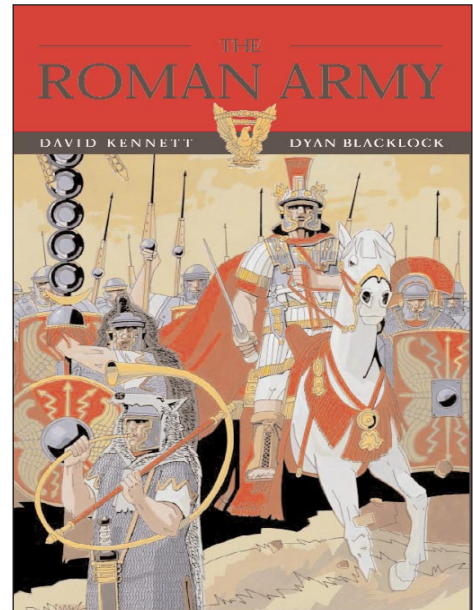


The Roman Army

Written by Dyan Blacklock
Illustrated by David Kennett



◀ The Back Story ▶ with Dyan Blacklock

Was it your idea to write this book? Why did you feel that there was an audience for this type of book?

The Roman army is possibly one of the most written about subjects in the world of nonfiction. Despite there being a mountain of books on the subject there is always a new way to look at it. David Kennett was keen to do a book on the Romans and I felt that there was nothing that showed all the tiny elements of the nature of the army's movements. I was interested to know how they moved across a foreign landscape. David is the one who had all the really hard work to do. He had to illustrate every page and, unless he was fascinated in the subject, it would have been very painful for him! We talked about it until we were both confident we could make a good book. Really this wasn't a single person's idea but rather the result of two people working together.

Did you have a big influence on the design of the book?

No, I can't take credit for the design. This is David Kennett's department. I thought his design for this book was really outstanding. (The text is in capital letters because I wanted to avoid the feeling of this being like a school textbook.)

You must have done an enormous amount of research for this book. How long did it take you to research and write it?

David and I both researched the book – but I think David had a much bigger job. He had to make sure all the illustrations were correct – and checking so many facts is very tiresome. Fortunately he loves history and he does a wonderful job. In all, the book took about three years to make.

Do you enjoy researching? If so, do you particularly prefer to research ancient cultures?

This is absolutely my favourite thing to do. I could spend years in a research library – as long as there was a nice place to sit and read and a good café.

Does the finished book contain the information and design that you initially envisaged?

Absolutely – except it is even better than I imagined it would be. We made an American edition of this book at the same time and the Americans also contributed to the information and the detail of the book. They had their own ideas and they were excellent. In the end a book like this involves a lot of teamwork. The most important part of our team was the editor, Celia Jellett. Without Celia it might all have fallen into a heap many times. She remembered all the different ideas, kept track of everyone and everything and then she checked everything a million times. We couldn't have managed without her. Eija Murch-Lempinen, the art director, also had a very important job. The artwork was done in layers and Eija had to put it all together on the computer at the end.

What is your favourite element of the book?

The endpapers – I love looking at all the enemies of Rome.

You and David Kennett have worked on another book together [*Olympia: Warrior Athletes of Ancient Greece*]. Do you plan on doing any more books together?

Yes, we are working on the next book right now. It's called *Pharaoh – the Life and Death of a God*.

◀ with David Kennett

What made you decide to illustrate this book? You must get asked to do numerous books.

I have a very good relationship with my publisher [Dyan Blacklock – also the writer of this book] and she asked me what kind of book I would like to do. We discussed a few options, from dinosaurs to the Aztecs, and decided that a book about the Roman army would be of interest to both of us. Also, Rome is a topic on the school curriculum, so we thought there would be a good deal of interest in the book from schools.

Your drawings are very detailed. Did you have to do an enormous amount of research?

The research is very time-consuming. I did a lot of reading. Fortunately I am very interested in all ancient history – I like the costumes, animals and buildings. It's all very exotic and colourful.

Are you pleased with the finished result? Would you change anything?

I think the book is good, but I would change a great deal if I had the chance – that's what drives me to do better next time.

About the author: Dyan Blacklock

I have always been fascinated with odd facts. I particularly enjoy odd, gory facts – possibly this is a result of growing up with older brothers who were very odd and gory themselves! For many years I've been involved with children's books. My proper job is as the publisher at Omnibus Books, while my non-proper job is as a writer. I have three children, four chickens, two dogs, a cat, and I have owned two cockatiels but they have flown away.

About the illustrator: David Kennett

I decided to become an illustrator before I could draw. I took a fairly roundabout way of getting there – lots of jobs in kitchens, pubs and building sites. I became a mature-age student at art school where I graduated with distinction. After ten years of illustrating books that I wasn't really suited for, I got a lucky break with Omnibus to do *Olympia: Warrior Athletes of Ancient Greece* with Dyan – great work.

Teaching Ideas ✓

Before Reading ✓

- With students discuss any other books or movies they may have read or seen that were about Ancient Rome (or other ancient cultures). Ask who is interested in learning about Ancient Rome and why. If students are less than enthusiastic, encourage them to brainstorm reasons why it will be interesting to read this book.
- Ask students to imagine that they have been asked to write on the topic of Roman armies. What type of information would they include and why? List their answers on the board. Have them predict if the information will be included in this book.
- Ensure that students know where Rome is in relation to Australia and the rest of the world. Using an overhead projector or a large map, display a map of the world to the class. Can students point out where Rome is? What country is it in? Compare the map on pages 2 and 3 of *The Roman Army* to the map of the world. Have students work out the extent of the Roman Empire.

Activities

On the map

Your teacher will give you a worksheet that shows an outline of a world map. To reinforce the discussion of the size and whereabouts of the Roman Empire, colour in the area where the Roman Empire existed. When completed, compare and discuss your map with other members of the class.

Covering it

Revisit the front cover of *The Roman Army*. What does the image tell you? With a friend, list the things that you can learn from the illustration (eg some of the men used swords). Present your ideas to the class. A scribe might like to compile the answers to make a class list.

During reading ✓

- Point out to students that the map (pages 2–3) shows the extent of the Roman Empire in AD 117. Ask students if they can explain what 'AD' means. What is the difference between AD and BC?
- Either as a whole class, or in small groups, have students take it in turns to read the text while everyone else listens. Have listening students ask one or two questions to the class (or group) after each double-page spread to make sure that everyone is listening and to reinforce interesting points. For example, where does the word 'salary' come from? (page 5)
- Discuss the images on each double-page spread. Do they extend the text? If so, how do they do this? Do they make the book easier to read and more reader-friendly? Do the captions help? What other elements make the book fun to read?
- Remind students to put up their hands if they do not understand something. Encourage students to help each other through any difficult parts of the text. For example: What is a fort? (page 4); What is an artisan? (page 5); What does the word 'resistance' mean? (page 38). List any words on the board that students do not understand.
- Discuss the headings (eg The Roman Legions, The Auxiliary, The Legionary and His Equipment) as you come across them during shared reading. What might be the purpose of the headings? Are they useful?
- As a class, or in small groups, examine the plan of the Roman Army Marching Camp (pages 26–27). Look at the code on page 27. Have students explain what each of the words associated with the colour code means. (eg What is a forum?) Discuss the layout of the plan. Does everyone understand it?

Activities

Who am I?

Using recycled materials make your own helmet. (See page 6.) When completed, wear it in front of the class. Can anyone guess your rank? Explain why you chose to make this particular helmet.

Shields

After reading the section on 'Roman Arms and Armour' (page 14) try making your own shield (out of A1 cardboard). Then turn to page 41 to have a look at the illustration of a 'testudo' or 'tortoise'. Why do you think the word 'tortoise' was chosen? When everyone has made a shield, your teacher can divide the class into halves. One half of the class should take on the formation of the tortoise while the other half throws pieces of crumpled paper (only) at it. Do the shields stop the paper from hitting any of the students? Then swap roles. Discuss the usefulness (or not) of the shields.

BEHIND THE BOOK TEACHER'S NOTES

Class plan

Using the plan of the camp on pages 26–27, make a colour-coded plan of your classroom (or entire school). Remember to include the 'key' so that the people reading your plan can understand it. When completed, present your plan to the class and discuss it.

After reading ✓

- Ask students what they liked or disliked about the book. The author Dyan Blacklock's favourite part of the book is the endpapers. Have students take it in turns to comment on which part of the book they like and why. Take a vote on the most popular element. Students could graph the results and then display them.
- Revise the layout of information reports with students. List the features. These include: a general statement to define the subject; use of visual elements; labels and captions; technical terms; paragraphs of information and an end statement. Ask students to find other texts or articles that are information reports and to examine and discuss their layout. (See activities below.)
- Both the author and illustrator of *The Roman Army* mention that they enjoy history and researching ancient cultures. Ask students to nominate what they would like to research and why. (See activities below.)
- Place students into small groups and ask them to re-read the book together. This can be done silently or as shared reading. Ask each group to appoint a scribe so they can list the things each group member has learnt from reading this book. Then ask a spokesperson from each group to report back to the class. Discuss the findings.
- Dyan Blacklock says that she believes that David Kennett's job as illustrator was harder to do than her job of writing the text. Ask students if they would prefer to write or illustrate a book, and why this might be.

Activities

Index

One difference between fiction and nonfiction books is that you do not have to start at the beginning of a nonfiction book and read the pages in order to the end. Imagine reading pages of a novel out of order! You can dip in and out of an information book, especially if you are searching for particular information. This is where the index comes in handy. Can you find the pages that have information on the following:

- Roman navy
- Slave traders
- Camp followers
- Ballistae

Choose one entry from the index and then find the information in the book to explain what it is about. Illustrate your information before displaying it on the class wall. Examine the work done by class members and be amazed at how much you can learn – without trying!

Glossary

Turn to page 46 to see the glossary. Notice that the glossary is in alphabetical order and its purpose is to explain the meaning of some words. Revisit the book to add another five entries to the glossary. Which words would you add and why? Write them down (in alphabetical order) and explain what they mean. Compare your words with the words of other students in the class.

Reporting in

As you know, the text type of this book is that of an information report. Research to create your own information report on a subject of your choice. Remember to have a general opening statement, paragraphs each containing one idea followed by supporting details, and a conclusion. Think about other features that make up an information report so that you can make it as informative and as stimulating as possible. When completed, present your report to the class.

Nonfiction study

Help students gain a greater understanding of *The Roman Army*, and of nonfiction texts, by discussing the following questions with them. Encourage students to generate other questions that will help them to think more deeply about the book.

- Why do you think Dyan Blacklock wrote this text?
- Is this a nonfiction or a fiction book?
- Brainstorm some of the elements of the book: map, chapter headings, illustrations with captions, glossary and index page. Why might these things be included in the book?
- As the title suggests, this book is about the Roman army. Look at the layout of the book. Can you give a quick summary of the information given? (eg Enemies of Rome, area the Roman Empire covered, Roman legions, equipment needed, arms and armour, how camps were set up etc.) Does the layout help you to easily make a summary or overview of the book?
- What are some nonfiction text types? (Nonfiction text types are: discussion, explanation, exposition, recount, information report and procedure.)
- What text type is this book? (information report)
- What are some of the features of an information report? (eg Information reports generally have an opening statement – see page 1 – followed by facts grouped in paragraphs of information about different aspects of the topic – see pages 4–43. There is usually a statement to round off the report – see page 45.)
- Discuss (either as a class or in small groups) the use of visual information in this book. What visual elements are there? (eg Maps, illustrations with captions and labelled illustrations.) What are the benefits, if any, of these elements? Remember to justify your answers.
- Is there anything unusual about the appearance of the text? Have you read any books that have the text written in capital letters? Do you like it written in this manner?