
What Were the Primary Reasons for the “Fall” of Rome?



CV

The Destruction of Empire, painted by the American artist Thomas Cole in 1836.

Overview: From about 50 BCE until the year 200 CE, the Roman Empire was the superpower of the Mediterranean world. During that time, the empire’s wealth, territory and international status grew and grew. But even as the empire prospered, it was slowly starting to fall apart. Some of its problems were internal – coming from within Rome itself – and others were external. This Mini-Q explores the factors that led to the eventual fall of one of history’s most powerful and influential empires.

The Documents:

- Document A: Roman Emperors, 235-285 CE (chart)
- Document B: The Roman Army
- Document C: Foreign Invasions (map)
- Document D: The Huns
- Document E: Economic Corruption
- Document F: Disasters and Disease

A Mini Document Based Question (Mini-Q)

Mini-Q™s in World History
Volume 1, Unit 10

What Were the Primary Reasons for the “Fall” of Rome?

MINI-Q™ LESSON PLAN

DAY 1 – 45 minutes

Step One: Hook Refer to the Step One teacher notes in the Mini-Q. Read the directions aloud. The purpose is to get students engaged, talking, and wanting to do the Mini-Q.

Step Two: Background Essay Refer to the Step Two teacher notes in the Mini-Q. Students can write out answers to the BGE questions or the questions can simply be discussed.

Step Three: Understanding the Question and Pre-Bucketing The task of recognizing and defining key words in the question is a crucial habit of mind. The second task of pre-bucketing based on clues in the question and in document titles is a huge categorization skill.

Step Four: Document Analysis Do Document A with the whole class, modeling the kind of detail you expect in student answers to the Document Analysis questions.

Homework: Analyze the remaining documents and answer the questions that follow.

DAY 2 – 45 minutes

Step Four (continued): Discussion of Documents

Option One: Working in pairs or threesomes, have students discuss the answers to the first set of Document Analysis questions they did for homework. Using a different-colored pen than they used for homework, they may add to their answers. After five minutes, open the discussion of that document to the full class. Then proceed to the next document and repeat.

Option Two: Proceed as above, but have a volunteer group lead each of the three or four different document discussions. Students at their desks may add to their notes, again in a different pen.

Step Five: Bucketing and Chicken Foot Have students complete the bucketing and chicken foot work page. This step will help students clarify their thesis and road map.

Step Six: From Thesis to Essay Writing (For homework) Have students fill out the Outline Guide Sheet or write their multi-paragraph essay.

DAY 3 (Optional)

Step Six (continued): Conduct an in-class Writing Workshop.

MINI-Q™ LESSON PLAN: CLEAN VERSION OPTION

If students are ready, use the Clean Version of the Mini-Q, which requires them to handle more of the analysis on their own. Estimated time to complete is 1-2 class periods.

TEACHER DOCUMENT LIST (CV)

There are six documents in this Mini-Q. Students are provided with the same document list, but it is not divided into analytical categories or buckets. Students may develop categories that are different from these.

Political Instability

Document A: Roman Emperors, 235-285 CE (chart)

Military Mistakes

Document B: The Roman Army

Foreign Invasions

Document C: Foreign Invasions (map)

Document D: The Huns

Bad Government

Document E: Economic Corruption

Natural Forces

Document F: Disasters and Disease

The Hook

Teacher Note: The purpose of this Hook Exercise is to create some initial interest in the Mini-Q and to get students thinking about how to weigh arguments. Divide students into pairs or groups of three and give them about five minutes to select their three key problems. Then take a few minutes to process the answers with the class.

Lists will vary, but all students should give clear reasons for their choices. Most important is to have students explain *why* one problem trumps another. For example, why is the development of a couch-potato culture more of a problem than Islamic fundamentalism? A student might argue that most Moslems are not fundamentalist and that violence will wear itself out, just as it did in the American civil-rights movement. However, couch-potato culture suggests a deep cultural laziness that makes America unready to deal with any problem. Democracy depends on active, thinking people, not potatoes. The biggest threat to American leadership lies within, not without.

Hook Exercise: Ranking Reasons in Order of Importance

Directions: There is general agreement among historians that the 1900s was America's century. During this 100-year period, the United States emerged as the world leader in a number of critical areas – politics, economics, military power, and human and civil rights. Now, in the opening decades of the 21st century, observers are wondering if America is losing its edge.

Your Task: Below is a short list of eight troubles facing the United States in the 21st century. With a partner, identify the three troubles that you believe are most capable of causing America's decline. Be prepared to share your thinking with the class.

- America is becoming an unhealthy, overweight couch-potato culture. Too much sit and click.
- Political squabbling among Democrats and Republicans is sinking the nation.
- Terrorism is a real threat.
- Growing economic inequality between rich and poor has created the greatest gap in decades.
- Yearly budget deficits and growing national debt imply a "buy now, let our children pay later" mindset.
- Environmental threats – pollution, habitat destruction and global warming. Climate-related disasters like Hurricane Katrina are on the rise.
- Dependence on foreign oil and unwillingness to pay the price for alternative energy
- Moral and cultural decline – music, pop culture, materialism and declining work ethic

List your three primary troubles below. Put them in order of importance, with the first one being the most significant problem.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Establishing the Context

General Instructions

- Review the Timeline on page 449.
- Pre-teach the bold-faced vocabulary.
- Have students read the Background Essay or read it aloud.

Specific Considerations

The main purpose of the Background Essay is to create a context for the Mini-Q exercise. Its job is to provide a sense of time, place and story, and to introduce important vocabulary and concepts. Doing this well gives all students a more equal chance to succeed with the Mini-Q.

Time: Be sure students review the Timeline on page 449. Note that about 1,000 years passed between Rome’s founding and the collapse of its empire.

Place: Examine the geographical reach of the Roman Empire at its peak, pointing out on a map how it stretched from Western Europe to North Africa to the Middle East. Discuss the challenges of managing an empire this size in a time when there were no cars, trains, airplanes, or modern communication devices.

Story: We suggest reading the Background Essay aloud. It is good for students, even strong readers, to hear the words as they see them. For many, it is important to hear the cadence of the language, to experience pauses and emphasis. Use the Background Essay questions to review the text.

Vocabulary and Concepts: You may want to pre-teach the four bold-faced terms in the essay. Our feeling about vocabulary is that some pre-teaching is good, but keep the word list short. When reading aloud, see how much students can get from context.

Background Essay

What Were the Primary Reasons for the "Fall" of Rome?

Rome – the city that would become the center of one of the world’s greatest empires – began around 750 BCE as an unremarkable settlement. During Rome’s early years, the most wealthy and powerful people of the Mediterranean world were the Greeks. However, by 200 BCE, the Greek empire was weakening and Rome was turning into a giant, spilling over its borders as it acquired foreign lands. No longer a sleepy little town, Rome had become a powerhouse.

As with so many empires, Rome’s rise to power came with the thrust of a spear and the slash of a sword. The enormous Roman army conquered territory from modern-day Scotland to Spain, gained control of the whole Mediterranean Sea, and established colonies in North Africa, Egypt, the Middle East and Asia Minor. By the year 44 BCE, when Julius Caesar became Rome’s virtual emperor, there were no major rivals left to defeat.

Caesar used his hero status – along with bribery, beatings and even assassination – to gain political power. Over the next two decades, Rome shifted from being a **republic**, with elements of democratic control, to an empire with power in the hands an emperor and the military.

Rome’s first two centuries as an empire were years of relative stability, increasing power, and great imperial wealth. It was a time known as the **Pax Romana**, the time of Roman peace. Rome was clearly top dog in the western world. But as Rome was to discover, size has its problems. The empire acquired new subjects who were not Roman and who often did not want to be Roman – in Gaul (France), in England, beyond the Danube River, in the Middle East.

Controlling this expanded empire meant a larger army, which in turn meant a need for more food, clothing, weapons and supplies. Political strains developed at home. Leaders in Rome focused less on debate and compromise and more on force to get their way. Having existed for centuries as a republic, Rome eventually became more like a **dictatorship**.

As Rome drifted through the 3rd century, survived the 4th, and staggered into the 5th, one general problem was apparent – life at the top was getting soft. Upper-class Romans were losing their edge. When a country is on the make,

when energy and hope are high, leaders and their people are more willing to work hard and to sacrifice. When the goal appears to have been reached, it is easy to get lazy. The evidence for this was a love of luxury, a decline in the quality of literature, even a decision by upper-

class Romans to have fewer children because child-raising was a bother.

But there was more to Rome’s decline than developing a soft belly. By the 5th century CE, when the city was **sacked** by outside invaders, Rome had been badly weakened by a number of problems. Parts of the empire would survive, particularly in Constantinople and the East, but the old heart of the empire – Italy and the West – was shattered.

Your task is to examine the documents in this Mini-Q and decide which three problems were most responsible for bringing Rome to its knees. Then, of these three problems, decide which was most important.



The Roman Empire at its height

CV

Document A: Roman Emperors, 235-285 CE (chart)

Content Notes:

- Bryan Ward-Perkins, whose book *The Fall of Rome* was a key source for this document, is an archaeologist and historian who teaches in Great Britain. He is the son of a distinguished historian, John Bryan Ward-Perkins, and was born in Rome.
- Some of these "crisis" emperors are also called "barracks" emperors because they were more or less picked at the desire of the military.
- By comparison, four American presidents have been assassinated since George Washington was inaugurated in 1789: Abraham Lincoln, James Garfield, William McKinley and John Kennedy. Though tragic, that number is very small compared to the 13 assassinations and possible assassinations of Roman emperors within a short 50-year period.
- These frequent assassinations were thought to be carried out by members of the Roman military and were a result of rampant power struggles occurring within the empire at the time. By contrast, perpetrators of assassinations in the United States have not been active members of the military or government, but rather disgruntled individuals.

Teaching Tips:

- Explain to students that an assassination is a targeted killing of a public figure, often a political leader.
- Discuss the Document Analysis questions:
 1. How many Roman emperors ruled during the 50-year period covered by this chart?
20 (or 22, if you count the co-rulers)
How many died a natural death? 0
How many were the victims of assassination or possible assassination? 13
 2. What message might these frequent and violent changes in leadership have sent to people of the Roman Empire?
Our government is falling apart. It is not to be trusted or depended upon.
 3. What message might these frequent and violent changes in leadership have sent to people living outside the Roman Empire?
Rome's head is constantly being cut off. A body without a head is weak and vulnerable to attack.
 4. How does this document help explain the decline of the Roman Empire?
The frequency of the assassinations suggests that taking office by violence has replaced any kind of peaceful selection process by a Senate or the people. It appears the assassinations are by the henchmen of the next guy to take over. Such a government would be practically leaderless and command no respect or confidence from the people. Rome appears destined for quick decline.

Document A

Source: Chart compiled from various sources.

Roman Emperors, 235-285 CE

Emperor	Reign	Cause of Death
Maximinus	235-38 CE	Assassination
Gordian I & II (co-rulers)	238	Suicide; killed in battle
Balbinus & Pupineus	238	Assassination
Gordian III	238-44	Possible assassination
Philip the Arab	244-49	Killed in battle
Decius	249-51	Killed in battle
Hostilian	251	Possible plague
Gallus	251-53	Assassination
Aemilianus	253	Assassination
Valerian & Gallienus	253-60	Died as slave of Persians; assassination
Claudius Gothicus	268-70	Plague
Quintillus	270	Assassination or suicide
Aurelian	270-75	Assassination
Tacitus	275-76	Possible assassination
Florianus	276	Assassination
Probus	276-82	Assassination
Carus	282-83	Assassination
Numerian	283-84	Possible assassination
Carinus	283-85	Killed in battle

CV

Document B: The Roman Army

Content Notes:

- The argument made by Vegetius echoes recent criticism of the U.S. military regarding the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; specifically, that soldiers and military vehicles were not sufficiently equipped with protection from heavy armor commonly used in roadside attacks.
- Little is known about the life of the historian Vegetius other than what he wrote in his two surviving works, one that deals with Roman military history and the other with veterinary medicine.
- Michael Grant was among the foremost historians of the ancient world throughout the 20th century. A British scholar who died at the age of 90 in 2004, he was criticized by some academics, not for weaknesses in his research, but rather for oversimplifying and condensing complex historical content, though his many fans appreciated him for it.
- The subject of who, if anyone, should be exempt from the military draft has been controversial at many other points in history. During the Vietnam War, many were critical of the U.S. policy that allowed exemptions for college students. Critics have argued that such policies placed a disproportionate burden on the poor and racial minorities and may have even contributed to decreased levels of morale among soldiers and citizenry.

Teaching Tips:

- Discuss the Document Analysis questions:

1. According to Vegetius, what led to the changes in Roman military armor and training techniques?

When the parade-ground drills were abandoned, soldiers became used to not wearing protective armor. When they were in battle situations that required wearing such heavy equipment, the soldiers complained and, because of this, were allowed to go into battle without it.

2. How did the change in breastplates and helmets contribute to the decline of the Roman Empire?

Failure to wear the armor resulted in high rates of deaths and injury. The negligence and laziness of both commanders and government officials made the military vulnerable. More soldiers died in battle. The enemy was more likely to win.

3. What is conscription?

Conscription is the same as the draft. It is the opposite of a volunteer army.

4. In what ways could the failure to enforce conscription weaken Rome?

Roman citizens who were required to join the military were likely angry and resentful that they had to serve and maybe die while so many others were not forced to do the same. Army morale would suffer, battles would be lost, Rome would decline.

5. Is there any connection between Document A and Document B? Explain your thinking.

Possible responses: Limited connection. The assassinations in Doc A occurred 200 years before the military problems described in Doc B.

Strong connection. The assassinations of the emperors had to weaken the confidence and loyalty of the Roman people and, eventually, the military. Laziness followed.

Document B

Source: An excerpt from the ancient book *Concerning Military Matters* by the Roman historian Vegetius, c. 450 CE.

[Before the year 400 CE] footsoldiers wore breastplates and helmets. But when, because of negligence and laziness, parade ground drills were abandoned, the customary armor began to seem heavy since the soldiers rarely ever wore it. Therefore, they first asked the emperor to set aside the breastplates ... and then the helmets. So our soldiers fought the Goths without any protection for chest and head and were often beaten by archers. Although there were many disasters, which led to the loss of great cities, no one tried to restore breastplates and helmets to the infantry. Thus it happens that troops in battle, exposed to wounds because they have no armor, think about running and not about fighting.

CV

Source: Michael Grant, *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A Reappraisal*, Crown Publishing, 1982.

There can be little doubt that the weaknesses of the late Roman army were largely due to the eventual failure ... to enforce regular conscription [draft of soldiers] The exempted categories were... numerous. Hosts of senators, bureaucrats, and clergymen were entitled to avoid the draft; and among other groups who escaped were cooks, bakers, and slaves.

Document C: Foreign Invasions (map)

Content Notes:

- The Huns were a nomadic, heterogeneous people with geographic roots that stretched west from Mongolia to modern-day Hungary and Bulgaria. Their reputation as skillful archers and horsemen who thrived in harsh conditions is noted in the Document E excerpt by Ammianus Marcellinus and echoed in several other historical accounts.
- The Goths comprised the Visigoth (western) and Ostrogoth (eastern) Germanic peoples. Migrations of the Goths also found them settling as far north as Scandinavia, south into Baltic regions, and as far east as modern-day Poland.
- The Vandals were another Germanic tribe that eventually invaded lands controlled by the Roman Empire and helped contribute to its decline. The term “vandalism,” meaning senseless destruction and defacement of property, is related to the characterization of the Vandals by ancient historians who portrayed them as unusually reckless. Many contemporary historians dispute this, claiming that the Vandals were no worse than any other invaders.

Teaching Tips:

- Discuss the Document Analysis questions:

1. Which invaders of the Roman Empire came from the farthest eastern point?

The Huns

2. Which invaders of the Roman Empire were the first to reach the city of Rome?

The Visigoths entered Rome sometime between 395 and 418 CE. Close inspection of the Visigoth’s invasion path reveals this.

3. Do the dates on this map suggest an invasion of people or a migration of people? Explain your thinking.

When you think of an invasion, you think of a quick military advance. The dates on the map show that the advance of the Huns, the Visigoths, and the Vandals wasn’t very quick. In fact, the Huns left Asia around 370 and didn’t cross the Rhine into modern France until about 450. This suggests a three-generation movement of peoples who intended to settle, not simply to make a military strike.

4. How does this document help explain the reasons for the decline of the Roman Empire?

The map shows that the Roman Empire, over a period of about 75 years (370 CE and 455 CE), was gradually taken over by peoples from western Asia. The map doesn’t explain why the “invaders” came or what enabled them to succeed, but the inference is that they either displaced the Romans or mixed with them. Either event would have a large impact on Roman society.

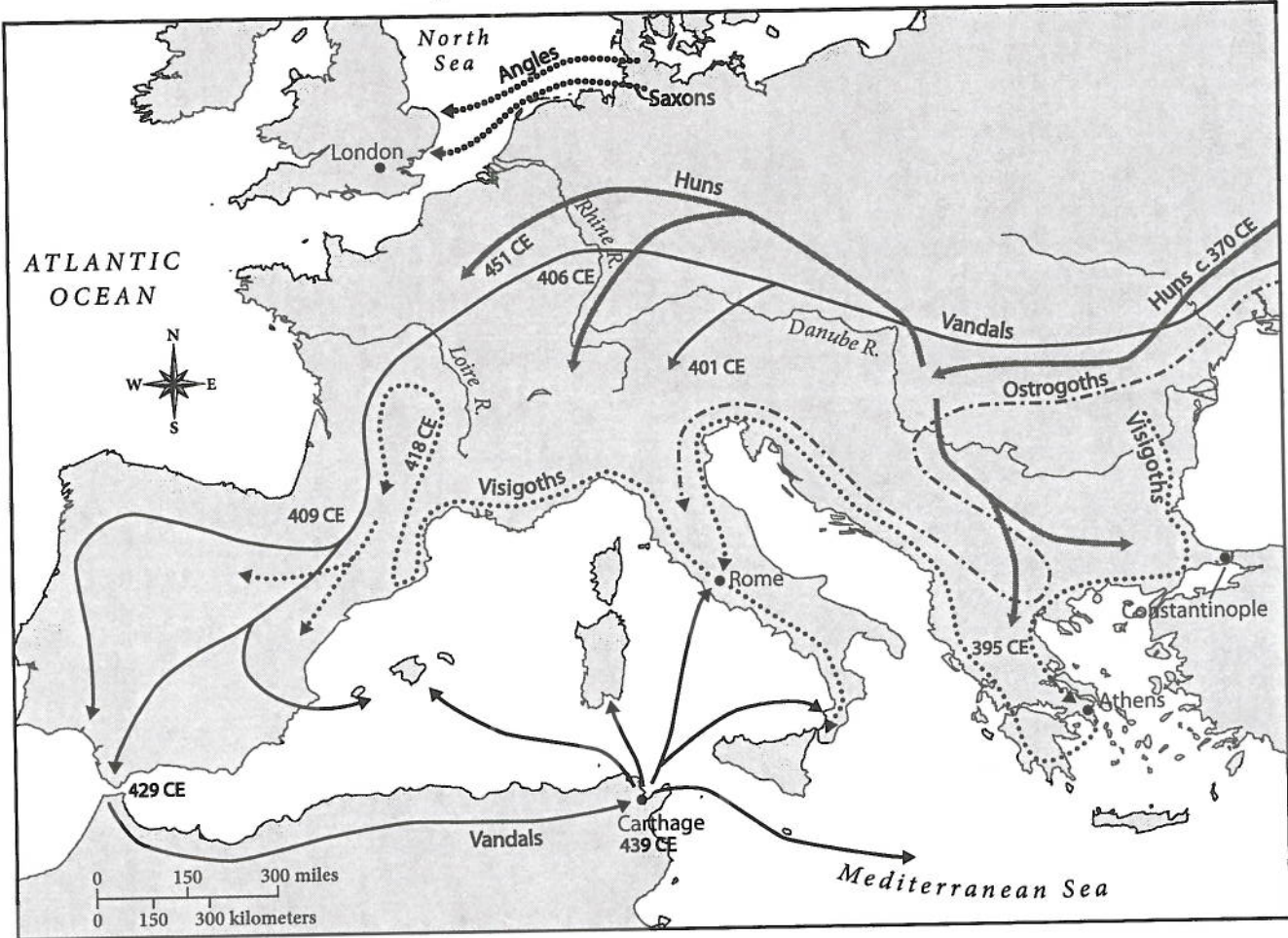
5. Is there a possible connection between Document C and Document B?

Possible response: Problems with armor and conscription could be part of the reason that tribes from the east were able to invade the Roman Empire.

Document C

Source: Map created from various sources.

Foreign Invasions of the Roman Empire



CV

Document D: The Huns

Content Notes:

- Ammianus Marcellinus ranks among the most prominent historians who lived during the twilight of the Roman Empire. He was a soldier and writer who chronicled the history of the empire from 96-378 CE, though only his accounts of the later years have survived. Marcellinus’s work has been extremely valuable in contributing to modern understanding of his times and is generally praised for its balance and objectivity. The 18th-century historian Edward Gibbon called Marcellinus, “an accurate and faithful guide, who composed the history of his own times without indulging the prejudices and passions which usually affect the mind of a contemporary.”
- As noted by Marcellinus, the Huns were renowned for their skill on horseback and with archery. They devised stirrups that allowed them to stand astride their charging horses and attack their opponents. The name “Hun” continues to connote fearsomeness in battle.
- The most famous of the Hun leaders was Atilla who, by 450 CE, had conquered lands stretching from France eastward to the Balkans and into central Asia. Atilla set up headquarters in modern-day Hungary, where he is still revered. Not so in western Europe, where he is thought of as a particularly crude and cruel warrior. He was described by the Roman writer Priscus as, “Short of stature, with a broad chest and a large head; his eyes were small, his beard thin and sprinkled with grey; and he had a flat nose and tanned skin, showing evidence of his origin.”
- The term “Hun” was often applied to the Germans during World War I and, to a lesser extent, during World War II. One theory explaining this usage comes from Kaiser Wilhelm’s quote about the Chinese uprising against European colonial powers in 1900, known as the Boxer Rebellion: “Mercy will not be shown, prisoners will not be taken. Just as a thousand years ago, the Huns under Attila won a reputation of might that lives on in legends, so may the name of Germany in China, such that no Chinese will even again dare so much as to look in askance at a German.” Whatever the case, the term was meant to characterize the Germans as a belligerent and brutish enemy.

Teaching Tips:

- Discuss the Document Analysis questions:

1. Who was Ammianus Marcellinus?

Ammianus was a Roman historian of the late 4th century CE.

2. What words and phrases does Ammianus use to describe the Huns?

exceed any definition of savagery; eat roots and half-raw flesh; without permanent homes or law; ungovernable; destructive

3. What does Marcellinus mean when he describes the Huns as being “glued to their horses”?

This quote implies that the Huns were unusually skilled horsemen able to stay in the saddle even during fierce battles.

4. Why might a Roman historian like Ammianus want to compare the Huns to “unthinking animals”?

At one level, he makes this comparison because he claims the Huns are uncivilized savages, ignorant of the difference between right and wrong. On a deeper level, he makes this claim so that Romans will feel justified in conquering them.

5. How can you use this document to help explain the decline of the Roman Empire?

One: Rome is sinking because it is at the mercy of barbarians like the Huns.

Two: Rome is sinking because it has reached a point where they have to dehumanize others to justify their efforts at regaining control of the empire.

Document D

Source: Excerpts about an Asian tribe called the Huns from *Roman History* by the Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus, c. 380 CE.

The Huns exceed any definition of savagery. They have compact, sturdy limbs and thick necks.... Although they have the shape ... of human beings, they are so wild in their way of life that they have no need of fire or pleasant tasting foods, but eat the roots of uncultivated plants and the half-raw flesh of all sorts of animals. This they place between their thighs and the backs of their horses and so warm it a little Huns are never sheltered by buildings, but ... roam freely in the mountains and woods, learning from their earliest childhood to endure freezing cold, hunger and thirst.... Huns are not well adapted to battle on foot, but are almost glued to their horses, which are certainly hardy, but also ugly.... Like refugees – all without permanent settlements, homes, law, or a fixed way of life – they are always on the move with their wagons, in which they leave.... Like unthinking animals, they are completely ignorant of the difference between right and wrong. Fired with an overwhelming desire for seizing the property of others, these swift-moving and ungovernable people make their destructive way amid the pillage and slaughter of those who live around them.

CV

Document E: Economic Corruption

Content Notes:

- Priscus was a diplomat and a historian whose writings about Attila the Hun are considered among the most valuable early accounts of the leader's life.
- The complaint by the person speaking to Priscus about the corruption and ineffectiveness of political leaders reflects complaints often expressed by American citizens; namely, that our country has good laws, but inept or corrupt political officials often ignore or fail to properly respect them, at the expense of common citizens.
- Historian Peter Stearns, excerpted in Document F of this Mini-Q, echoes the sentiment expressed in Priscus's writing: “Attempts to regulate the economy reduced economic initiative and lowered production; ultimately tax revenues declined once again. The army deteriorated further. And when the Germanic invasions began in earnest in the 40s, there was scant basis to resist. Many peasants, burdened by the social and economic pressures of the decaying empire, actually welcomed the barbarians. A priest noted that ‘in all districts taken over by the Germans, there is one desire among all Romans, that they should never again find it necessary to pass under Roman jurisdiction.’”

Teaching Tips:

- Discuss the Document Analysis questions:

1. Who was Priscus? Do you think his description is reliable? Why?

Priscus was the Roman ambassador to the Huns. His description is probably reliable because it would be in his interest to say the opposite. His report was saying that the Huns, the barbarians from the east, were doing a better job administering the area than his own people, the Romans.

2. Why were some Romans happy about being conquered by the Huns?

The Romans had been corrupt in administering justice. Rich men were able to bribe their way out of trouble. The strong impression left by the document is that the Huns were more honest.

3. What does the person talking to Priscus mean when he says, “The climax of misery is to have to pay ... for justice”?

This quote suggests that there was a great deal of corruption in Roman society, particularly relating to the administration of justice. Bribing officials would allow the wealthy to avoid problems with the law while the poorer segments of society would have to suffer the consequences of arrest.

4. How can you use this document to explain what caused the decline of the Roman Empire?

According to the ex-Roman citizen whose land had been conquered by the Huns, life was better under the Huns than it had been under the Romans. The main reason was the lack of even-handed justice. Basically, the rich bought their way out of trouble; the poor were punished. The fault, according to this source, lay with the Roman governors who lacked “the spirit of former generations.” In other words, not only was Rome going soft (BGE), it was going corrupt.

Document E

Source: An excerpt of a historical text written by Priscus, Roman ambassador to the Huns, 449 CE.

Note: Priscus is reporting a conversation he had with a former Roman citizen whose land had been conquered by the Huns.

[He] ... considered his new life ... better than his old life among the Romans, and the reasons he gave were as follows: ... The condition of [Roman] subjects in time of peace [is worse than war] ... taxes are very severe, and unprincipled men inflict injuries on others ... A [wealthy lawbreaker] ... is not punished for his injustice, while a poor man ... undergoes the legal penalty The climax of misery is to have to pay in order to obtain justice.... [He said] that the laws and constitution of the Romans were fair, but deplored that the governors, not possessing the spirit of former generations, were ruining the state.

CV

Document F: Disasters and Disease

Content Notes:

- Edward Gibbon (1737-1794) is the preeminent historian of the Roman Empire. He served in the British Parliament, but is most famous for writing *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, which was published in six volumes over a 12-year period. He is praised for his use of primary sources, and once said, “I have always endeavored to draw from the fountain-head; that my curiosity, as well as a sense of duty, has always urged me to study the originals.”
- Gibbon continues from the excerpt to compare the societal impact of the disasters to that of foreign invasion, noting, “[but] man has much more to fear from the passions of his fellow-creatures than from the convulsions of the elements In the disastrous period of the fall of the Roman empire ... the happiness and security of each individual were personally attacked, and the arts and labours of ages were rudely defaced by the barbarians of Scythia [Central Asia] and Germany. The invasion of the Huns [forced into] the provinces of the West the Gothic nation, which advanced in less than forty years, from the Danube to the Atlantic, and opened a way, by the success of their arms, to the inroads of so many hostile tribes more savage than themselves.”
- Peter Stearns, a co-author of the second document source, is an American professor of history at George Mason University. He has written or edited more than 100 books and serves as the chair of the Advanced Placement World History Committee.
- Some historians have argued that the Roman Empire’s heavy reliance on lead pipes for their many aqueducts contributed to a debilitating depletion of the population. According to this theory, lead poisoning eventually killed many Romans and also slowed the fertility rate. Most historians refute this theory, and it is generally not considered a factor in Rome’s decline.

Teaching Tips:

- Discuss the Document Analysis questions:
 1. In the Gibbon passage, what natural disaster struck the Roman Empire in 366 CE?

An earthquake, which caused a deadly flood
 2. In the Stearns passage, what deadly illness arrived from southern Asia?

A disease called the plague
 3. Describe one specific way that each of the two disasters detailed above contributed to the decline of the Roman Empire.

The earthquake of 366 CE occurred near the shore of the Mediterranean and the shift of the seabed floor caused a tremendous tidal wave that hit Egypt, Sicily, and Greece. 50,000 people died in Alexandria alone. It shook the morale of the empire. The plague reduced the population of the city of Rome from one million to 250,000. Among other things, this greatly reduced the pool of young men available to be soldiers and hurt frontier security.
 4. Consider the various causes of decline presented by the six documents in this Mini-Q: political assassinations, military problems like armor and conscription, legal injustice, foreign invasions, and natural disasters. Which of these do you regard as the most important three causes? Explain.

Answers will vary. Here are some possibles:

 1. Political assassinations: Has the look of a society that has lost confidence in its future and is fighting to keep individual heads above water.
 2. Military problems: The armor and conscription problems are symptoms of a society gone soft. “I’m not going to fight with that heavy armor; in fact, I’m not going to fight at all.”
 3. Foreign invasions: Would not have happened if Rome hadn’t gotten soft and made itself vulnerable.

Document F

Source: Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Strahan & Cadell, 1776-1788.

Note: It took the author 12 years to write this six-volume set of books.

In the second year of the reign of Valens (366 CE) ... the Roman world was shaken by a violent and destructive earthquake The shores of the Mediterranean were left dry by the sudden retreat of the sea ... but the tide soon returned with the weight of an immense [flood] which was severely felt on the coasts of Sicily ... Greece, and of Egypt ... fifty thousand persons had lost their lives in the flood [in the city of Alexandria alone] [T]his calamity ... astonished and terrified the subjects of Rome ... and their fearful vanity was disposed to [see a connection between] the symptoms of a declining empire and a sinking world....

CV

Source: Peter Stearns, Michael Adas, Stuart Schwartz, Marc Jason Gilbert, *World Civilizations: The Global Experience*, Pearson Education, 2000.

More important in initiating the process of decline was a series of plagues that swept over the empire...which brought diseases [from] southern Asia to new areas like the Mediterranean, where no resistance had been established even to contagions such as the measles. The resulting diseases decimated the population. The population of Rome decreased from a million people to 250,000. Economic life worsened in consequence. Recruitment of troops became more difficult, so the empire was increasingly reduced to hiring Germanic soldiers to guard its frontiers. The need to pay troops added to the demands on the state's budget, just as declining production cut into tax revenues.

