



The Emperor's Soothsayer

14-15



Co-funded by
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Topic: History

Level: Secondary education (14-15 years old)

Concepts: Roman Emperors

Time required: +/- 45 min

Summary of the activity: Edugraal offers a series of adventures related to the 'Wonderful Treasures', an agency that deals with finding lost treasures. In this series, the readers are the protagonists and experience the adventure themselves! They choose what to do and solve puzzles or quizzes to get ahead. A helper is always present, who suggests answers if there is a problem and allows a review of the topics.

This adventure is set in the time of Emperor Augustus: it allows a review of the history of the Roman Emperors from Augustus to the crisis of the 3rd century.

Itinerary/Process Summary: It is a classic itinerary with multiple choices. The correct choice leads to the advancement of the story. The wrong choice usually leads back, with a brief summary of the concepts addressed.

Material needed: Paper, pen, knowledge about history and... motivation!

1



You are standing in Rome on the terrace of a small B&B that directly overlooks the Palatine Hill. You have in front of you a marvellous sight: one of the oldest areas of Rome where the ruins of the temples and palaces of the Roman emperors who lived there currently stand. Although only parts of the old structures are visible, you can appreciate and imagine the lifestyle they had at that time. One of the best-preserved structures on Palatine Hill is the Imperial House, also known as the House of Augustus.

Find out why you are there!



Go to paragraph 3.

2

"I am so excited! Working on the Palatine excavations is an excellent opportunity for a Roman history enthusiast like me! I am working with a team of young archaeologists worldwide, and I am their coordinator. Three thousand years of history will pass in these months before my eyes and under my 'hands'. I am sure my team and I will return a formidable heritage of 'memories' to the scientific community and the city."

- Read the last page of Dora's diary  **Go to paragraph 4.**
- Go to the Palatine  **Go to paragraph 6.**

3

Wonderful Treasures, the agency you founded that searches for lost treasures, has a critical mission: find out what happened to archaeologist Dora Tei!



You've been flipping through her notebook for about an hour: it was found by a curious tourist right in a hidden corner of the Imperial Forum. There had been much rain in the previous days, and some of the pages were obliterated by water. But there is a disturbing message in the last one, written in hasty handwriting...

- Read the first page of Dora's diary  **Go to paragraph 2.**
- Read the last page of Dora's diary  **Go to paragraph 4.**

4

"The door has opened and I can't help but go in. I'm afraid of what's going to happen, but I'll do it."

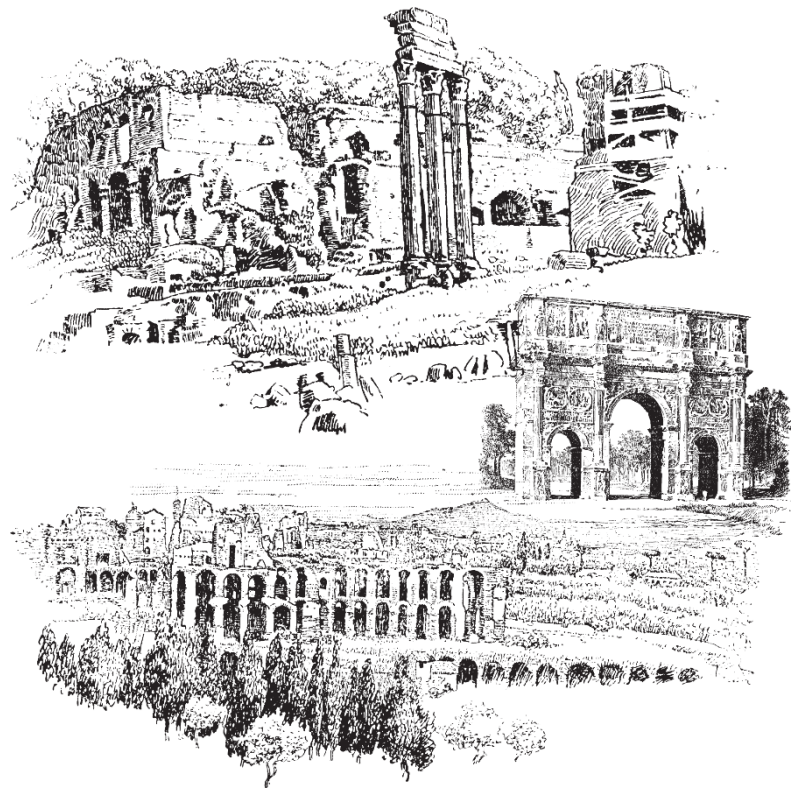
Dora must have run into some danger: she did not feel safe and wrote that message hoping for someone's help. An acronym underlined several times opened a big question for you: SRQR. You know that SPQR is a Roman acronym used to refer to the Roman Senate and People, but what does SRQR mean? You don't know anything about that.

It plagues you with the thought that you don't know where to start. The only thing you're sure of is that Dora's last research concerned Emperor Augustus.

- Read the first page of Dora's diary  **Go to paragraph 2.**
- Go to the Palatine  **Go to paragraph 6.**

5

The Palatine Hill has been considered the cradle of the Italian capital. According to ancient tradition, it was on this hill where Romulus built the first nucleus of Rome in the second half of the 8th century BC.



During the Republican period, Romans belonging to the aristocratic class settled on this hill and built luxurious palaces. Important vestiges of which are preserved today.

During the 2nd and 1st centuries B.C., it was a veritable "residential quarter" of the Roman aristocracy.

Under Emperor Augustus, the Palatine Hill became the official seat of power by initiating a program of building imperial palaces, renovations, and extensions of buildings constructed by previous emperors.



But you are not there for a vacation.

 **Go to paragraph 7.**

6

It's almost 6 p.m. and you remember that while you were deep in thought, you didn't even think about lunch. So your stomach protests! But before the janitor closes the entrance gates to the Palatine, something urges you to return to the spot where the tourist says he found the notebook.

Given the hour and the unfavourable weather, there are very few tourists. As you walk, your gaze falls on an inscription on the ruins of one of the domus: unbelievable! You precisely recognise the initials of Dora Tei's notebook, SRQR. That's weird... Shouldn't it be SPQR?

- What's SPQR?  **Go to paragraph 7.**
- Learn more about the Palatine  **Go to paragraph 5.**

7

This acronym sees its origins in the time of the Roman Republic when the two main figures of power were the Senate and the People. The abbreviation SPQR encapsulates within itself both figures since it stands for *Senatus PopulusQue Romanus*, or "the Senate and the Roman People."

But you are sure that you have never read the acronym SRQR.

You try to rub the engraving on the column, thinking it is an act of vandalism by some thoughtless person who wanted to deface the archaeological heritage. But something incredible and inexplicable happens...

 **Go to paragraph 16.**



8

Luckily, Dora follows you and lets you know that you gave the wrong answer. The title of "Optimus Princeps", the perfect ruler, is attributed to the emperor Trajan, who brought the empire to its maximum extent, undertook a great program of public works and social reforms, and became famous for his wisdom.

 **Go to paragraph 14.**

9

Once again, Dora elbows you in the side to make. This is not what you should have said: in fact, this information can be traced back to Vespasian, not to the successor of Tiberius, namely Caligula!

 **Go to paragraph 19.**

10

Fortunately, Dora is always around and beckons you to retrace your steps!

 **Go to paragraph 31.**

11

Augustus became emperor because he was designated heir by his adoptive father, Julius Caesar, in his will.

You also fully understand his motives for establishing armed guards for the emperor, given the tragic end of his uncle Julius Caesar, who was killed at the hands of the Senate in an ambush that occurred on March 15, 44 BCE!






He became consul at age 19, the youngest consul in history.

He was the founder of the Roman Empire. With him, the crisis of the republic came to a definitive end, replacing a monarchical regime based on the army and the rule of the provinces.

Augustus meanwhile continues to speak, "I am sure that thanks to the settings we are giving our Empire It will be able to last over 100 years!"

Without even realizing it, a comment comes out of you: "Great Augustus, you may not know it yet, but the Roman Empire will be able to last:

- Less than 100 years  **Go to paragraph 18.**
- About 200 years  **Go to paragraph 13.**
- More than 350 years  **Go to paragraph 17.**

12

Augustus seems to appreciate your answer and resumes speaking: "Well, let's go on again. After him, what will happen?"

Here, things get complicated. If Tiberius was still considered among the "good" emperors, the same cannot be said of his successor. But you only want to talk to him about some positive aspects.

- He will be Caligula. Through his example of a simple life, he will contrast the luxury and extravagance of the Roman nobles.

➡➡➡ → **Go to paragraph 9.**

- He will be Caligula. Because an illness struck him, he became insane and unscrupulous, but he will work for the reduction of taxes and the implementation and renovation of some public works.

➡➡➡ → **Go to paragraph 19.**

13

Behind your back, you hear a whisper, "Hey! What are you talking about? The Empire will last over 350 years!" You turn around to see who is giving you this advice and see Dora Tei, also dressed in Roman clothing. She is holding a water pitcher and is about to pour it for the emperor. Incredible! What is taking place surprises you more and more every moment. But there is no time to ask yourself too many questions and you immediately correct yourself, "I meant to say, Great Augustus, it will last over 350 years!"

→ **Go to paragraph 17.**

14

Exalted by your response, Augustus smiles contentedly.

"Your words come to me gladly, reflecting my ideas and plans for the Empire."

Indeed, for everyone, the Augustan age will remain etched as the Golden Age, because of the peace that Augustus restored and the beauty of the works he built.

Thinking about this, you look at Augustus with admiration. He seems to notice and smiles at you.

"After all my efforts, what can you tell me about my successor?"

Now that you have won his trust, you are at a loss to reveal something that he may not like very much:

- He will be Tiberius. He will show great deference to the Senate and renounce those honorific titles, granted to Augustus, fearing that they will sound offensive to the senators.

➡➡➡➡➡ **Go to paragraph 31.**

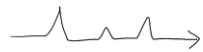
- He will be Nero, a megalomaniac despot but, at the same time, a man who loves art and beauty, appreciated by the people for the tax and monetary reforms that will benefit the poorest.

➡➡➡➡➡ **Go to paragraph 10.**

15

Arunte was an Etruscan haruspex, a character in Lucan's Pharsalia and mentioned in Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy.

For Lucan he was a powerful soothsayer specialising in divination through the entrails of animals, the flight of birds and other natural phenomena. He was summoned to Rome just before the civil war between Caesar and Pompey to interpret some significant events: he prophesied both the war and Caesar's glorious victory.



Go to paragraph 20.

16

You are overwhelmed by a blinding light and are forced to close your eyes, unable to explain what is happening. When the light seems to soften and what you see is even more incredible: it seems as if you have gone back in time, to the Ancient Rome with its elegant domus and its opulent decorations. You see fantastic effects and illusory perspectives, unreal shapes, human or animal figures arising from plant motifs, purple and gold, and dazzling hues prevailing over the design.

You hear voices and follow them.



Go to paragraph 22.

17

Great! The emperor looks at your face for the first time.

The astonishment in his eyes is glaring:

"How can you say that with such certainty?"

"I shouldn't say it, but I am descended from the soothsayer Arunte, from whom I inherited the power of divination."

Your ability to tell stories surprises you more and more every day!



Augustus replies, "Are you really descended from the haruspex who prophesied Caesar's glorious victory?"

"Yes, I am."

Augustus approaches you and looks at you with wide eyes, "I will be willing to release you from your servant status if you can enlighten me about what will happen in the coming years to the Roman Empire."

His proposal catches you unprepared. Fortunately, you have always liked challenges, and also, you think you have no choice.

"I will be honoured to be able to answer your questions".

- Learn more about Arunte  **Go to paragraph 15.**
- Listen to Augustus' first question  **Go to paragraph 20.**

18

Behind your back, you hear a whisper, "Hey! What are you talking about? The Empire will last over 350 years!" You turn around to see who is giving you this advice and see Dora Tei, also dressed in Roman clothing. She is holding a water pitcher and is about to pour it for the emperor. Incredible! What is taking place surprises you more and more every moment. But there is no time to ask yourself too many questions and you immediately correct yourself, "I meant to say, Great Augustus, it will last over 350 years!"

 **Go to paragraph 17.**

19

Great, your memory seems infallible! The choice of Caligula as the new emperor was not made by his predecessor Tiberius, but by the Senate and the Praetorians. Both hoped to control him easily because of his young age.



But during his short reign, Caligula was capable of many extravagances and criminal and cruel acts, driven by his megalomania and avarice. He will go down in history as a "monster" (as Suetonius and Dione Cassius called him). According to some, this was an entirely unbiased portrayal, but it fulfilled a specific political and moral purpose: to warn of the dangers of personal power and to remind us of the respect and integrity of Rome's nobility and senate.

Discover Augustus' fourth question!

 **Go to paragraph 25.**

20

"My first question is, what will be the greatest work I will be remembered for?"
This question does not catch you unprepared. You pretend to scan the sky, then answer:

- You will be remembered for the unity of the Empire, ensuring prosperity and peace, and realising the ancient ideal of the abolition of wars between the participants of the same civilisation.

➤➤➤➤➤ ➔ **Go to paragraph 14.**

- You will already be exalted by your contemporaries and remembered by ancient historians as Optimus Princeps, the perfect ruler, for your deeds and extraordinary abilities as a general, administrator, politician and statesman.

➤➤➤➤➤ ➔ **Go to paragraph 8.**

21


Great answer! In fact, the period from 96 (election of Nerva) to 180 (death of Marcus Aurelius) is habitually defined as the age of the adoptive emperors (or emperors of adoption). Succession to the throne is established not by family, but through adoption by the incumbent emperor. This is considered one of the most splendid ages of Roman history, after the travails of the last years of the Flavian Dynasty and before the return to the dynastic principle with Commodus and the subsequent Roman Civil War (193-197).

As you are about to hear Augustus's new question, you see in the distance a man who has approached Dora. The two are evidently arguing. You pretend you need to rest to continue your divinations. So, you move away from Augustus. Thus, you hear a few words: "No one must know about the space-time door! It is too dangerous to subvert history! A disaster could

happen that we can't even imagine!" The man looks grim, and his voice is frightening: "You mustn't get involved! We in the XWG know how to handle this. Now that we've made this sensational discovery, we certainly won't give up taking advantage of it. You keep your mouth shut. Otherwise, we'll send you to a place you'll hardly ever return."

You would like to run to Dora, but Augustus approaches you.

"What are you hiding from me?" You promptly reply, "Nothing, Divine Augustus, I am ready for your next question."

Discover Augustus' fifth question!  **Go to paragraph 29.**

22

A man speaks decisively to others who listen attentively. You only notice that you are wearing a Roman robe and holding a platter of fruit, which immediately lets you know that you are at the host's service. The man continues to speak. Your presence does not seem to arouse surprise; at a certain point, the man motions you to approach: he is interested in the fruit you are holding. You hear him speak:

"I want to continue the work of the great Caesar, but I intend to avoid all aspects of usurpation and dictatorship, justifying my regime from the republican point of view. We must think of laws to combat luxury to return Rome to its former glory. And also, it is appropriate to establish armed guards for me since I, as the Emperor, deserve the utmost protection and security."

From these words, you understand that most likely, who what you are looking at right now is no less than Emperor Augustus, that is, Gaius Julius Caesar Octavian, the first Roman emperor!

Learn more about him!  **Go to paragraph 11.**

23

Dora grimaces and makes you realise that you need to remember this topic better...



Go to paragraph 21.

24

You remain perplexed for a few seconds as to what to do; then your thoughts turn to Dora. You see her enter the room accompanied by Augustus' guards and you feel relieved. She can give you some explanation about this singular adventure and above all tell you how to go back in time. The guards leave you alone. But Dora is distraught: "I don't know you, but I understood that you also came here from the future. Thank you for saving me from that man; I think he wanted to silence me forever." You reply: "I followed your tracks, starting with the acronym SRQR." She smiles: "It worked then! Sorry, though, now you are in danger, too. The company XWG discovered the space-time gate following my studies, and now they want to exploit this incredible discovery to alter historical facts and make profits. They're dangerous. We must stop them. We must return to our own time and destroy the space-time gate." Then Dora grabbed you and made you run wild. In a flash, you are once again facing the dazzling light. You enter the light together. It lasts a few seconds. Then the light goes out.

When you manage to open your eyes, you expect to be at the starting point of the adventure and are eager to ask Dora for an explanation. But even she seems astonished. To your surprise, you find yourself in a shack that has nothing to do with contemporary times. You are in a military camp, together with some Roman soldiers! Oops, something must have gone wrong!

Your adventure seems far from over!

The end...

25

Augustus seems satisfied with what you told him about Caligula, and fortunately, he cannot read your mind! You expect a new question about the next emperor, but instead, you are surprised: "Will the emperor always be a member of the same family?"

- No. In 96 A.D., the system of adoption will be introduced: the emperor can choose as his successor a person he considered capable of ruling by adopting him before he dies. This person can also not be a member of his family.

➡➡➡ **Go to paragraph 21.**

- No. Over time, the Senate will gain more and more power and strength, to the point where it can name the emperor's successor.

➡➡➡ **Go to paragraph 23.**

26

"Thank you. Let me tell you this, Great Augustus: The Roman Empire will succeed in bringing together so many peoples with different languages and traditions under one form of government, evolved in every way, socially, legally, economically and culturally. To do this, it will build 80000 km of roads, with bridges, aqueducts, sewers, cisterns, harbours, courts, nymphaeums, stadiums, arches, walls and gates, basilicas, arenas and theatres, baths, public baths and temples. Roman laws will stand for centuries, and Roman law will inspire the laws of many countries. Ask no more questions and be proud of it all."

Your words reassure Augustus and he smiles at you: "Whether you really know all this or not... you are free. You can stay here in my house. I will have accommodation prepared for you. I wish I could still confront you." Without another word, he turns and walks away.

What will happen now?

➡ **Go to paragraph 24.**

27

Great, your memory seems infallible! You remember that with Trajan, the empire reached its greatest extent, and after him, each new emperor was greeted by the Senate with the words, "Be more beneficent than Augustus and more just than Trajan."





Under his inspired leadership, Rome regained confidence not only in its internal security but also in its imperial destiny. Trajan's was one of the happiest eras in imperial history.

Trajan was extolled already by contemporaries and ancient historians as *Optimus Princeps*; by many modern historians and experts, he is considered the best emperor known to Rome throughout its long history.

You see Augustus looking up into the sky thoughtfully, "I don't know whether to ask you this question, but I feel burning like an unquenchable hunger for my desire to know. Why will all this come to an end? How is it possible that this great empire will go into crisis?"

You understand that this is a very delicate question. You try to take courage and find the right words.

- Among the causes of the crisis will be barbarian invasions and the "military anarchy".  **Go to paragraph 32.**
- The empire would enter a crisis and be shaken by a series of civil wars until its demise after the Battle of Actium.  **Go to paragraph 28.**

28

Oops! Fortunately, Dora suggests something in your ear...

 **Go to paragraph 32.**

29

Augustus continues: "Tell me, among all the emperors who will alternate on the throne of the Empire, who will history recognise as the most important?"

You give him this answer, feeling in your heart great esteem for him: "For many, there is no doubt: it is you, Augustus. He who avenged the assassination of Julius Caesar, in 27 B.C. founded the Empire, establishing control over all the provinces..." but knowing that you cannot lie to history you continue, "For others, however, the greatest emperor of Rome will be Trajan."

Augustus is intrigued and a little displeased, "And for what reason will Trajan be greater than me?"

- He will be the emperor who, while still alive, will be revered throughout the empire. Upon his death he will be deified, inaugurating a custom that will continue with his successors.

 **Go to paragraph 30.**

- He will be the emperor who will bring Rome to its greatest splendour and extent and will be called "The Delight of the people" because of his virtues.

 **Go to paragraph 27.**

30

Dora is your salvation again: with a grimace, she makes you realise that what you said is incorrect!

 **Go to paragraph 27.**

31

Augustus turns dark in the face. Tiberius was the stepson of Octavian Augustus. He never particularly loved him because of his closed and shadowy character. Augustus appointed him successor only after the death of his favourite nephews.

You feel sorry for Augustus and try to reassure him:

"Augustus, do not fear. Despite the negative image handed down by historiography, Tiberius will consolidate your work, succeed in keeping peace on the borders, and be excellent in the financial management of the Empire. Tiberius will also organise the Praetorian Guard, for which he built a large camp (Castrum praetorium) whose imposing remains will truncate through the centuries!" Even today, they can be seen in Rome, near Termini Station!

Discover Augustus' third question!

 **Go to paragraph 12.**



32



You're right! During this crisis, extremely problematic situations occurred simultaneously on several fronts: from increased enemy pressure on the borders (with the barbarian invasions of the 3rd century), often accompanied by secessions (as in the case of the Empire of Gaul and the Kingdom of Palmyra) and internal unrest (which would result in structural reforms of the traditional Roman military unit, the legion), the crisis of the traditional economic system, and, above all, severe political instability (the so-called "military anarchy").

Suddenly, you hear screams coming from the vestibule. Perhaps Dora is in danger? You get distracted, and Augustus notices immediately. "You are hiding something from me! You cannot deny it! And I don't like that! Who's to say you're not deceiving me?" His thundering voice startled you: "Augustus, I would never do that!" He is not convinced: "Guards, catch them and imprison them. Maybe that will help them to be more honest." You cannot allow that to happen! "Augustus, all right, I confess I am concerned about the fate of one of your servants. I am in love with her. I heard her cries coming from the vestibule. A man is bothering her. Please send your guards to check that all is quiet in the vestibule." Augustus remains silent, then instructs his guards to do as you ask.

Your greeting to Augustus...



Go to paragraph 26.



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