

Fall of Rome 1.0

Teacher's Debriefing Supplement

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Debriefing Questions

In the game, The Barbarians and Sassanids often attack at the same time. Do you think this degree of coordination actually existed between the Barbarians and the Sassanids?

[The Germanic peoples of Germania and Sarmatia did not have highly structured governments like the Romans and Sassanids. Therefore, it is unlikely there was any actual diplomacy between the two. However, Rome's enemies could easily see when legions were being sent off to fight elsewhere. Therefore if the Sassanids attacked in the east, the Barbarians would notice Roman legions being sent elsewhere, leaving the borders less defended. This thinning out of the border defenses would have encouraged them to raid Roman territory.]

Did anyone have a plague hit the empire? If so, describe what happened.

[Plagues reduce tax revenue, and halt the creation of new legions. Legions lost in battle will not be replaced. However, since the existing legions must still be paid, the treasury will rapidly be depleted. If the treasury is exhausted, legions start disbanding. If an attack by the Sassanids or Barbarians occurs while a plague exists, the player may rapidly lose territory to the computer.]

Can you compare the plagues of ancient times to anything happening today?

[Possibly the AIDS crisis in parts of Africa or how aging populations are hindering the economies of Japan and some countries in Europe. Some students might associate it with the black plague of the Middle Ages.]

By the end of the Roman Empire, plague had reduced the Roman Empire's population by one third. Describe the effects on our society if our population fell by that much? (This might be good pseudo-authentic writing assignment.)

[Falling tax revenue, inability to keep up roads/bridges/hospitals/schools/sewers/fire & police departments. Deficit Spending to make up the shortfall might cause high inflation. Inability to keep troops overseas. End of big public programs such as NASA. People might move elsewhere to seek a higher standard of living, which would just make the problem worse.]

Did anyone have legions rebel? If so, when did this happen? What does this say about the relationship between the army and the senate?

[Two possible answers: Troops can spontaneously ask for a donative and rebel if it is not paid. Troops will also sometimes rebel after defeating the last Barbarian or Sassanid legion. This question is aimed at exploring the relationship between the senate and the army]

What there any advantage to having troops rebel? [did anyone just leave them there?]

[In the game, troops that rebel don't attack the Romans (or anyone else). Leaving them alone creates a buffer zone between the Romans and their enemies. Explain how the breakup of the Roman Empire into three separate empires during the 3rd century actually helped preserve it by creating political units which could handle their own defense more effectively. Explain how Armenia was often a buffer state between the Romans and Sassanids, Thailand was a border State between British India and French Indo-China.]

In the game, the chance of winning a battle is fifty percent. Do you think this is realistic? Why or why not?

[Some students might say the Roman legions should at least have an advantage over the "barbarians." This assumption might be based on the fact that if the Roman legions weren't superior to their adversaries, the Empire would never have grown so large in the first place. Others might share this opinion because of what they have seen on the history Channel or in the movie *Gladiator*. However, by the third and fourth centuries, the falling population and increasing external threat meant that the Romans were relying on frontier militias and barbarian settlers from outside the empire for defense. Consequently, the qualitative difference between Roman and "barbarian" troops steadily eroded over the third and fourth centuries.]

In the game, the Germanic tribes ask for tribute before attacking. What do you think would have been the advantage of paying them off in exchange for peace? What would have been the risks?

[Romans had a strong sense of honor. Emperors who paid tribute to the barbarians were often criticized for being cowardly. One might argue that cash-for-peace arrangements might just encourage Rome's enemies to ask for increasingly higher sums. Students might state that this strategy would be practical because peace is cheaper than war, or that peace on one front would allow the Romans to address threats to another. Others might speculate that giving currency to her enemies would actually be helpful, since the barbarians would no doubt use the funds to purchase goods made within the empire (if a student does suggest this, compare it to post WWII Marshall Plan)]

In the game, it is possible to run out of money. However, in the 3rd and 4th centuries, emperors just minted more coins. What are the dangers of creating money?

[Increasing the amount of money in an economy increases demand, which drives up prices. When people see prices rising they buy things as soon as possible, exacerbating the problem. The phenomenon of rapidly rising prices is called *hyperinflation*. This happened in the Confederate States during the Civil War, Germany following WWI, and recently in Zimbabwe. The huge number of coins struck during the 3rd century explains why they can be purchased on eBay for less than \$20.]

Did anyone attempt to protect the western part of the Empire by stationing legions in every province along the Rhine and Danube Rivers? Did anyone try anything else?

[An alternative to putting legions along the frontier is to hold them back and move them to meet an incoming attack. This means that at least temporarily, the barbarians will control Roman territory. However, it means less manpower required to hold the frontier since the player doesn't need to position troops everywhere. The later strategy is called "defense in depth" while the former is called "static defense." During the 3rd century, Rome shifted from static defense to defense-in-depth. Cities began to have walls (like the Aurelian walls in Rome), while the military shifted away from legions to local militias, backed up by heavy cavalry. Now we can start to see the origins of the castles and walled cities that become the norm during the Middle Ages.]

Did anyone have barbarians ask to settle inside the Empire? What were the options for handling that situation? What were the pros and cons of each option? Are there any comparable modern situations you could compare that to?

[The border of the empire was not an impenetrable wall like the Berlin Wall. Forts along the border were designed to control the movement of people rather than stop it. Tribes asking to settle in the empire could be a boon as it boosted population, productivity, and tax revenue. It also provided manpower for the military. The problems would come when the groups arriving became too large for the empire to absorb (such as the Goths). This situation could be likened to any scenario where people are immigrating to seek better opportunities. Some students might recall that Texas was settled by Americans who rebelled against Mexico, then petitioned to join the United States.]