

Section of a Floor Mosaic Depicting Fall

Roman, ca. 3rd - 4th century A.D.

Stone and glass tesserae

70 x 40 in.

Museum Purchase, The Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund,
51.13

Object Information

Romans often decorated their public buildings, villas, and houses with mosaics, pictures or patterns made from small pieces of marble, stone, and glass called *tesserae* [pronounced tes'-er-ray]. Mosaic artists would start with a foundation (slightly below ground level) that included rocks and mortar, poured wet cement into it, and then placed the tesserae on the cement to create a design or a picture. The artists achieved the effects of a painting by gradually changing the colors of the tesserae. They might use glass for certain details and stones of different sizes to produce a more realistic image.

The mosaic panel shown here is part of a larger continuous composition illustrating the four seasons. The seasons are personified as *erotes* [er-o'-tees], mythological figures depicted as small boys with wings. They were the mischievous companions of Eros (also known as Cupid), son of Venus, the goddess of love (Aphrodite in Greek), and were often shown in a variety of costumes. The *erote* in this panel represents the fall season. He wears a tunic with a mantle around his waist, carries a basket of fruit on his shoulders, and has a pruning knife in his left hand because fruits such as apples and grapes were harvested in the fall.

Although some mosaics were applied to walls, most were placed on the floor, serving as part of the architecture as well as the decoration in Roman buildings. The four seasons mosaic was created around the late 3rd or early 4th century and decorated a corridor in a house next to two *cubicula*, or bedrooms. The house that these mosaics came from was called the House of the Drinking Contest, named for another mosaic showing a competition between Dionysus and Herakles that was on the floor of the *triclinium*, or dining room. The house was in Seleucia, the port of the city of Antioch, capital of the Roman province of Syria. Antioch was an extremely important city, strategically located between trade routes from Asia Minor to Europe. This area in present day Turkey, was excavated by archaeologists in the 1930s. The mosaics from here were removed and sent to various museums.

Related SOLs and Lesson Ideas for Grades K-5

Visual Arts K.1, K.2, K.3.4, K.3.5, K.8, K.11, K.12, K.13, K.14, K.16, 1.1, 1.2, 1.3.4, 1.4, 1.8, 1.12, 1.13, 1.17, 1.20, 2.4.3, 2.5, 2.19, 2.21, 2.22, 3.2, 3.4, 3.13, 3.16, 3.17, 3.19, 3.25, 4.3, 4.5, 4.6, 4.8, 4.18, 5.1, 5.3, 5.5, 5.6, 5.9, 5.26

English K.1.a, K.2.b-g, K.3.a-f, K.8.a,b,c,d, K-11, 1.1, 1.2.a-e, 1.3,a-d, 1.8, 1.9, 1.11, 1.12, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.5, 2.7, 2.8, 2.11, 2.12, 3.1, 3.2, 3.4, 3.5, 3.9, 3.10, 3.11, 4.1 b,e, 4.2, 4.4, 4.7, 4.8, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.8, 5.9

History K.3, K.4.b, K.4.c, 1.4.b, 1.4.d, 2.7, 3.1, 3.4, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8

Math K.12, 1.17

Observation and Discussion

Use the following suggested questions and discussion points while looking at the *Section of a Floor-Mosaic Depicting Fall*.

- What natural materials were used to make the mosaic?
- Where did the Romans display mosaics? Would this image have been on the floor or on the wall?
- Do you think every Roman home had mosaic floors?
- What is the figure carrying?
- What season does the figure in the mosaic represent?
- Now that you know what season this is, do you think there would have been other images nearby? What might they have represented?
- Why would a mosaic artist depict the four seasons?
- What is your favorite season? Why?
- How would you represent the four seasons?

Activities

MOSAIC-MAKING ACTIVITY 1

Have the students sketch out their own design for a mosaic. The image should be large enough so it can be "tiled" later.

Alternatively, ask the students how they would represent one of the four seasons in a picture. Would they personify the season? What symbols would they use to represent that particular season? Have the students draw the season they wish to represent.

MOSAIC-MAKING ACTIVITY 2

Ask the students to cut construction paper strips of different colors into approximately 1/8-inch squares. Have them wipe a glue stick on a small area of the image and place the color paper squares on the image using their fingers or tweezers.

WRITING ACTIVITY 1

Ask the students to write a story about life in a house or villa in ancient Rome. Ask them to describe how they would decorate the house with mosaics and paintings. What would life be like? What would the daily activities be?

WRITING ACTIVITY 2

Have the students complete the mosaic-making activity above or illustrate their story another way.

Closure

Encourage the students to share their ideas about their mosaic, story, or drawing. Ask them to explain any symbols they have chosen and why they selected them.

VMFA Educational Media Resources

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ACC-1

Cyber Rome

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Upper elementary through adult

Rome circa 200 A.D. comes alive through virtual reality and 3-D graphics. Visit the Colosseum, the Basilica of Maxentius, the Tabularium, the Basilica Giulia, the Curia, the Temple of Vesta, the House of the Vestals, the Temple of Mars Ultor, Trajan's Column, the Basilica Ulpia, the Temple of Venus and Roma, and

the Palatine, where legend says Romulus built the first wall around the city.

Link to related works of art in the VMFA collection along with educational information on Rome, visit

<http://www.vmfa.museum/PrevisitAncient.html>

Web link

<http://rome.mrdonn.org/mosaics.html>

Links to related programs

Teen classes

<http://www.vmfa.museum/Learn/Teens/Teens.aspx> Families and Kids

http://www.vmfa.museum/Learn/Kids_Families/Kids_Families.aspx

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