



POWELL CENTER FOR
ECONOMIC LITERACY

Lesson Plan

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It Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time

Choices and Consequences as seen through
the interaction of the Goths and the Romans

Time Required

15 minutes

Grade Level and Subject

Any Grade Level; Ancient History

Keystone Principles

Principle #3 – Choices Have Consequences

Economic Concepts

Scarcity- *Unlimited wants and limited resources to satisfy those wants creates scarcity.*

When we face scarcity we must make choices.

Consequences- *A result or effect of an action or decision may be positive or negative.*

All choices come with benefits and costs.

Overview

This is a quick review lesson for a social studies unit on the fall of Ancient Rome during the 5th century AD and a review of the above economic concepts. Essentially, the Goths fled the more fearsome Huns when they asked Rome for sanctuary. The Romans allowed the Goths to enter the Roman Empire, but put them in guarded confinement camps with little food and no means of producing any more. The Romans traded starving Goth families a dog to eat in return for a child that would become a Roman slave. After years

of horrible mistreatment the Goths revolted and defeated the Romans in a huge battle in which the Roman Emperor Valens and most of the Roman army died. As a part of the treaty, the Goths agree to serve in the Roman army when needed. The Romans trained and armed the Goths as foot soldiers but used them in such a way that thousands were slaughtered in many battles. After years of having no land of their own and suffering horrible losses in Roman wars, the well-armed, fed, and trained Goth soldiers attacked and sacked the city of Rome.

Objectives

Students will follow the threads of choices made in history and link them to their consequences, both expected and unintended.

Materials and Handouts

- There are numerous internet sources for information about the Goths and their interactions with the Roman Empire. For a simple summary, you can look at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goths>.
- Make an overhead of the Decision Grid

Teaching Activity

By working through the decisions of the Goths and the Romans the students will understand that people are forced to make choices as a reaction to scarcity, and those choices are best made by understanding and identifying both costs and benefits. It appears that both the Goths and the Romans (and maybe all of us) tend to consider only the predicted benefits of a choice before making it. In retrospect, might they have made wiser choices by looking more carefully at the costs (or negative consequences) of those choices? Because we cannot anticipate the unintended consequences of our actions, prudent decision-making makes continuing re-evaluation a necessity.

This is a question and answer review session. Write the answers on the overhead of the decision grid.

1. Why did the Goths make the choice to ask Rome if they could cross the Danube River into Rome? *Because they were farmers who were being attacked by the Huns.*

What was the predicted benefit of making this choice for the Goths? *The Goths expected to be safe from the Huns.*

What was the unexpected cost of this choice for the Goths? *The Romans confined the Goths in camps and gave them insufficient food and no way to produce more.*

2. What was the predicted benefit of confining the Goths to camps and not giving them an opportunity to feed themselves for the Romans? *The Romans expected to get a ready and regular supply of free slaves by trading the Goth families dogs to eat in exchange for children to serve the Romans as slaves.*

What was the unexpected cost to Rome of making this choice? *The Goths, formerly peaceful farmers with no history of military aggression, respond to starvation and having their children taken as slaves by going on a rampage and sacking Roman frontier towns*

in search of food and arms.

3. What was the expected benefit to the Roman emperor Valens when he made the choice to ride himself from Rome with the Roman army to crush the Goth rebellion? *He expected to look like a decisive and strong leader of the Roman people.*

What was the unexpected cost of his decision? *He was killed in the battle in which the Roman army was defeated and almost totally destroyed.*

4. As a part of the peace treaty between Rome and the Goths after this battle, the Goths agreed to serve in the Roman army. What was the predicted benefit to Rome of this choice? *Rome got a steady supply of soldiers to use in protecting and expanding its empire.*

What was the predicted benefit to the Goths of their choice to agree to supply the Roman Army with Goth men? *The Goth people received freedom to move about the Roman Empire south of the Danube River and the Goth men were well armed and trained by the Roman army.*

What was the unexpected cost to the Goths of the choice to join the Roman army? *The Romans used the Goths with total disregard to their safety and the Goth losses in battle were enormous.*

What was the unexpected cost to Rome of the choice to use Goth soldiers this way? *Eventually the Goth King Alaric emerged and organized the now well-trained and dangerous Goth soldiers. He led them on to attack and sack Rome.*

5. What was the predicted benefit to Rome of offering the Goths the area of Spain in the peace treaty that followed the Goth sacking of Rome? *This trade-off removed the Goths from the city of Rome and re-settled them relatively far away.*

What was unexpected benefit to Rome of giving this land to the Goths? *In the Dark Ages following the end of the Roman empire, the cultural legacy of Rome was more fully preserved by the people of Spain (the Goths) than anywhere else in the world, including Italy.*

Decision Grid

Choice	Benefits	Costs