

Name _____

Date _____

Roman Dining

¹ What did the ancient Romans eat? If your answer is pasta or pizza, you are in for a surprise!

² Back in the old days, the Romans ate three times a day, just like us. Both their breakfast and lunch were quite simple. For their first meal, they would usually have bread with honey or watered down wine. (The Romans thought it rude to drink wine straight up.) For their second meal, they would eat bread with cheese, dates, fruits, and occasionally, some meat. The two modest fares were enough to aid them for a day of hard work. At dusk, they headed back home to enjoy their main meal, dinner.

³ The Romans loved to hold dinner parties. Before their guests arrived, they would have their servants arrange three couches around every low dining table. Each couch could hold up to three people. The Romans had an interesting dining habit. They liked to eat while lying down!

⁴ Just as each dressed-up guest took up a spot on the couches, the servants began to bring out food and lay it on the tables. On the menu were three courses - appetizer, main course, and dessert. Each course could consist of several dishes. The Romans ate all sorts of vegetables, fruits, and meats. They liked olives, asparagus, mushrooms, beans, and broccoli. They liked apples, pears, figs, dates, and grapes. They liked fish, oysters, lobster, eggs, poultry, and pork. They rarely ate beef. And they did not know about potatoes or tomatoes. The Romans put a lot of sauce in their food. They especially liked

garum. *Garum* was a condiment made from fish, salt, and herbs. It could be bought ready-made from a marketplace. At dinner parties, the guests were often served exotic food. They might have boiled ostriches. They might have roasted flamingoes. Or they might even have stuffed dormice sprinkled with honey and poppy seed.

⁵ No matter what was on the menu, the guests could always count on having a tasty treat. When the feast finally began, everybody dug in - truly. As there were no table knives or forks back then, people ate mostly with their hands. Sometimes, they ate with spoons, too.

⁶ Dinner parties in ancient Rome could go on for hours. And they cost a lot of money. Besides the food, the hosts would need to prepare many varieties of wine. They would also need to hire clowns, dancers, or musicians to perform in between courses. When the guests finally rose to leave - hopefully all stuffed, drunk, and well entertained, the hosts were left with piles of dirty dishes and high bills.

⁷ Since dinner parties were costly, only a few in ancient Rome could afford them. Most people were poor. They lived on government subsidies. Without even having kitchens in their apartments, many ate take-out or used communal ovens. For the commoners, bread was their staple food. Meats were for special occasions only. For them, boiled ostriches, roasted flamingoes, or stuffed dormice were things far beyond their wildest imagination!

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1. Which meal was the most important one for the ancient Romans?

2. Which of the following did the ancient Romans **not** eat?

- a. Grilled fish
- b. Boiled chicken
- c. Mashed potatoes
- d. Roasted pork

3. If a host invited 16 people to a dinner party, how many couches did he need to prepare?

- a. 3
- b. 9
- c. 4
- d. 6

4. Which of the following about the ancient Romans' dinner parties is true?

- a. The guests ate while lying down on couches.
- b. Each guest was served one type of appetizer, one main course, and one dessert.
- c. The guests needed to bring their own wine.
- d. The hosts would ask the guests to share some expenses.

5. Compare a Roman dinner to your dinner on the Venn Diagram below:

