

# Section of a Floor Mosaic Depicting Fall

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*Section of a Floor Mosaic Depicting Fall, 3rd–4th century AD*  
Roman

Stone and glass tesserae, 70 x 40 in.

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 stone and glass called *tesserae* (tes'-er-ray). To make these mosaics, artists first created a foundation (slightly below ground level) with rocks and mortar and then poured wet cement over this mixture. Next they placed the tesserae on the cement to create a design or a picture, using different colors, materials, and sizes to achieve the effects of a painting and a more naturalistic image. Here, for instance, glass tesserae were used to add highlights and emphasize the piled-up bounty of the harvest in the basket.

This mosaic panel is part of a larger continuous composition illustrating the four seasons. The seasons are personified as *erotes* (er-o'-tees), small boys with wings who were the mischievous companions of Eros. (Eros and his mother, Aphrodite, the Greek god and goddess of love, were known in Rome as Cupid and Venus.) *Erotes* were often shown in a variety of costumes; the one in this panel represents the fall season and wears a tunic with a mantle around his waist. He carries a basket of fruit on his shoulders and a pruning knife in his left hand to harvest fall fruits such as apples and grapes.

Although some mosaics were applied to walls and even ceilings, most were placed on floors, serving as part of the architecture as well as the decoration in Roman buildings. The four-seasons mosaic was created around the mid to late third century and decorated the corridor next to two *cubicula*, or bedrooms, of a house. On the floor of the *triclinium*, or dining room, was another mosaic showing a drinking competition between Dionysus and Hercules. This "House of the Drinking Contest," as it was accordingly named, was in Seleucia, the port of the city of Antioch, capital of the Roman province of Syria. Antioch was one of the largest cities of the Roman Empire, strategically located between trade routes from Asia Minor to Europe. Many different goods were traded at Antioch including spices. When this site (in present-day Turkey) was excavated by archaeologists in the 1930s, some of the discoveries remained in Turkey while others were sent to various museums and universities that helped fund the excavation.

## Concept

Students will be introduced to the ancient Roman art of mosaics by studying the *Section of a Floor Mosaic Depicting Fall*. They will learn about how mosaics were made and used in Roman houses. They will also learn about the ancient Roman city of Antioch and its importance in the Roman Empire.

## Map

Have students view a detailed map of the Roman Empire and locate the city of Antioch. It was located in a prime spot for trade between the lands of Asia Minor and those of the rest of the European continent. Students will discuss the types of things that might have been traded in the Roman Empire including Antioch.

## Resources for Grades K–5

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### 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?

# Resources for Grades K–5

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## Activity

Have the students sketch out an original 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, then 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 squares on the image using their fingers or tweezers.

## Writing Activity

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

## Closure

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

## SOLs

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**Visual Arts** K.1, K.2, K.3, K.7.3, K.7.5, K.8, K.11, K.12, K.13, K.14, K.16, 1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 1.7.3, 1.7.4, 1.8, 1.12, 1.13, 1.17, 1.20, 2.4., 2.5.4, 2.5.5, 2.11, 2.19, 2.20, 2.21, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.7.5, 3.13, 3.16, 3.19, 3.25, 4.2, 4.3, 4.5.4, 4.7, 4.18, 4.19, 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–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

# Educational Media Resources

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## Recommended Films, Videos, and DVDs

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### **Ancient Civilizations for Children Series**

9 parts, 23 min. each | 1998 | AK | VHS | DVD

*3rd through 7th grades*

Join archeologist Arizona Smith and his young detective in training as they delve into clues of the past to unlock mysteries of the world's ancient civilizations.

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### **Ancient Rome for Children ACC-1**

#### **Cyber Rome ED-533**

*Upper elementary through adult*

Rome circa 200 AD 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.

**Note: These and other audiovisual resources related to VMFA's collection may be accessed through our website:**

[http://www.vmfa.museum/Learn/Statewide\\_Programs/Films,\\_Videos,\\_and\\_DVDs.aspx](http://www.vmfa.museum/Learn/Statewide_Programs/Films,_Videos,_and_DVDs.aspx)

Link to Related Works of Art at VMFA

<http://www.vmfa.museum/Collections/Ancient/>

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](http://www.vmfa.museum/Learn/Kids+_Families/Kids+_Families.aspx)

*Tours*

<http://www.vmfa.museum/Learn/Educators/educators.aspx>

*Teacher workshops*

[http://www.vmfa.museum/Learn/Educators/Teacher\\_Workshops/Teacher\\_Workshops.aspx](http://www.vmfa.museum/Learn/Educators/Teacher_Workshops/Teacher_Workshops.aspx)

Please check <http://www.vmfa.museum/Learn/> regularly to learn about new tours and other educational opportunities.



VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

200 N. Boulevard | Richmond, VA 23220 | [www.VMFA.museum](http://www.VMFA.museum)