

The Raven's Wing

Frances Watts

Book Summary

Set in Ancient Rome, *The Raven's Wing* tells the story of Claudia, who is wrenched from her happy life with her aunt and uncle to return to the home of her senator father, whom she hasn't seen since her mother died when she was very young. Soon Claudia starts to uncover the true reasons behind her father's newfound interest, and finds herself an unwitting pawn in her new stepmother's plots and schemes. Full of intrigue, romance and humour, *The Raven's Wing* takes you back to life in Ancient Rome, but with a voice that is entirely fresh and relatable for young women today.

Curriculum Areas and Key Learning Outcomes

The Raven's Wing is suitable for years 7-9 and match the following National Curriculum Objectives:

Year Seven

ACELA1528	ACELA1539	ACDSEH004
ACELA1529	ACELT1619	ACDSEH039
ACELA1782	ACELT1620	ACDSEH040
ACELA1531	ACELT1803	ACDSEH131
ACELA1764	ACELY1722	

Year Eight

ACELA1540	ACELA1547
ACELA1541	ACELA1549
ACELA1542	ACELT1807
ACELA1766	ACELT1630
ACELA1544	ACELY1732

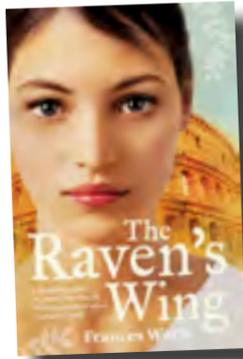
Year Nine

ACELA1557	ACELY1739
ACELT1633	ACELY1742
ACELT1771	ACELY1743
ACELT1635	ACELY1744
ACELT1772	

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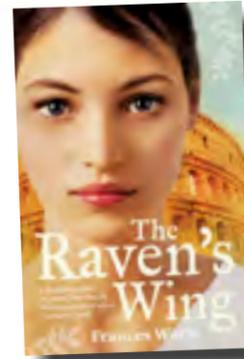
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Introduction

'The new leaves were still only tight knuckles of green along the branches and the craggy limbs were stark against the sky. For some reason they gave me a chill, these bare bones of branches. The change in the landscape felt symbolic somehow, as if we had crossed some invisible border. I had left my home in Arretium, and I did not yet have a home in Rome. How easily I could fall through the space between the trees and be lost forever ...' (pp 22-3)

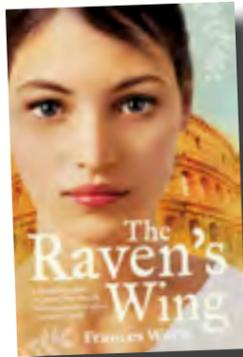
Fifteen-year-old Claudia is plucked from her childhood home in a quiet town, and thrust into the machinations of ancient Roman upper society. As a woman in this highly structured environment she has few choices in life; she has been taken from her childhood betrothed, in order to be offered to another. But Claudia, despite her youth, is a girl who is beginning to know her own mind and is unlikely to accept her fate without some resistance. *The Raven's Wing* is an exciting new historical fiction which will introduce young readers (10-14 years) to the history and the characters of ancient Rome, in an immediate and extremely engaging way.

Synopsis

"Politics is how we argue our different goals for Rome, our different cures for her ills, how all our voices are heard. Well, not all our voices are heard — but they should be. Rome might be more stable, more secure, than at any time in her history, but at what cost? Power that used to reside with the assemblies of the people has all been transferred to the Senate, made up only of patricians — and even the Senate is dominated by one

man, Caesar." He looked troubled. "The signature of our state is SPQR, *Senātus Populusque Rōmānus*: the Senate and People of Rome. It is meant to convey that both are sovereign. I think we have strayed from the ideals of the Republic.' (pp 227-8)

Set first in Arretium, and then in Rome, this is an historical fiction set amidst the political intrigues of Ancient Rome and spiced with tragedy, scheming rivals, humour and romance. Since her mother's death, Claudia has been brought up by an uncle and aunt in the provinces, but is sent for to her powerful father, Gaius Claudius Maximus, a member of the Roman Senate. Initially excited that her father might wish to see her again, she soon realises that she is a pawn in a plot to marry her to her stepmother Prisca's son, Marcus Fabius Aquila, and thus to secure him power and wealth. The plot thickens when a friend of her dead brother Tiberius arrives and inveigles himself into the family. Lucius Cassius Calidus charms Gaius Claudius Maximus who considers adopting him and then agrees to marry Aurelia, the widowed daughter of Prisca. But Lucius does not confine his charm to his betrothed but also makes Claudia's heart flutter as does that of Sabine, Aurelia's younger sister. Meanwhile Marcus is summoned to Rome by his mother, Prisca, and is reluctantly considering marrying Claudia. Tragedy strikes, though, when Aurelia mysteriously falls ill, and this precipitates some exciting twists and turns in an already exciting plot. Underlying all this action,



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though, is the issue of living a life 'which matters' and pursuing your own individual path in life. The novel is also concerned with the underlying tensions in Roman society and government, and how it was supported by slavery. The morality of buying and selling human lives is argued by Marcus and Claudia finds that for the first time in her life, she is able to consider the plight of others. What is a free and just society? What are the ideals by which our lives should be governed? How should she choose a partner in life and for what reasons? These questions and more are canvassed in an exciting story of deception, drama and love.

About the Author

Frances Watts was born in Lausanne, Switzerland, and moved to Sydney when she was three. After graduating from uni with a PhD she became an editor of children's books, she spent nearly ten years working with some of Australia's most talented children's authors and illustrators before writing a book of her own *Kisses for Daddy* illustrated by David Legge. Their second collaboration *Parsley Rabbit's Book about Books* won the CBCA Eve Pownall Award. *Goodnight, Mice!* with Judy Watson won the the 2012 Primer Minister's Literary Award for Children's Fiction.

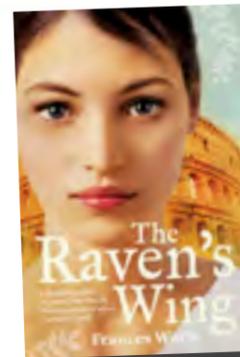
For more information see her website www.franceswatts.com/

Author Inspiration

Frances writes:

'For me, Roman history has always represented the path not taken. At university, my favourite subjects were literature and history, and for the first couple of years I studied both. But when it came time to choose a major, I decided on literature. I've never regretted that choice for an instant, but in the back of my mind I've hoped that maybe I'd have the chance to continue my study of Roman history one day. And so I have — though not at all in the way I imagined...

I've always been interested in extending myself as a writer, and I've always seen historical fiction as a particular challenge. To begin with, there's the research required. Before Claudia could so much as walk down the street I needed to know what she would be wearing, what the architecture looked like, what she would be likely to see — and, importantly, what imagery she might use to describe her thoughts and feelings. And as well as being an accurate reflection of Roman life and times, I wanted to make the story feel contemporary. *The Raven's Wing* might be set more than two thousand years ago, but at the time Claudia would have been a modern young woman, and I hope today's readers will relate to her in this way.'



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Notes on Themes and Curriculum Topics

The following activities and discussion points relate to the **themes, writing style** and to other curriculum areas such as **Interpretation** and **Reading Comprehension, Visual Literacy** and **Creative Arts**.

Ancient Roman Government, Politics and Society

Activity: Augustus (Latin: *Imperator Caesar Divi F. Augustus*) (23 September 63 BC – 19 August 14 AD) was the founder of the Roman Empire and its first Emperor, ruling from 27 BC until his death in 14 AD. Born **Gaius Octavius** into an old and wealthy equestrian branch of the plebeian Octavii family, in 44 BC he was adopted posthumously by his maternal great-uncle Julius Caesar following Caesar's assassination. 'Augustus' *Wikipedia*

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustus>

Activity: Discuss the concept of the Roman Republic and the ideals on which it was founded.

Activity: Draw a timeline of this story, based on both the novel and on actual historical events

Activity: Read other historical fiction about Ancient Rome. Find lists of titles such as the following:

Ancient Rome

www.historicalnovels.info/Ancient-YA.html#YARom

Novels set in Ancient Rome

www.rebecca-east.com/books.html

Ancient Roman Customs and Culture

Activity: Research the culture and customs of Ancient Rome. Begin by reading this Wikipedia entry:

Culture of Ancient Rome

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_of_ancient_Rome

Research this further at sites such as:

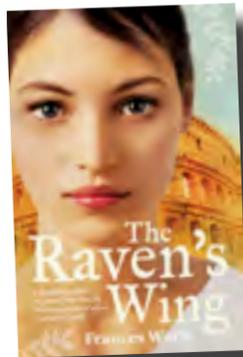
Ancient Roman Cuisine:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Roman_cuisine

Roman Food

http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/roman_food.htm

Discussion Point: The fashions of the time were very stylised and regimented by custom. (eg Unmarried girls could only wear white.) Research Roman fashion and find out the names of the various garments worn by both women and men.



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Discussion Point:

'The banquet went on and on. There were more dishes than I could count and they were more luxurious than I had ever seen in Arretium: oysters were followed by baked dormice, stuffed with a mix of pork mince, pepper and pine nuts; boiled ostrich preceded smoked breast of peacock.' (pp 145-6)

Is this menu typical of Ancient Roman feasts? Research this further.

Activity: Sabine's garden (p 37) contains many alternate remedies and medicines. Research the kinds of treatments used to cure ills in this time.

Activity: Decorative art and architecture were obviously very sophisticated in Roman times. Read some of the descriptions of Gaius's homes and then research the mosaics, art and furniture which are described.

Discussion Point: Claudia sings and plays a **cithara** as accompaniment to entertain her family. How important was music in ancient Rome? What other instruments were played?

Discussion Point: Marriage Law in ancient Rome was strictly observed and arranged by families. But women also played a subversively powerful role. (Both Prisca and her daughter

saw husbands as creatures to be managed, apparently.) (p 78) Discuss the role of women in Roman society.

Slavery

Activity: Many earlier societies were based economically on slave labour. Research the role which slaves played in Ancient Rome.

Discussion Point: Claudia has never before thought about the plight of her slave servants such as Anthusa and Aballa. What changes that for her?

Individuality

Discussion Point: Claudia has been a child in two homes but in the course of this novel she becomes a woman. What changes in her life to make her more mature?

Morality

Discussion Point:

'That was the kind of man he was: he risked himself to help others, especially those who weren't in a position to help themselves.' (p 250)

Claudia is ultimately drawn to Marcus because he is a man of principle, not just because he is handsome and intelligent.



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Discussion Point: Sabine and Lucius behave in a manner which is lacking in common morality. What hints are offered in the novel to explain their behaviour?

Discussion Point: What are the values encouraged in this novel?

Family Relationships

The novel hinges on Claudia's desire not simply for romantic love, but also for parental love. Although she has been nurtured by her aunt and uncle, her lack of a mother and her estrangement from her father have left her searching for a parent's love, and she is doubly wounded when Gaius shows no interest in her:

'It was like she was reminding him of who I was and what I was doing there, I thought, irritated.' (p 42)

and

'It made no sense. Why would he summon me back to Rome so urgently, and yet show hardly any interest in me? What was I doing here?' (p 45)

Discuss.

Discussion Point: Prisca has manipulated her daughters and been incensed by her son's resistance to her demands, but ultimately she

learns that love is a partnership, not a battle of wills. Discuss.

Discussion Point: Gaius has lost his son Tiberius and is desperate for another heir. But his stepson Marcus is too idealistic for his taste and they argue constantly. Lucius (who says he was a friend of Tiberius) seems far more pliable.

'It's a bit too late for that; Gaius only has eyes for Lucius. Anyway, was Marcus ever in his affections?' Aurelia's tone was light. I hadn't noticed. It seems to me they're always at odds.' (p 75)

Discuss Gaius's expectations of a son and how that provides motivation for his often insensitive actions.

Love

Discussion Point: Claudia had been happy to marry Rufus because he was a childhood friend but had not really ever expected to find love. In this society romantic 'love' was a word which had little currency. Discuss.

Discussion Point: Claudia's romance with Marcus is somewhat similar to that of Mr Darcy and Elizabeth Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice*, although set in an entirely different era and society. How is Marcus like Mr Darcy? How is he different?

The following quotations relate to themes in the novel. Choose one and discuss its significance in the work.

Class	'Before I could explain I heard Prisca respond, 'I told you not to expect much in the way of refinement; she was brought up in the provinces, remember.' (pp 34-5)
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Secrets	'It surprised me how pleased she seemed by compliments paid to me. If anything, I had expected she would be jealous of the position of her own daughters. Of course, she would want me to be a credit to her husband, I reasoned.' (p 64)
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Threats	'Yet next to me, I heard Aurelia whisper to herself, "This means trouble." (p 71)
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Roman Politics	'That's Rome for you: we eat, sleep and breathe politics here. What did you talk about in Arretium?' (p 82)
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Marriage Law	'It's called the Lex de maritandis ordinibus' she explained, 'a law to regulate marriage. Caesar Augustus is concerned that not enough of the finest families are marrying and starting families. For the sake of Rome, it's important that the nobility breed.' She licked the honey from her fingers. 'That's not the only new law Augustus is bringing in. There's also the sumptuary law, Lex sumptuaria, which is meant to curb people's spending. Augustus thinks we've all grown too extravagant, especially the women.' (pp 82-3)
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Marriage Law	'But that would make no difference to either of them, I realised. My character, good or bad, was of no importance. Nor were my feelings. Marcus would marry me because he had finally accepted that it would be to his advantage.' (p 187)
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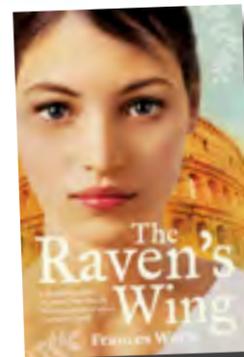
Slavery	'I hope that if I were taken slave, I'd be treated with kindness.' "You might hope in vain," said Marcus, "for there's no law to govern how we use our slaves." (p 114-5) 'Perhaps as many as a third of Rome's residents are slaves. What would happen if they were to revolt? And if they did, what would we have for a labour force? The very future of the Roman Empire might rest on how we deal with our slaves.' (p 117)
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Roman Law	'It occurred to me that this was at the bottom of all the disputes between my father and Marcus: Rome. Father thought that Rome was perfect, that the job of Caesar and his Senate was to preserve her in her perfection. Marcus, on the other hand, was always arguing for change. They both wanted the best for Rome, but whose way was right? It seemed to me that they both were. I felt sorry for Prisca suddenly, being caught between them.' (p 116)
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Power	"If you want progress, you need the power to change the status quo," I countered. "And if your goals are worthy, surely it's better to achieve them than not, whatever means you use. Why are you so proud?" (p 123)
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Love	'I returned his smile, but inside I felt something like fear. I do not know who you are, I realised. I don't really know your character, and you don't know mine. So how can we truly love each other if we don't truly know each other? And if we have made a mistake, it will be a mistake that will last the rest of our lives ...'(p 223)
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A Meaningful Life	'What did it matter now? 'Kindness,' I said. 'Isn't that enough? You told me once that I should decide what kind of life I wanted. Well, I want someone to care for me, to notice if I'm happy or sad, to take pleasure in my company.' Marcus rubbed at the corners of his eyes with his fingertips as if weary. 'You're right: I encouraged you to consider what you wanted — but I was talking about a life that mattered. I'd hoped that you would want to do good, to be of use. Instead you'll just be helping Lucius to become rich.' (p 227)
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Curriculum Topics

Language and Literacy

Narrative Person and Point of View

Discussion Point: This novel is told through Claudia's eyes. Imagine if Marcus or Prisca had told the story? How would that have changed it?

Historical Fiction

Discussion Point: This novel is set in the time of Augustus Caesar (23 September 63 BC – 19 August 14 AD) and yet the characters are all invented and the language is often familiarly colloquial. How does Frances Watts make such historical events and times come alive in this fiction? What strategies does she employ to engage the reader?

Activity: Many words which are uncommonly used today, appear throughout this novel, and lend historical veracity to the text. [See Activity Sheet One Below.]

Literary Reference

Activity: Homer, Cicero, Plato, Aristotle, Ovid, Socrates, Theocritus and other literary writers are referred to and quoted in the novel. For example, Marcus reminds his stepfather that

agriculture was prized by the great Cicero:

'But wasn't it Cicero who said: *Of all the occupations by which gain is secured, none is better than agriculture, none more profitable, none more delightful, none more becoming to a free man?*' (p 108)

What role do such texts play in the advancement of theme or plot? Choose an example, and explain its significance.

Journey or Quest

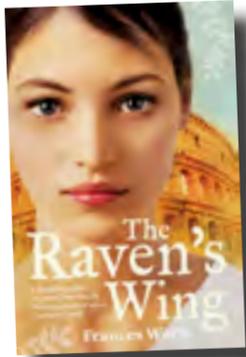
Activity: The Journey or Quest is a motif used in this novel and in many other narratives. Claudia's 'journey' is central to the thematic action in this novel. Use the table in **Activity Sheet Two** to identify the stages of Claudia's journey as outlined below. (You may add rows to allow you to include all the obstacles, foes, etc.)

Discussion Point: Marcus refers to Penelope in Homer's *The Odyssey*. What was he inferring when he read that passage?

Characterisation

Activity: Choose a **major character** and trace the various events which reveal their personality:

Claudia, the narrator
Prisca, her stepmother



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Gaius Claudius Maximus, her father
Aurelia, one of the three children of Prisca
Marcus Fabius Aquila, Prisca's son
Sabine, the younger sister
Lucius Cassius Calidus, friend of Tiberius

Activity: Choose a **minor character** and what you gleaned about their character via description or dialogue:

Rufus Crispus, Claudia's betrothed
Titus Crispus, father of Rufus and business partner of Marius
Theodotus, Marius's steward
Aunt Quinta
Uncle Marius
Anthusa, a servant in Quinta and Marius's house
Julia Domitia, friend of Quinta
Calpurnia
Titus Laenus
Flavia, his daughter
Marcus's overseer, Timon
Aballa, a servant at Marius's house
Anadalo, brother of Aballa

Discussion Point: Discuss the positive and negative aspects of Prisca's character. with reference to the following quotes:

'That's Mother for you,' she said. 'In most households as large as ours the stewards and overseers manage the accounts, but Mother believes that hard work is a virtue.'(p 89)

and

'She can be very strict but it's only because she wants the best for us.' (p 35)

She is in many ways the most interesting of the characters as is Snow White's stepmother in the classic tale.

[See Creative Arts Activities and Discussions below.]

Tropes of Fairy Tale

Discussion Point: This novel contains a number of tropes of fairy tale. eg Scheming stepmother (Prisca); unloved daughter (Claudia); trickster (Lucius). Identify any others.

Symbolism

Discussion Point: A raven is referred to in the title and in the novel. What does it signify?

Discussion Point: What other symbolic references did you discover?

Writing Exercise

Activity: Imagine an incident which might have occurred on Claudia's journey from Arretium to Rome. Write a story about it.

Author Study

Activity: Study Frances Watts' other works and discuss and compare her writing style.



Activity Sheet One

Research the meaning of words which appear in this text referring to customs of the time. (The context may give you a hint as to their meaning before you seek their definitions.)

Ornatix (p 1)	
Caldarium (p 5)	
Cithara (p 25)	
Peristyle (p 35)	
Amphora (p 95)	
Tablinum (p 129)	
Stola (p 147)	
Strigil (p 211)	
Mandrake (p 257)	
Carnelian (p 296)	

Activity Sheet Two

Research the meaning of words which appear in this text referring to customs of the time. (The context may give you a hint as to their meaning before you seek their definitions.)

Stages of Journey	
Catalyst for Journey	
Embark on Journey	
Meet Adviser(s)/Helper(s)	
Encounter Foe(s)	
Encounter Obstacle(s)	
Final Conflict	
Journey Home	
Resolution	

Interpretation And Reading Comprehension Activities And Discussion Points

Comprehension Quiz

1. What relationship has Tiberius to Claudia?
2. Who is Timon?
3. What is Sabine's great interest?
4. Who was Aurelia married to before his death?
5. Who was Claudia betrothed to as a child?
6. What did Aurelia die from?
7. Where was Andalus held as a slave?
8. Why was Lucius eager to obtain money?
9. What is the name of the seaside home to which Gaius Maximus and his family retreated after Aurelia's death?
10. Where did her captors take Claudia when they kidnapped her on the eve of her wedding to Lucius?

Answers: 1. Brother. 2. Marcus's overseer. 3. Her garden. 4. Decimus Paullus. 5. Rufus Crispus. 6. Hemlock poisoning. 7. The Peacock in the Suburan area of the city. 8. To pay his gambling debts. 9. Oplontis. 10. To Veii, Marcus Aquila's country estate.



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Visual Literacy And Illustration Activities And Discussion Points

Covers

Activity: Covers need to convey a lot about a book's contents. Design a new cover for this book. Write a blurb to go on the cover.

Comic Strip

Activity: Graphic novels and comics can offer new insights into classical texts. Create a one page comic strip (or graphic novel) version of any incident in this novel. Use varied formats in the design of each strip, speech balloons, think bubbles, captions and sound effect, to create effects. [See Chinn, Mike *Writing and Illustrating the Graphic Novel* London: New Burlington Books, 2006.]

Book Trailer

Activity: Create a book trailer for this novel. Use resources to prepare for this activity:

'Book Trailers' - Resources: Ipswich District Teacher Librarian Network' <http://learningplace.com.au/deliver/content.asp?pid=41987>

'Book Trailers' Insideadog <http://www.insideadog.com.au/teachers/book-trailers>

'Book Trailers for Readers' by Michelle Harclerode <http://www.booktrailersforreaders.com/How+to+make+a+book+trailer>

Creative Arts and Discussion Points

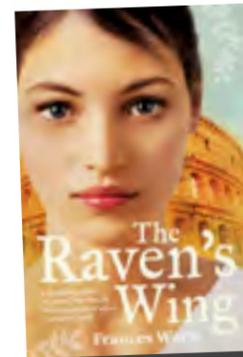
Activity: Create a Classroom Display with some of the stories, and covers you've created, inspired by *The Raven's Wing*.

Activity: Design an outfit for Claudia's wedding day.

Activity: Draw the home and gardens of Gaius Claudius Maximus using clues contained in this text.

Activity: Design a menu for Claudia and Marcus's wedding feast.

Activity: Paint a portrait of Prisca as if it was an official portrait of an esteemed member of the elite in Ancient Rome.



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Conclusion

This novel is a very approachable historical fiction which is based on sound research and knowledge of the times, and yet introduces younger readers to these facts in a very palatable way. It encourages readers to investigate the political and cultural history of ancient Rome and is also a lively novel of intrigue and romance. Claudia and Marcus are also a very engaging heroine and hero, and the novel promises to be very popular. 'Marcus bent his head till his forehead was touching mine. "It means we stay together forever." (p 296) Will the course of their future romance be untroubled? Or are there further challenges ahead?

Bibliography

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<http://www.unrv.com/culture/ancient-roman-clothing.php>

Ancient Roman Cuisine

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Roman_cuisine

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http://www.ducksters.com/history/ancient_rome_food_daily_life.php

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<http://www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/233472.html>

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<http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/index.html>

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http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/roman_food.htm

Slavery in Ancient Rome

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery_in_ancient_Rome

Teaching Resources

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Book Trailers - Resources: Ipswich District Teacher Librarian Network

<http://learningplace.com.au/deliver/content.asp?pid=41987>

'Book Trailers' Insideadog

<http://www.insideadog.com.au/teachers/book-trailers>

Book Trailers for Readers by Michelle Harclerode

<http://www.booktrailersforreaders.com/How+to+make+a+book+trailer>

Ancient Rome

<http://www.historicalnovels.info/Ancient-YA.html#YARom>

Novels set in Ancient Rome

<http://www.rebecca-east.com/books.html>

About the Author of the Notes

Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright operates Justified Text writing and publishing consultancy services, and has published widely on children's and YA literature. In 2011 she was the recipient of the CBCA (Qld Branch) Dame Annabelle Rankin Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Queensland, and in 2012 the CBCA (National) Nan Chauncy Award for Outstanding Services to Children's Literature in Australia.