II. Ancient Rome

The early phases of the struggle between the plebeians and the patricians and the political life of the early Roman Republic are memorably depicted in one of Shakespeare’s lesser-known plays, *Coriolanus*. Another classic work on the early Roman Republic that is more suitable for use in Grade 3 is T. B. Macaulay’s famous poem, “Horatius at the Bridge.” This poem tells the story of Horatius’s battle against the Etruscan army, which was on its way to attack Rome. The army’s attempt was defeated by the bravery of the legendary Horatius. For more on this legend, see the Language Arts section of this book on p. 77. Students may also enjoy the legendary story of Cincinnatus, a citizen who left his farm to protect Rome during a time of emergency and then returned to the plow when the crisis was over. Stories of Cincinnatus and Horatius are useful because they capture some of the values that were most important to the ancient Romans: bravery, patriotism, and willingness to risk one’s life for the Republic.

The Punic Wars

Under the Republic, Rome began to grow by conquering neighboring territories. By 340 BCE, Rome dominated central Italy. By 295 BCE, it dominated the entire peninsula. Gradually, Rome began to acquire territory elsewhere in the Mediterranean.

Rome’s major rival for power in the Mediterranean was the North African city of Carthage, founded by Phoenician traders. Phoenicia was an area in the eastern Mediterranean in what is today Lebanon. Between 264 BCE and 146 BCE, the Carthaginians and Romans fought three wars. They were called the Punic Wars after *Punicus*, the Roman word for Phoenician.

The First Punic War lasted more than 20 years, from 264 to 241 BCE. When the war began, the Carthaginians had a navy of several hundred ships, and Rome had no navy at all. The Romans realized they could not defeat Carthage or extend their influence into the Mediterranean without a formidable navy. They captured a Carthaginian ship and built a navy full of replicas. The Romans ultimately won the war, but not without losing 30,000 citizen-soldiers. One of the fruits of victory was control of the island of Sicily.

The Second Punic War (218–201 BCE) lasted for 17 years and is noteworthy for the exploits of Hannibal, a Carthaginian general. Hannibal was the son of a general who had fought in the First Punic War and remained bitter about Carthage’s defeat. According to one story, when Hannibal was still a boy, his father made him swear that he would fight against Rome until his dying day. Hannibal kept that promise. Rather than invade Italy by sea, Hannibal, who had already subdued most of the native peoples of southern Spain, decided to march from Spain to Italy. He marched across the mountains into Gaul (modern-day France) with a force of 40,000 soldiers, 8,000 horses, and 37 elephants trained for use in battle. A few months later, he led his army across the Alps—an astonishingly bold and dangerous maneuver. Hannibal lost almost half of his men and most of his attack elephants on the treacherous icy slopes of the Alps. Despite the losses, Hannibal moved south into the Italian peninsula. The Carthaginians defeated the Romans in a series of battles and after a victory at Cannae, seemed to be on the verge of taking Rome. In that battle, the Romans lost about 56,000 soldiers, while Hannibal lost only about 6,000. Somehow, Rome managed to survive these great defeats and rebuild its army. Rome even launched a bold counterattack,
sending an army to Africa to threaten Carthage. This army won several major victories and forced Hannibal to return to Africa. The Romans met Hannibal’s army south of Carthage, at Zama. This time the Romans won—although Hannibal himself escaped. The peace treaty that ended the Second Punic War allowed Carthage to keep its lands in Africa, but the Carthaginians were required to give up Spain and pay Rome a large amount of money. They were also forbidden to begin any war without Rome’s permission.

Carthage rebuilt itself after the Second Punic War, and for many years they abided by the terms of the treaty, not declaring any wars. Nevertheless, many Romans worried that Carthage was still a threat. They continued to think this even after Hannibal committed suicide rather than turn himself over to Roman authorities. For many years, a Roman senator named Cato concluded every speech he made in the Senate, no matter what the subject, with the Latin words *Carthago delenda est*, “Carthage must be destroyed.” When Carthage eventually did declare war on another country, the Romans sent an army to besiege Carthage. This was the beginning of the Third Punic War (149–146 BCE). The Romans surrounded Carthage and starved the city into surrendering. Then they burned the city. They killed many of the city’s inhabitants and sold others into slavery. According to legend, the Romans even poured large amounts of salt into the fields around the city, to ensure that Carthaginians could not grow any crops in the future. This decisive victory made Rome the strongest power in the Mediterranean.

C. The Empire
D. The “Decline and Fall” of Rome
E. The Eastern Roman Empire: Byzantine Civilization

**Background**

The Roman Republic lasted hundreds of years but eventually gave way to an empire ruled by emperors. The first emperor was Augustus Caesar, who ruled Rome from 27 BCE to 14 CE. The causes that led to the decline of the Republic, however, date back to the unrest caused by Rome’s campaigns of conquest. Once Carthage fell, Rome controlled—either by conquest or alliances—the Mediterranean region from Spain in the northwest, across Asia Minor and the Middle East, to Egypt in the south.

The resulting wealth brought many problems and much civil unrest to Rome. Citizen-farmers who had been the backbone of Roman society found themselves displaced from their farms because of debt. Wealthy patricians bought up their land and created huge estates worked by slave labor. (Many slaves had been taken during the Punic Wars.) Without land and jobs, the farmers drifted to the cities, where large numbers of unemployed already lived. When attempts were made to reform the society and government, corrupt office-holders, including senators accustomed to bribery, sought to protect their positions. In time, mob violence erupted—and then civil wars—brought about in part by ambitious men who wanted power for themselves.