

Name \_\_\_\_\_ **Textual Evidence**

An arch is a curved, symmetrical structure, usually spanning an opening, and made of stone, brick, or concrete. Most arches are composed of wedge shaped blocks, and a wood frame is used to support them during construction. When the top center stone, called the keystone, is inserted, the wooden scaffolding can be removed and the arch is supported because both sides of it apply equal pressure to the keystone. The arch in architecture is usually associated with the Romans, but in fact, the arch has been used in construction since prehistoric times by Egyptian, Babylonian and Greek cultures. It was of limited use, however, since it could not bear much weight, and so could only supporting small structures, and columns were often needed to support an arched roof. What Rome did for the arch was to figure out how it could support a lot of weight, and their innovation changed construction forever.

Essentially the real Roman innovation was the development of concrete. They mixed lime and volcanic sand to make a strong, durable material that dries into a solid and which is capable of supporting a great deal of weight. Making arches in the usual way with their new, super-strong material, the Romans were able to build massive structures like temples and aqueducts. Other cultures soon adopted the Roman methodology, and the arch can be seen in ancient buildings in both Eastern and Western Europe. In Arabia, architects used pointed, scalloped and horseshoe arches to build impressive mosques and palaces. The Romans, themselves, pushed the frontiers of possibility in construction by combining arches to create new kinds of ceilings called vaults and domes.

Today Rome's contribution to architecture can be seen all around us: cathedrals such as Chartres in France, the Taj Mahal in India, and the U.S. Capitol building in Washington, D.C. were all made possible by the Romans.

## The Impact of the Roman Arch



**Why is the arch usually associated with the Romans? Cite textual evidence to support your answer.**

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