The Roman Republic

Students learn about the history of the Roman Empire. Studying ancient Rome is important because much of the culture of Europe and the United States was greatly influenced by the culture of Ancient Rome. When the Roman Empire was at its highest point in history, the Roman Emperor was the ruler of the area surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. Rome was not always ruled by emperors; at first Rome was ruled by a king.

Kings usually belong to a Royal Family and the eldest son of the current king ascends to the throne and becomes the next king when his father dies. Even today, this is how the ceremonial King of England is selected. However, the kings of Ancient Rome were not necessarily members of a Royal Family. Early Rome had a council of elders who advised the king and selected a new king when needed. This council was called senes in Latin. This is where we get the term Senate and Senators to describe one part of our Congress.

Eventually the Etruscans migrated into Roman territory and peacefully became the dominant society in Rome. Etruscan kings ruled for many years until the last king, Tarquinius Superbus, Tarquin the Proud. Tarquin murdered the previous king, seized power without being selected by the council, and became a tyrannical ruler. The Romans finally drove him out of power.

Historians call the next time period in Ancient Rome the Roman Republic. Many people think that the term republic means the same thing as a democracy especially since the Pledge of Allegiance calls the United States a republic. A republic is a form of government where the citizens choose their leaders and some members of society have a say in how this leader rules. Two consuls were elected by the Senate to rule Rome for just one year.

Roman society was divided into two main classes: patricians and plebeians. Patricians were descendants of the heads of the richest and most powerful families of early Rome, a form of Roman nobility. Everyone else was a plebeian, except for slaves. The 300 Roman Senators had to be patricians. Plebeians finally revolted and were allowed to form a Plebeian Council which participated in government. Eventually a plebeian was selected to be a consul.