

## Augustus Lesson Plan

**Central Historical Question:**  
*What kind of leader was Augustus?*

### Materials:

- Copies of Augustus Documents A-F
- Copies of Augustus Graphic Organizer

### Plan of Instruction:

1. Introduce lesson: *Today we're going to examine the leader Augustus, who became the first emperor of the Roman Empire in 27 BCE and who died in 14 CE. His original name was Octavian, but he took the title "Augustus" when he became emperor. (You might remind students that Octavian conquered Egypt and was present at Cleopatra's death).*

Hand out Documents A and B (map and coins).

Ask students: *Based on just this evidence, what can we learn about the kind of leader Augustus was?*

Have students complete Graphic Organizer for Round One.

2. Discuss student answers.

Students will likely say that Augustus was popular because he expanded the Roman Empire. They might say that the coins provide evidence that he was popular because the presidents that we put on our coins are popular. You might open this point up for discussion: What if Augustus was the one who decided to print those coins (as he was), do they still serve as evidence of his popularity? Students could still argue that they do because they emphasize his territorial conquests and the subsequent wealth that the Roman Empire enjoyed.

3. Hand out Documents C and D and have students complete Graphic Organizer for Round Two.

4. Review student answers.

Students will likely write that Augustus was a powerful and effective leader who also had a touch of humility and compassion. However, they should note that neither source is reliable—the first is written by Augustus himself and the second by a soldier in his army. It is important to note that this

does not mean the claims are false. The documents do offer evidence of Augustus's power and effectiveness and students should say so in their first claim.

5. Hand out Documents E and F and have students complete Graphic Organizer for Round Three.
6. Review student answers.

Documents E and F offer contrasting portraits of Augustus's leadership. Document E suggests that he was power-hungry, manipulative, and politically shrewd. Document F suggests that he was humble and did not seek the spotlight, and saw himself as the equal of the Senators.

7. Use the contradiction between documents E and F to launch discussion about Augustus's character. In particular, focus on the following:
  - Are these contradictions irreconcilable, or is it possible that Augustus was all of these things?
  - What questions remain about Augustus's leadership?
  - What evidence might we find that could answer our questions?
  - Why is it so challenging to find reliable evidence about Augustus?

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Citations:

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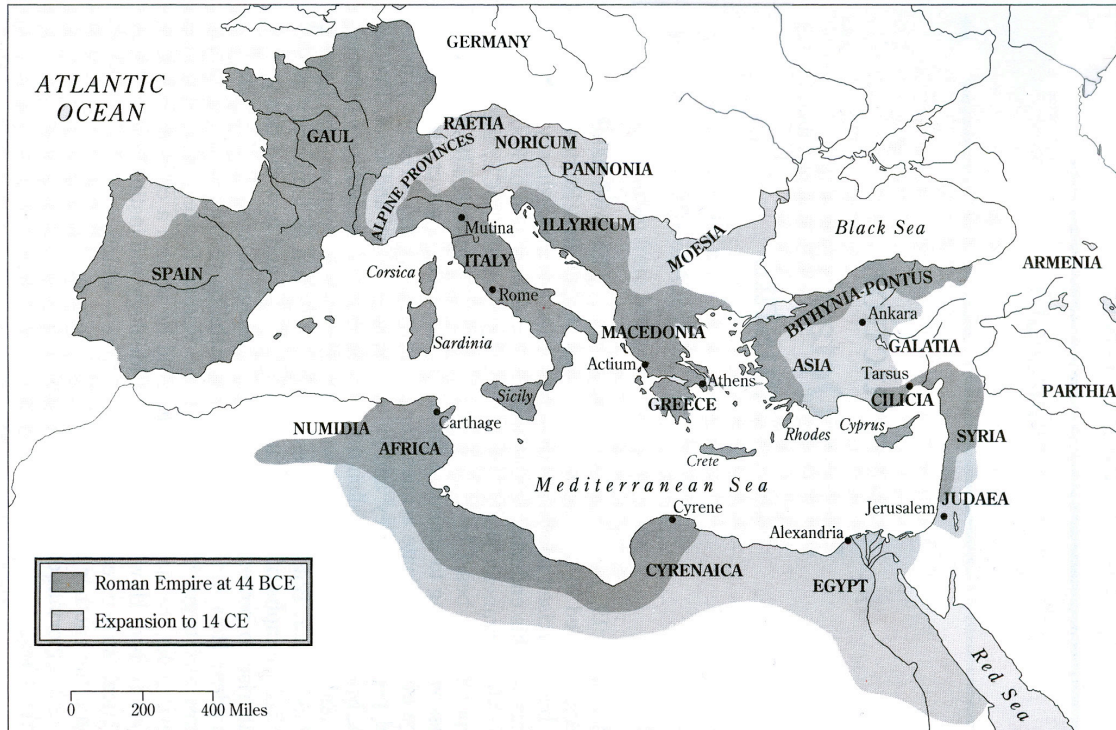
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## Document A: Map



*The Roman Empire in the Time of Augustus, 44 BCE–14 CE.*

## Document B: Coins

**Context:** The denarius was a silver coin used in the Roman Empire. On the front side of the coin is the head of Octavian and the inscribed word “CAESAR.” On the back is a Crocodile inscribed with “AEGVPTO CAPTA” which means “Egypt Captured.” This coin was used in celebration of Augustus’s victory in Egypt, specifically the Battle of Actium in 31 B.C.E.

**FRONT OF COIN**



**BACK OF COIN**



## Document C: Augustus (Modified)

*When Emperor Augustus felt ill and thought his life was coming to an end, he began writing down his accomplishments. This is a first person account of his life and accomplishments. Initially, it was carved into bronze and put in Augustus' mausoleum. Later copies were distributed throughout the empire. Here is an excerpt from the account.*

2. I drove the men who slaughtered my father into **exile**, punishing their crime. Afterwards, when they waged war, I conquered them in two battles.

3. I often waged war, on the earth and sea, in the whole wide world, and as the victor I spared all the citizens who sought **pardon**. As for the foreign nations I conquered, I preferred to preserve them than to destroy the nations.

5. When the **dictatorship** was offered to me, I did not accept it.

16. I paid the towns for the fields, which I had assigned to soldiers. I was first and alone who did this among all who founded colonies.

18. When the taxes fell short, I gave out contributions of grain and money from my own supply, sometimes to 100,000 men, sometimes to many more.

25. I restored peace to the sea from pirates.

26. I extended the borders of all the provinces of the Roman people. I restored peace to the provinces of Gaul and Spain and Germany. I brought peace to the Alps.

27. I added Egypt to the rule of the Roman people.

31. Emissaries from the Indian kings were often sent to me, which had not been seen before that time by any Roman leader.

### **Vocabulary**

dictatorship: the rule of one person who holds all the power

exile: being sent away from one's native country, typically for political punishment

pardon: forgiveness

## Document D: Soldier (Modified)

*The passage below was written by Velleius, who served as a soldier while Augustus was emperor.*

There is nothing a man can desire from the gods, nothing that the gods can grant to a man, which Augustus did not bestow upon the Republic, the Roman people, and the world. The civil wars were ended after twenty years, foreign wars were suppressed, peace **restored**; **validity** was restored to the laws, authority to the courts, and dignity to the Senate. The old traditional form of Republic was restored. Agriculture was returned to the fields, respect to religion, to mankind freedom from anxiety, and to each citizen his property rights were now assured; old laws were usefully **amended**, and new laws passed for the general good.

Augustus was forced to hold the office of consul eleven times in a row, despite his frequent efforts to refuse. But he stubbornly refused the dictatorship, which the people persistently offered him. To tell of the wars waged under his command, of the peace of the world by his victories, of his many works at home and outside of Italy would weary a writer who had his whole life to devote to the task.

### **Vocabulary**

restored: to bring back

validity: legally acceptable

amended: changed or revised

## Document E: Cassius Dio (Modified)

*This excerpt was written by the historian Cassius Dio, who was born 150 years after Octavian died.*

Octavian wanted to be thought of as democratic. He gave the Senate control of the weaker **provinces**, on the ground that they were peaceful and free from war, while he **retained** control of the more powerful provinces (like Egypt), claiming that they were insecure and might begin a serious revolt. He said that he wanted the Senate to enjoy the finest portion of the empire, while he himself had the hardships and the dangers; but his real purpose was that by this arrangement the senators would be unarmed and unprepared for battle, while he alone had arms and maintained soldiers.

Octavian was **destined** to have absolute control of all matters for all time. When his ten-year period came to an end, he was voted for another five years, then five more, after that ten, and again another ten, and then ten for the fifth time, so that by a series of ten-year periods he continued to be sole ruler for life.

The name Augustus was given to him by the senate and by the people. They wished to call him by some distinctive title, and men were proposing one title and another. Octavian took the title of "Augustus," signifying that he was more than human; for all the most precious and sacred objects are termed "augusta."

In this way the power of both people and senate passed entirely into the hands of Octavian, and he became, strictly speaking, a monarch; for monarchy would be the truest name for it. Romans, to be sure, so hated the idea of monarchy that they called their emperors neither dictators nor kings nor anything of the sort.

### **Vocabulary**

province: a region of a country or empire

retain: to keep or maintain

destined: certain to happen

## Document F: Seutonius (Modified)

*The excerpt below was written by the historian Seutonius, who wrote almost 100 years after Octavian died.*

Octavian always shrank from the title of “Lord.” When the words “O just and gracious Lord!” were spoken in a play at which he was a spectator and all the people sprang to their feet and applauded as if the words had been directed at him, he immediately stopped them with a look, and on the following day insisted that the line be removed from the play. After that he would not allow himself to be called “**Sire**” even by his children or his grandchildren either as a joke or seriously, and he forbade them to use such flattering terms even among themselves.

If he could help it, he did not leave or enter any city or town except in the evening or at night, to avoid disturbing anyone by the **obligations** of ceremony. He commonly went through the streets on foot. His morning receptions were open to all, including commoners, and he met the requests of those who approached him with great friendliness.

When meeting with the Senate he always greeted the members in the House and in their seats, calling each man by name; and when he left the House, he used to take leave of them in the same manner, while they remained seated. When Gallus Cerrinius, a senator with whom he was not at all intimate, had suddenly become blind and had therefore decided to commit suicide, Augustus called on him and by his **consoling** words convinced him to live.

### **Vocabulary**

sire: someone of high status

obligation: something that has to be done

console: to comfort someone

**What kind of leader was Augustus?**

**Round 1**

<i>Document</i>	<i>Based on these documents, what kind of leader was Augustus?</i>	<i>Evidence from documents to support these reasons</i>
<b>A &amp; B: Map and Coins</b>		

**Round 2**

<i>Document</i>	<i>Based on this document, what kind of leader was Augustus?</i>	<i>Evidence from document to support these reasons</i>	<i>Is this document reliable? Why or why not?</i>
<b>C: Augustus</b>			
<b>D: Soldier</b>			

**Claim: What kind of leader was Augustus?**



### What kind of leader was Augustus?

#### Round 3

<i>Document</i>	<i>Based on this document, what kind of leader was Augustus?</i>	<i>Evidence from document to support these reasons</i>	<i>Is this document reliable? Why or why not?</i>
<i>E: Cassius Dio</i>			
<i>F: Seutonius</i>			

#### Final Claim: What kind of leader was Augustus?