

A Celebration of Riches – Ancient Coin Museum



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On the sunny spring weekend of April 22 – 24th, Zee Poerio, Latin teacher at St. Louise de Marillac School and Vice-Chair of the Excellence Through Classics, wove a celebration of three noble causes amidst an enthusiastic audience of 400 elementary students, their teachers and parents. In honor of 2005's designation as the "Year of Languages" and the cause of National Latin Teacher Recruitment Week, Mrs. Poerio chose to highlight the American Numismatic Association's "National Coin Week" with an exhibit of her school's Ancient Coin Museum.

Mrs. Poerio developed the Ancient Coin Museum under the guidance of the non-profit organization "Ancient Coins for Education" (ACE) which contributes coins to schools for their study and has coordinated coin donations for school museums.

Mrs. Poerio's exhibit is a model teaching display, rich in context materials that engage audiences of all ages. Thanks to a grant from ETC, I was able to travel from Lexington, Kentucky where I teach high school Latin at Lexington Catholic High School to share in this occasion and to delight in the enthusiasm of younger students for the ancient world.

On opening day, all 400 elementary students listened in small groups to our presentations. To help students understand the origin of Latin *pecunia* "money" as *pecus* "beast," and to set the context for the ancient coin exhibit, I shared my collection of "traditional" money, items from around the world that have been used for barter before or alongside the development of coins and currency.

Each student received a cowry shell to

take home, and student volunteers had the opportunity to model a pigs' teeth necklace and glass beads, display inscribed banana leaves and an African kissi penny, a form of money considered to have a soul. Scott Uhrick, a Director of ACE and ancient coin numismatist, traveled from Connecticut as a co-presenter, and followed with a literal "hands-on" exhibit of ancient artifacts, allowing students to carry around items such as clay tablets, oil lamps, and a glass vase as their eager classmates listened to his fascinating narration.

All students then took a tour of the museum to whet their appetites for returning on Friday evening with their parents when they would also be able to listen to the dialogue of Greek goddesses (aka Mrs. Poerio's Latin students!) a flute player, and a singer. Mr. Russ Bobkoski, a collector of coins from Roman Egypt, joined the exhibit.

The hands-on displays of artifacts, traditional money, coin displays, and reproduction ancient helmets along with the opportunity to ask questions engaged the elementary students and their parents. Mrs. Poerio added great excitement to the evening with coin-related prizes, raffles, and a souvenir shop, and helpful parents refreshed everyone with cake and punch.

On Saturday morning teachers gathered from St. Louise de Marillac and a total of five states for a workshop on using ancient coins in their classrooms.

Mrs. Poerio inspired teachers by showing projects created by her students. Mr. Uhrick illustrated how coins, as ancient primary sources that students can experience outside a formal museum setting, are powerful teaching tools for topics in social studies or Latin classrooms.

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I shared images illustrating the evolution of ancient coinage and the minting processes.

Teachers had the opportunity to handle coins and look closely at their Latin inscriptions and images documenting cultural and religious traditions of Roman society and events of Roman history. Teachers received lesson plans and went home with sacks full of classroom resources, posters, coin publications, ancient beads from Mr. Uhrick, 4th century Roman coins from ACE, and an Roman archaeological simulation kit which I had assembled with tile, brick and marble fragments, scarab seals, beads, bones and seeds.

On Saturday evening there was a "Show Me the Money" session for visitors to the museum to share their own numismatic stories and coin treasures from home, a sure sign of

how well students and the community related to the Ancient Coin Museum experience. I was thrilled to be a part of this well-organized, multi-dimensional event. It was a marvelous example of how educational organizations, the business community, teachers, and parents, can work together to create enriching and authentic learning opportunities for students which in turn benefit all aspects of our society.

Any teachers who would like to find out more information about the coin project sponsored by ACE should consult www.bitsofhistory.com/ace.

Teachers who are interested in participating in a scholarship-funded seminar "Coins in the Classroom" sponsored by the American Numismatic Association" in December and July should check out <http://www.money.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=TeacherTool>



Teachers gain hands-on experience with coins