

A "CHARMING" PROJECT USING ANCIENT COINS: MAKE A BULLA

Part 1

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WHAT IS A BULLA?

A BULLA is a type of necklace with pouch that was worn by ancient Roman children as a type of protection from evil spirits. The pouch was made of gold, leather, or cloth depending on how wealthy the family was. The inside of a bulla contained amulets or charms. The bulla was presented to a child at birth. A Roman boy would wear the bulla until he became a man and a Roman girl wore the bulla until she got married.

COINS CAN BE CHARMING

Did you ever hear of a lucky penny? Do you think ancient Romans had lucky coins? My class was lucky enough to get both a few worn Category B Late Roman coins and a helping of Roman coin "Culls" through the generosity of Ancient Coins for Education, for whom they were too worn to use for student identification and history classes. Since Roman children usually had charms of some type in their bullas, I decided that 1600-1700 year old Roman coins, no matter how worn, could be given new life and would serve as the perfect charms for inside of a bulla! In the true spirit of ACE, students were able to put "ancient history in their hands" AND then carry it around with them - inside of their very own Roman bulla!

See the following page and Parts 2, 3 & 4 for ideas on how to make a bulla with coins.

WHAT DOES A BULLA LOOK LIKE?

Below (left) is a picture of a statue of Nero as a child wearing a bulla around his neck. This statue is in the Louvre Museum in Paris, France and is from 48-50 CE. This image is courtesy of the VROMA Project and can be located at http://www.vroma.org/images/mcmanus_images/nerochild.jpg



Above (right) is an image of a replica of a gold bulla.

This image is also courtesy of the VROMA Project and can be found at:

http://www.vroma.org/images/mcmanus_images/bulla_replica.jpg

Part 2

BULLA WEBSITES

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1. This BBC Site has a worksheet and a template for a bulla.
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/romans/activities/bulla.html>
2. This site has an image of authentic bulla. Includes a brief description, instructions, and a grading sheet.
<http://www.dl.ket.org/latin1/things/projects/bulla/>
3. This site shows images of student created bullas and gives instructions.
http://library.thinkquest.org/CR0210200/ancient_rome/bulla.htm

MAKING A BULLA

I told my students to be creative. I gave the students the list of websites above and told them they could chose to make their bullas from fabric, plastic, or metal. I gave them each the following:

24" piece of CORD (I used pieces of Black leather string - one per student which I purchased at a local craft store. I spend about \$5.00 and had enough for 20 students. You could substitute yarn, twine, or any type of string, even a shoe lace will work.)

FOUR (4) COINS - I asked the students to pick three (3) coins from a pile of "Culls" for inside their bullas to act as the "charms." I told students to look through the pile of coin culls carefully and to pick out three (3) coins that were "calling out to them." I also gave each child one (1) nicer looking but worn Category B Late Roman coin to place outside the bulla for decoration. I did suggest that they attach the outside coin by placing the coin on the front of the bulla. This could be done by placing a circular piece of transparent fabric or tulle cut larger than the coin itself on top of the coin and then use a blanket stitch to enclose the coin to secure it in place. I also suggested that the students try wrapping the coin in wire and hanging it from the pouch. (I would be pleased to help any teacher by explaining this further.) I told them they would have to ask their parents for help with this part or they could bring it to school and I would help them. The ACE coins gave the bullas an authentic quality and really brought the past into the present for the students.

The students were required to research bullas using the websites and then make their own bullas. They were given 2 weeks to complete the assignment. The following are photos of students selecting their coins and their finished projects.



Part 3 TOP: Students choose coins for charms inside their bullas.

BOTTOM: FIVE BULLAS (left to right)

- 1. Made with two plastic bottle caps glued together and spray painted gold.**
- 2. Made of two pieces of cotton fabric cut in 3" circles and sewn together with coin glued to front.**
- 3. Red suede, rectangular pouch, sewn on three sides and tied with a string across the top with coin wired and hung from the front.**
- 4. Large circular piece of flannel with slits cut approximately 2" apart. String was drawn through the slits to bring the pouch together - no sewing involved.**
- 5. Brown suede rectangular pouch with coin glued to front.**

The ties were embellished with gold beads. (Photos by Zee Ann Poerio)



Part 4 - Details from brown suede bulla with gold beads and red suede bulla with wired coin. Also pictured is a blue felt bulla at the base of the column. This felt bulla was cut from a circle and then gathered together and tied a half inch down from the edges. No sewing was required on the blue felt bulla. (Photos by Zee Ann Poerio)



