

Sending signals

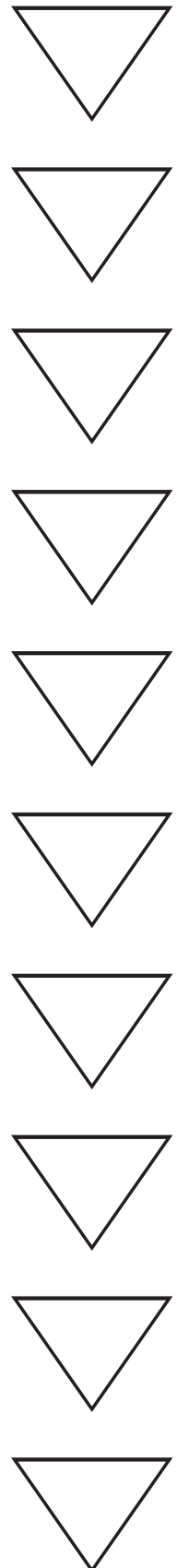
The Romans had a system of signalling using flags. The flags were arranged in two groups of five and different combinations of them were used to send each letter of the alphabet.

1. Cut out the flags on the right of this worksheet, colour them red and stick them on the end of ten straws.
2. Take a cereal box, lie it on its side and make five holes in a line then leave a gap and make another five holes in a line.
3. Use the table below to send messages with the flags.

	I	II	III	IV	V
I	A	B	C	D	E
II	F	G	H	I	K
III	L	M	N	O	P
IV	Q	R	S	T	V
V	X	Z			

You send a letter in the following way. For example, if you wanted to send the letter H you would do this:

- (a) Look along the top of the table until you find the column containing H. It is column III.
 - (b) Place three flags in the holes on your right.
 - (c) Look down the side of the table and find the line that H is on. It is on line II.
 - (d) Place two flags in the holes on your left.
 - (e) Turn the box round so that the flags face the person you are sending the message to in just the same way as when you set them up. That is three flags on their right and two flags on their left.
 - (f) Give the person a copy of the table and tell them how to find the letter.
4. Once you and your friend understand how to send and receive letters, send a message and let your friend decode it.



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Age range

- Years 3/4 (SP4/5).
- Years 5/6 (SP6/7).

Resources

Ten drinking straws, scissors, sticky paper, a cereal box, red pencil or crayon.

Using the worksheet

This activity shows one of the ways that Romans sent messages along the walls they defended. The flags were actually on poles. The poles were arranged on two trestles. They were attached to the trestle as if they were a see saw and the end with the flag on could be swung up or lowered as required. The flags were displayed so they could be read by someone facing them looking to the flags in the right to find the column number and the flags to the left to find the line number. As the people sending the message were behind the flags they actually put the flags to their left for the column number and the flags to their right for the line number. To reduce this complication in the model, the sender is instructed to set up the message as the receiver will see it then turn it round.

Younger students

The students may need help in reading the table and setting up the flags. When they turn them to the receiver of the message the receiver may say that he or she cannot see the flags. This will help the students realise that the flags need to be displayed side on to the receiver of the message.

Outcomes

The students can:

- Make a simple model following instructions.
- Understand a simple code.
- Send and receive a coded message

Older students

When the students have mastered the code and technique of sending and receiving it, they could send a message using the Latin words in activity 3B. A pair could also set up two flag systems and send messages to each other. Perhaps three or four could work together to send a message a long distance – from the hall, round a corner to the classroom.

Outcomes

The students can:

- Understand and use a simple code.
- Communicate using the flag system.
- Relay a message over a long distance using the flag system.