

## Museums Worcestershire Make-athon Challenges

### Romans: Mosaics

Learn more about the history of roman mosaics and create your own.



One of the best Roman mosaics in the Museums Worcestershire collection comes from a home near Droitwich. Bays Meadow Villa (150 AD) was a splendid palace and farm, probably belonging to a Roman official who managed the nearby salt works production. He must have been important enough to live in style and to afford wonderful decoration in his home. At the site of Bays Meadow Villa, archaeologists have discovered mosaic floors, a mosaic workers hut and a mortar mixing pit!

#### Discover 5 facts:

1. The mosaics of Roman times were often bought 'off the shelf' with standard designs available. In the larger towns (e.g. Cirencester, St. Albans and Colchester) there were shops and show rooms with mosaic pattern books with images from history, Emperors, or gods. Only the very wealthy could afford a personalised design.
2. The mosaic was usually in the main room of the house where it would be admired by all visitors and guests. It was the show piece of the home!
3. Once the design had been agreed, an artist made a full-scale colour drawing of the mosaic. The drawing was passed on to a craftsman who would start to produce the individual pieces (tesserae) that would make up the mosaic. He would shape or 'nip' broken pottery and stone and build up a store of pieces ready to be used in the pattern.
4. Sometimes panels of completed mosaic were delivered to the house. If the pattern was more complicated the craftsman and his apprentices

would lay each piece by hand. A mosaic that covered an area of 4.6m x 2.8m contained about 120,000 tesserae – no time for a tea break!

5. Before laying the mosaic, a base of rubble was put down covered by a layer of cement (mortar) – remember the mortar mixing pit! Before this hardened the mosaic pattern would be drawn out on the surface. Finally, a mixture of limestone and water was spread over the cement, and the tesserae pieces laid. The limestone and water acted as the grout (glue) to fix the tesserae.

### Explore:

In Britain, we have many surviving Roman mosaics. Some are displayed in museums and others are still where they were first laid – in Roman villas and palaces. One of our favourites is Fishbourne Palace mosaic here [www.sussexpast.co.uk](http://www.sussexpast.co.uk)

**Create:** ✂ a marvellous COLLAGE mosaic! ✍

You will need: Paper/card, Pencil, Glue, Scissors, Scrap coloured paper/foil/fabric, Dried pasta shapes or lentils (optional), Buttons (optional)

1. Draw the outline of a shape or pattern on your card.
2. Cut scrap card & material into small pieces and place in different colour groups (look at how the Roman mosaic artist used contrasting colours in the Bays Meadow mosaic).
3. Arrange card and material pieces on your shape & outline pattern – glue to fix. Leave a few blank areas to add pasta shapes, buttons and lentils – these will add interesting texture and tone to your art!



To find more exciting make-athon ideas visit [www.museumsworcestershire.org.uk/collections/activities/](http://www.museumsworcestershire.org.uk/collections/activities/)