Aim: How did the Byzantine Empire preserve the heritage of Greece and Rome?
“The Byzantine state was the instrument by... which... Graeco-Roman antiquity survived through the ages, and ...Byzantium was the donor, the West the Recipient. This was particularly true at the same time of the renaissance, when there was such passionate interest in classical civilization and the West found that it could satisfy its longings to explore the treasures of antiquity from Byzantine sources. Byzantium...had saved from destruction, Roman law, Greek literature, philosophy and learning, so that this... heritage could be passed on to the people of western Europe who were now ready to receive it.” — George Ostrogorsky

What is the legacy of Byzantine heritage on the world?
I. Byzantine Empire

a. The Byzantine Empire, once part of the greater **Roman** empire, continued flourishing from an eastern **Mediterranean** base after Roman decline.
Byzantine Empire

When the Roman Empire divided under the Emperor Diocletian in the late 200’s, the eastern half of the empire became known as the Byzantine Empire, as its new capital was built on the site of the old Greek city Byzantium. When the western half was overrun in the late 5th century CE, the Byzantine Empire became supreme. Emperor Constantine gave the city of Byzantium the name Constantinople, and this city would become the vital center of the empire.

Directions:

Circle the following:
- Constantinople
- Black Sea
- Mediterranean Sea
- Rome
- Athens

1. Why do you think Constantinople became the vital center of the Byzantine Empire?

The Roman emperors and empresses lived in glittering splendor. They dressed in luxurious silk and attended chariot races. The emperor also had power over the Church. As a Byzantine official once noted:

“The emperor is equal to all men in the nature of his body, but in the authority of his rank, he is similar to God who rules all”

2. What does this quote tell you about the power of the emperor?
II. THE ORIGINS OF THE EMPIRE.
a. Emperor Constantine in the 4th century C.E. established a capital at Constantinople. Greek from the 6th century became the official language. The empire benefited from the high level of civilization in the former Hellenistic world and from the region's prosperous commerce. It held off barbarian invaders and developed a trained civilian bureaucracy.
What do you think are the qualities of a great leader?
Why are some leaders remembered today while others are forgotten?
a. Justinian (537-565) rebuilt Constantinople in classical style; among the architectural achievements was the huge church of *Hagia Sophia*.

b. His **codification of Roman law** reduced legal confusion in the empire.

c. The **code** later spread Roman legal concepts throughout Europe.
Hagia Sophia – Justinian left a more lasting monument in the building. To restore Roman glory, he launched a program to beautify Constantinople. His great triumph was the church of Hagia Sophia, or “Holy Wisdom”. Its immense, arching dome improved on earlier Roman buildings. The interior glowed with colored marble and embroidered silk curtains. Seeing this church, the emperor recalled King Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem. “Glory to God who has judged me worthy of accomplishing such a world as this!” Justinian exclaimed. “O Solomon, I have surpassed you!”

Completed in less then six years, Justinian’s Church of Hagia Sophia stood as the largest religious building of its day. A huge dome dominated the church. Four minarets, or narrow towers, were added later. After the empire’s fall in 1453, the Hagia Sophia served as a mosque and, in recent years, as a museum.
“A spherical-shaped dome standing upon this circle makes it exceedingly beautiful; from the lightness of the building, it does not appear to rest upon a solid foundation, but to cover the place beneath as though it were suspended from heaven by the fabled golden chain. All these parts surprisingly joined to one another in the air, suspended one from another, and resting only on that which is next to them, form the work into one admirably harmonious whole, which spectators do not dwell upon for long in the mass, as each individual part attracts the eye to itself. No one ever became weary of this spectacle, but those who are in the church delight in what they see, and, when they leave, magnify it in their talk. Moreover it is impossible accurately to describe the gold, and silver, and gems, presented by the Emperor Justinian, but by the description of one part, I leave the rest to be inferred. That part of the church which is especially sacred, and where the priests alone are allowed to enter, which is called the Sanctuary, contains forty thousand pounds' weight of silver.”

What are the distinctive characteristics of the Hagia Sophia?
What impact does the church have on a visitor?
How are the laws of Justinian comparative to American Laws?

**Justinian Code v. Present Laws**

“Things which are common to all and not capable of being owned are:
the air, running water, the sea, and the seashores.”
- Justinian Code

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laws about</th>
<th>Justinian Code</th>
<th>American Laws</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Rights</td>
<td>All women can own property, make contracts and will, and bring a lawsuit.</td>
<td>All women can own property, make contracts and wills, bring a lawsuit. Women are guaranteed the same right as men.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>Robbery was not a crime. The victim could sue the robber for up to four times the values of the stolen property.</td>
<td>Robbery is a crime and is punishable by a fine and/or a prison sentence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to pay debts</td>
<td>People owed something had to the person owing them to gain debt back.</td>
<td>People owed something had to the person owing them to gain debt back.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murder</td>
<td>Murder was punished by banishment</td>
<td>Murder is punished by a prison sentence or death.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inheritance</td>
<td>Women could not inherit property from their husbands unless it was provided in a will. Children received equal amounts of the father’s estate.</td>
<td>Standard law allows wives and children to divide an estate. Other directions can be provided for in a will.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
d. **ABSOLUTE POWER** – Justinian used the law to unite the empire under his control. He ruled as an **autocrat, or sole ruler with complete authority**. The emperor also had power over the Church. **He was deemed Christ’s co-ruler on Earth**. As a Byzantine official wrote, “The emperor is equal to all men in the nature of his body, but in the authority of his rank he is similar to God, who rules all.” He **combined both political power and spiritual authority**. His wife, **Theodora**, aided his control. A shrewd politician, she served as **adviser and co-ruler to Justinian and even pursued her own policies**.


Justinian was dissembling, crafty, hypocritical, secretive by temperament, two-faced; a clever fellow with a marvelous ability to conceal his real opinion, and able to shed tears, not from any joy or sorrow, but employing them artfully when required in accordance with the immediate need, lying all the time; not carelessly, however, but confirming his undertakings both with his signature and with the most fearsome oaths, even when dealing with his own subjects. . . Justinian showed himself approachable and affable to those with whom he came in contact; not a single person found himself denied access to the emperor, and even those who broke the rules by the way they stood or spoke in his presence never incurred his wrath. That, however, did not make him blush when confronting those whom he Intended to destroy. In fact, he never even gave a hint of anger or irritation to show how he felt towards those who had offended him; but with a friendly expression on his face and without raising an eyebrow, in a gentle voice he would order tens of thousands of quite innocent persons to be put to death, cities to be razed to the ground, and all their possessions to be confiscated for the Treasury.

To her bodily needs, Theodora devoted quite unnecessary attention, though never enough to satisfy herself. She was in a great hurry to get into her bath, and very unwilling to get out again. When she had finished her ablutions she would go now to breakfast, and after a light breakfast she would take a rest. But at lunch and supper, she indulged her taste for every kind of food and drink. Again and again she would sleep for hours on end, by day till nightfall and by night until sunrise. And though she had strayed thus into every path of self-indulgence for so great a part of the day, she thought fit to run the whole of the Roman Empire! If the emperor entrusted any business to a man without first seeking her approval, such a change of fortune would come upon that man’s affairs that very soon after he would be removed from his position with the utmost ignominy, and die a most shameful death.
In January 532 an event occurred in Constantinople that nearly brought Justinian down from his throne. Two opposing political factions, the Blues and Greens, went to the Hippodrome to make common cause against the government. Their traditional rivalry forgotten, both factions surged from the Hippodrome chanting Nika! (Win!). They forced their way into the palace of the City Prefect, killed the police and set free all the prisoners. They set fire to public buildings, including churches. They demanded the dismissal of the City Prefect and other officials.

Justinian appeared the next morning in the imperial box carrying the gospel and declared that he was to blame for what happened. Meanwhile behind closed doors Justinian and his associates were in earnest debate. A fast galley was waiting at the private harbor of the palace and the emperor was resolved to flee to Herakiaia in Thrace.

After Belisarius’ mission to capture one of the crowd’s leaders failed, Justinian ordered an immediate flight to the harbor. Then Theodora, who had sat silent as men argued this way and that, rose to her feet:

*Whether or not a woman should give an example of courage to men, is neither here nor there. At a moment of desperate danger one must do what one can. I think that flight, even if it brings us to safety, is not in our interest. Every man born to see the light of day must die. But that one who has been emperor should become an exile I cannot bear. May I never be without the purple I wear, nor live to see the day when men do not call me “Your Majesty”. If you wish safety, my Lord, that is an easy matter. We are rich, and there is the sea, and yonder our ships. But consider whether if you reach safety you may not desire to exchange that safety for death. As for me, I like the old saying, that the purple is the noblest shroud.* (Procopius, History of the Wars, vol. 1, Sec. 24, 33-37. In Robert Browning, Justinian and Theodora.)

She sat down. The men looked at one another nervously. Belisarius began discussing military plans. He and his other generals and their mercenaries went to the Hippodrome. They cut down every civilian within reach. The benches dripped with blood and the Hippodrome resounded with the echoes of the screams of the wounded and dying. When it was over thirty thousand men had been killed. But Justinian’s position was confirmed. Now he knew whom he could trust—Belisarius, Mundus, Narses, and above all Theodora.
Justinian's successors greatly defended their eastern territories. The empire centered in the Balkans, and western and central Turkey, a location blending a rich Hellenistic culture with Christianity. The revived empire withstood the 7th century advance of Arab Muslims. The wars and the permanent Muslim threat had significant cultural and commercial influences. The free rural population, the provider of military recruits and taxes, was weakened. Aristocratic estates grew larger, and aristocratic generals became stronger. At the close of the 10th century the Byzantine emperor may have been the strongest contemporary ruler.
IV. Byzantine Society and Politics. a. An emperor, ordained by god and surrounded by elaborate court ritual, headed both church and state. Women occasionally held the throne. An elaborate bureaucracy supported the imperial authority. The officials, trained in Hellenistic knowledge in a secular school system, could be recruited from all social classes, although, as in China, aristocrats predominated. Provincial governors were appointed from the center, and a spy system helped to preserve loyalty. A careful military organization defended the empire. Troops were recruited locally and given land in return for service.
b. Over time hereditary military leaders developed regional power and displaced better-educated aristocrats. The empire socially and economically depended upon Constantinople's control of the countryside. The bureaucracy regulated trade and food prices. Peasants supplied the food and provided most tax revenues. The large urban class was kept satisfied by low food prices. A widespread commercial network extended into Asia, Russia, Scandinavia, western Europe, and Africa.

c. Silk production techniques brought from China added a valuable product to the luxury items exported. The large merchant class however never developed political power. Cultural life centered upon Hellenistic secular traditions and Orthodox Christianity. Domed buildings, colored mosaics, and painted icons expressed an art linked to religion.
V. Controversy

a. Use of Icons: religious images

b. Byzantine people worshipped icons and images.
c. In the 700s, the Byzantine emperor Leo II forbid the worshipping of icons.
The link between all Byzantines was their deep knowledge of the Bible. Byzantine art expressed and relied on this common culture. The icon [the artistic representation of a religious figure, significantly displayed in homes and churches gains its emotional and spiritual dimension from its references to Scripture; it also acted as an enhancement of the Christian message which made the church a place of beauty as well as of truth. (Cormack, 6)

According to the passage describe why people believed in icons.
VI. The Split between East and West. a. Byzantine culture, political organization, and economic orientation help to explain the rift between the eastern and western versions of Christianity. Different rituals grew from Greek and Latin versions of the Bible. Emperors resisted papal attempts to interfere in religious issues. Hostility greeted the effort of the Frankish king Charlemagne to be recognized as Roman emperor. The final break between the two churches occurred in 1054 over arguments about the type of bread used in the mass and the celibacy of priests. Even though the two churches remained separate they continued to share a common classical heritage.
VII. The Empire's Decline. A long period of decline began in the 11th century. Muslim Turkish invaders seized almost all of the empire's Asian provinces, removing the most important sources of taxes and food. The empire never recovered from the loss of its army at Manzikert in 1071. Independent Slavic states appeared in the Balkans. An appeal for western European assistance did not help the Byzantines. Crusaders, led by Venetian merchants, sacked Constantinople in 1204. Italian cities, with their navies, secured special trading privileges. A smaller empire struggled to survive for another two centuries against western Europeans, Muslims, and Slavic kingdoms. On May 29th 1453 the Ottoman Turks conquered Constantinople.
VIII. The Spread of Civilization in Eastern Europe.

a. The Byzantine Empire’s influence spread among the people of the Balkans and southern Russia through conquest, commerce, and Christianity. In the 9th century missionaries Cyril and Methodius devised a written script, Cyrillic, for the Slavic language, providing a base for literacy in eastern Europe.

b. Unlike western Christians the Byzantines allowed the use of local languages in church services.
JOURNAL REFLECTION
In what ways was the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453 a turning point in world history? What role did the Byzantine Empire play in the preservation and transmission of Greek and Roman knowledge and culture? What was preserved? How was it preserved?