History of Roman Shields

Designing Shields
Shape of Shields

• There were many kinds of Roman shields used by legionaries (soldiers). Earlier on they were oval and flat, but at the time of the invasion of Britain (AD43) most were rectangular and curved, like part of a cylinder. This shield is called a Scutum.
What were they made of?

• The shields were mostly made of wood - a few layers glued together to make the curved shape. Some extra strips of wood were glued on the back for more strength. The shield was then covered in leather and a sheet of linen cloth added to the front. Designs were usually painted onto the front.
Back of the Shield

- The back of a replica shield, showing the wooden strips which reinforce the shield. Sheepskin was used above the handle to make the grip more comfortable. The rim was protected either with strips of bronze or with leather.
Shield Designs

Most designs were symmetrical and used the colours: red (for Mars the God of war), yellow, white and gold.
Shield Symbols

Each legion had their own symbol on their shields, to show who was their leader and the group they fought for.

- Lightning bolts

- Symbol of Jupiter king of the Gods. Romans believed he threw thunderbolts from the sky.

- Eagle's wings/ Eagle

- King of the birds and worked with God Jupiter. A symbol of power and strength. The main Roman army symbol.
• Elephant
  Shows huge strength and power. It was used to show Caesar won a battle at Thapsus and beat an elephant charge.

• Wreath
  Laurel bay leaves. Like a crown to show power and victory.

• Arrows
  To show how the Roman army travelled and conquered many lands.
• Boar

• This wild beast can defeat many of the animals it doesn’t give up even when cornered. It meant the army would never give up.

• Dolphin

• Thought of as king of the fish and is a sign of safe travel. The army would be ok on their long journeys.

• Bull

• They charge at their enemy to fight just like the army charge.
• Unicorn horn

• Moon

• Lion

• Thought to have power and could give protection.

• Symbol of Diana goddess of the Moon. She would watch out for them even at night.

• King of the beasts, so important and brave. It also showed this legion started in the month of July/ August (Leo star sign).
Real shield

- Only one scutum in good condition has ever been found, at Dura Europos, a Roman fort in Syria. It has pictures of an eagle, a lion, and winged gods. It was made in the 200s AD.
Using the Shield

- In battle the shield was held with the arm straight, holding a grip in the middle. The grip was across a hole cut from the middle of the shield. This hole was protected by a metal boss, a hemisphere of iron with an iron plate around it. The soldier could push this boss into his enemy to knock him off balance.
The shield in battle

- The shield could also be used in a special formation called a testudo (tortoise). The soldiers formed a complete shell to cover themselves, with the shields held overhead as well as in front and on the sides. This was so they could attack a city's walls and be protected from missiles like arrows.
Use what you have observed, learnt and the pictures of Roman shields to design your own Roman shields.

Think about Symmetry Colours Patterns Symbols/ Pictures

Draw and colour your design. It must be at least half a page in size.

Paint a cardboard rectangle the base colour for your shield. Thick card in the bottom of a fruit/ veg box from a supermarket with no holes is ideal size and thickness.
Making a template

Only part of the design needs to be made to then use the stencil to make sure the design is symmetrical (all parts will be exactly the same) and repeat the pattern.
Making a stencil

Once the symbols for the shield have been drawn it needs to be carefully cut out. Make a hole in the centre of the part that is to be cut out with scissors or something sharp. Then cut around the outside edge to create the stencil shape.
Painting using the stencil

Place the stencil on the shield where you want the design. Dab on the paint or roll on the paint so it fills the stencil. Move the stencil to another part of the shield and repeat to create a symmetrical design.
OR

On the piece of paper draw part of the design and then cut it out.

On the shield lightly draw round the template to get the pattern on the shield.

Next flip the template to create a symmetrical pattern and draw round it again. Repeat as many times as needed based on your design.

Paint the pattern.
Making the boss for a shield.

Draw round the template onto card and then cut it out to make the base.

Stick a yogurt pot (like rolo yoghurt size) in the middle.

Scrunch up balls of kitchen roll to make the nails around the edge of the boss.

Cover the whole thing with a layer of paper mâché. Make sure you smooth down.
Complete painting/ **printing** the design on the shield.

Once dry use a black pen to draw round the pattern to add the detail and make it stand out.

Paint the boss (grey) silver.

Once dry glue the boss to the middle of the shield.

Add a handle to the back of the shield.

Take a photo of you with your shield.