



project.org

TEACHER LESSON PLAN

Coin Detectives

Grades 3–4 · Real or Replica? · Coins as evidence

James Tissot (1836–1902), Brooklyn Museum

THE 40 MINUTES

5 min
HOOK

10 min
TEACH

20 min
DETECTIVE WORK

5 min
CLOSE

BY THE END OF THIS LESSON

You will be able to:

- 1 read an ancient coin as evidence: who made it, when, and what it helps show
- 2 use the clues experts use to tell a genuine coin from a fake
- 3 put the coins of the New Testament in time order
- 4 **GO DEEPER** explain why a genuine coin is stronger evidence for the Gospel than a replica

WHY THIS MATTERS A coin made by a real ruler, in a real year, is a witness. It helps show that the Gospel happened in real places, among real people.

WORDS FOR DETECTIVES

Genuine	really made in ancient times
Replica	an honest copy, labeled as a copy
Fake	a copy made to fool people
Struck	stamped between two dies
Patina	the color old metal gains over time
Evidence	a clue that helps show what is true

HOOK · 5 MINUTES

How do you know it's real?

Hold up a modern coin. *"How do you know this coin is real and not a toy?"* Take answers: the weight, the shine, the words, where it came from. Then show the coin of Pontius Pilate on page 3. *"The man who put Jesus on trial had this coin made. An expert says it is real. Today you are the expert."*

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

What students will understand

Students will read an ancient coin as a piece of evidence. They will use the clues experts use to tell a genuine coin from a fake, put the coins of the New Testament in time order, and explain how a coin made by a real ruler, in a real year, helps show that the Gospel happened in real places among real people.

STANDARDS AND THEMES

- **Social Studies** — artifacts as primary sources; chronology and BC/AD dates
- **Science and ELA** — close observation with a hand lens; stating a claim and backing it with evidence
- **Religion** — Luke 2:1 and Luke 3:1, where the Gospel names the rulers of its day; CCC 423 (Jesus born in Bethlehem in the time of Herod the Great and Caesar Augustus) and CCC 126 (the Church affirms that the Gospels are historical)

MATERIALS NEEDED

- *Real or Replica?* projected
- Magnifying glasses, if you have them
- A modern coin; page 3 of this plan
- Differentiated handouts, one per student

DIRECT INSTRUCTION · 10 MINUTES

Struck, cast and copied

How ancient coins were made. A blank of metal was struck between two engraved dies, by hand, one at a time. Striking leaves crisp, sharp detail — and everyday coins were often struck crude and off-center.

How fakes are made. Some are *cast*: molten metal is poured into a mold made from a real coin, which leaves soft detail, tiny bubbles or a grainy surface. Some are struck from *false dies*, copied by hand. Some are given fake age with a tumbler or sandpaper, or a patina painted on chemically. Play the widow's mite round of *Real or Replica?* together and read its clue aloud: *"If a lepton looks perfect, be suspicious. The imperfection is the proof of authenticity."*

Why it matters. Read Luke 3:1 aloud: Luke dates the start of John the Baptist's preaching by naming Tiberius, Pontius Pilate and Herod, tetrarch of Galilee. The exhibition holds coins of all three: Pilate's is genuine, and the coins of Tiberius and Herod Antipas are museum-quality replicas. A genuine coin is a witness from the same years as the Gospel.

DETECTIVE WORK · 20 MINUTES

Students choose a handout. All three levels compare real and fake coins and put coins of the Gospel in order.

GREEN LEVEL MORE SUPPORT

Spot the difference between a real and a fake widow's mite using a checklist of clues. Read Pilate's coin as evidence. Number four coins in story order, with pictures and dates.

YELLOW LEVEL GRADE LEVEL

Find the fake in two pairs and explain the clues in a table. Tell struck from cast. Order five coins by date, then explain why Pilate's coin is evidence for the Gospel.

RED LEVEL GO DEEPER

Weigh strong and weak evidence on the hardest kind of fake. Explain why it matters that three exhibition coins are replicas. Order five coins and explain the one that breaks the pattern.

LINE UP AND LOOK BACK · 5 MINUTES

A human timeline

Give five students the coins on page 3: Augustus, the Widow's Mite, Pilate, Agrippa and Festus. The class arranges them in Gospel order, from the census at Jesus' birth to Paul's appeal to Caesar. Then ask the objectives back, from the screen or page 1: *"Can you now...?"* Students show a thumb up, sideways or down. Exit question: *"Name one coin and tell me what it is evidence for."*

BACKGROUND · REPLICAS IN THE EXHIBITION

Eight coins are genuine. Three — the Tribute Penny, the Shekel of Tyre and the coin of Herod Antipas — are museum-quality replicas, because originals are exceptionally rare. Each is labeled as a replica. A replica tells the truth about itself; a fake is made to fool. The Festus coin has been independently authenticated by NGC, a professional coin grading service.

MINI MUSEUM CONNECTION

Online, *Real or Replica?* gives five rounds, each with how the fake was made, and the **Gospel Timeline** sets the eleven coins in order. In the exhibition, find Pilate's coin in Case 7 and look for the ladle and the grain.

minimuseumproject.org/exhibitions/in-their-hands

ANSWER KEY · THE FAKES AND THEIR CLUES

- **Widow's mite** (Green): **Coin B**. A real lepton is crude, off-center and irregular; the fake is too clean and symmetrical, its patina applied by chemicals.
- **Dekadrachm** (Yellow): **Coin A**, a cast fake. Its owl's feathers are softer and blurred; its surface is unnaturally uniform.
- **Lysimachus** (Yellow): **Coin B**, sand cast. Grainy surface, mushy curls, a different edge.
- **Greek drachm** (Red): **Coin B**, a die transfer. Flatter, grayer, less sharp, the wrong metal. Experts compare known genuine coins, and sometimes use X-rays.

ANSWER KEY · THE ORDERS

- **Green:** Augustus, Pilate, Agrippa, Festus
- **Yellow:** Augustus, Shekel of Tyre, Pilate, Agrippa, Festus
- **Red, by date made:** Widow's Mite, Augustus, Pilate, Agrippa, Festus. The mite was made long before, but was still being spent in Jesus' day.

SHOW YOUR CLASS

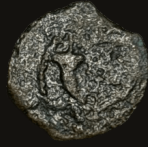
The Gospel in coins, in order

The eleven coins of the Gospel Timeline, from Jesus' birth to Paul's journey to Rome. Use it for the hook and the line-up.

CASE 6 · THE WORLD OF JESUS



Augustus Caesar · 5–4 BC

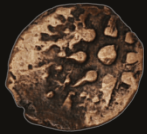


Herod the Great · 40–4 BC



Aretas IV · 9 BC–40 AD

CASE 7 · MINISTRY AND PASSION



Widow's Mite · 103–76 BC



Tribute Penny · 14–37 AD · replica



Shekel of Tyre · 1 BC–1 AD · replica



Pontius Pilate · 29/30 AD



Herod Antipas · 4 BC–39 AD · replica

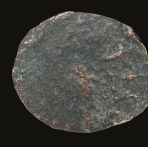
CASE 8 · THE EARLY CHURCH



Herod Agrippa I · 41–44 AD



Emperor Claudius · 41–54 AD



Porcius Festus · 59–62 AD

CASE 7 · MINISTRY AND PASSION

The coin of Pontius Pilate

COIN	Bronze prutah, genuine
DATE	29/30 AD
REFERENCE	Hendin 6370
SCRIPTURE	Matthew 27:24



Pilate was the Roman prefect of Judaea from 26 to 36 AD. This coin was minted in the year of the Passion. One side shows a simpulum, a Roman ladle used in pagan worship; the other shows three ears of grain tied together. For decades some scholars questioned whether Pilate was real. In 1961 a stone carved with his name and title was found at Caesarea Maritima. This coin existed before that discovery. It was evidence all along.

QUESTIONS TO ASK IN FRONT OF THE CASE

- What clues on this coin tell you it was struck by hand?
- Why would a Roman governor put a ladle used in pagan worship on a coin for Jewish people to spend?
- Some people once doubted Pilate was real. What does this coin say to them?
- Luke 3:1 names Pilate. How does it change the way you hear the Gospel to know his coins still exist?