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TEACHER LESSON PLAN

Whose Image Is This?

Grades 5–8 · Religion · The Tribute Penny

James Tissot (1836–1902), Brooklyn Museum

THE 45 MINUTES

5 min
HOOK

12 min
TEACH

22 min
ACTIVITY

6 min
CLOSE

BY THE END OF THIS LESSON

You will be able to:

- 1 read a Roman coin as evidence: whose image, whose inscription, and what it claims
- 2 explain the trap set for Jesus, and how his answer escapes it
- 3 connect “give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s” (Matthew 22:21) to being made in God’s image (Genesis 1:27)
- 4 **GO DEEPER** judge when obedience to the state must give way to conscience

WHY THIS MATTERS Coins, flags and screens all ask for our loyalty every day. Jesus’ question gives us a way to tell what belongs to God.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

What students will understand

Students will read Jesus’ answer about the Tribute Penny as more than a ruling on taxes. The coin bears Caesar’s image, so it belongs to Caesar; every human person bears God’s image, so every person belongs to God. Students will connect Matthew 22:15–22 to Genesis 1:27 and to the Church’s teaching on the duties of citizens, and reflect on what it means to *give back to God* the life that carries his image.

STANDARDS AND THEMES

- **Scripture** — Matthew 22:15–22; Genesis 1:26–27
- **Catechism** — CCC 2240 (the duties of citizens, including paying taxes) and CCC 2242 (when conscience must refuse an unjust command)
- **Catholic Social Teaching** — Life and Dignity of the Human Person; Rights and Responsibilities
- **Virtue** — prudence: answering a hard question wisely, without being trapped by it

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Bibles, or Matthew 22:15–22 projected
- An image of the Tribute Penny (the exhibition page, or the coin on the student handout)
- Any coin from a student’s pocket or purse
- Differentiated handouts, one per student

HOOK · 5 MINUTES

Read a coin

Hold up an ordinary coin. *“Whose face is on this? What words are written on it? What is the coin claiming?”* Take answers: a president, a motto, a date, a country. Then: *“Every coin tells you who is in charge. Two thousand years ago, someone handed Jesus a coin and tried to trap him with it.”*

DIRECT INSTRUCTION · 12 MINUTES

The trap and the answer

Read Matthew 22:15–22 aloud. Set out the trap: if Jesus says *pay the tax*, he sides with the occupying power and loses the crowd; if he says *don’t*, he can be reported to Rome as a rebel.

Show the Tribute Penny. The face is Tiberius; the inscription calls him the son of a god; the reverse names him High Priest. For a faithful Jew this was not neutral money — it was an image claiming divine and religious authority.

Jesus asks his questioners to produce the coin — and they can. *“Whose image is this? And whose inscription?”* The coin carries Caesar’s image, so give it back to Caesar. Then the turn: what carries *God’s* image? Read Genesis 1:27. St. Augustine and other early Christian writers drew exactly this line: Caesar looks for his image on his coin; God looks for his image in us.

ACTIVITY · 22 MINUTES

Students choose a handout. All three levels read the same passage and the same coin.

GREEN LEVEL MORE SUPPORT

Read the passage in short parts. Label the coin’s image and inscription, match each to Caesar or to God, and finish the sentence: *I carry God’s image, so...* Draw yourself as a coin stamped with God’s image.

YELLOW LEVEL GRADE LEVEL

Explain the trap and why Jesus’ answer escapes it. Compare the coin with Genesis 1:27 in a two-column chart, then write a paragraph on what *giving back to God* asks of a twelve-year-old today.

RED LEVEL GO DEEPER

Write a structured reflection: is Jesus’ answer about taxes, about idolatry, or about the human person? Use the coin’s inscription, Genesis 1:27 and CCC 2242, and judge a modern case where obeying the state and obeying God might conflict.

LOOK BACK AND PRAY · 6 MINUTES

Put the objectives back on the screen. For each one, students show a thumb up, sideways or down: *“Can you now read a coin as evidence? Can you explain the trap, and how Jesus’ answer escapes it? Can you connect Caesar’s coin to God’s image in you? Can you judge when obedience to the state must give way to conscience?”* Ask one student to answer each aloud; for the last, ask a Red Level reader.

Ask students to hold a coin in an open hand. Pray together: *“Lord, the coin carries the image of the one who made it. We carry yours. Help us to give back to you what is yours — our time, our gifts, and our whole selves. Amen.”*

MINI MUSEUM CONNECTION

Visit the exhibition: find the Tribute Penny in Case 7, *Ministry and Passion*, and look for the inscription. Then walk to the Shekel of Tyre beside it — the coin that paid for the betrayal.

Virtual visit: the coin, its reverse and the full Gospel Timeline are online.

minimuseumproject.org/exhibitions/in-their-hands

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Image and belonging

Image means ownership. In the ancient world, a ruler's image and name on a coin declared whose authority it served. Jesus does not deny that Caesar has a legitimate claim to what is stamped with his image.

Image means dignity. Genesis 1:27 says every human being is made in the image of God. If the coin belongs to Caesar because it bears his image, the person belongs to God for the same reason. Nothing stamped by the state can make that claim on a human life.

The order of loyalties. The Church teaches that citizens owe the state real duties, including paying taxes (CCC 2240). But the claim of God comes first: when a command contradicts the moral order, conscience must refuse it (CCC 2242). Jesus' answer holds both truths at once.

The coin itself. Tiberius' denarius called the emperor divine and named him High Priest. Jesus answers by asking whose image it bears. The question still works on any coin, any flag, any screen that asks for our allegiance.

SCRIPTURE CONNECTIONS

Matthew 22:15–22	The question of the tax and Jesus' answer
Genesis 1:26–27	Humankind made in the image and likeness of God
Mark 12:41–44	The widow's two small coins, in the same week: giving God everything
Romans 13:7	"Give to everyone what you owe them: if you owe taxes, pay taxes"
Acts 5:29	"We must obey God rather than human beings"

CROSS-CURRICULAR AND ASSESSMENT NOTES

- **Social Studies:** Roman rule in Judaea, client kings and prefects — the coins of Herod, Pilate and Antipas in Cases 6 and 7 show who governed
- **Art:** what a ruler chooses to put on a coin, and what Herod's coins left off because Jewish law forbade human images
- **ELA:** the structure of a trap question, and how Jesus answers with a question of his own
- **Assessment:** the handout reflection; an exit ticket — "What carries God's image, and what do I owe him?"

SHOW YOUR CLASS

The coin, up close

Project or print this page for the hook, or take it to Case 7.



REPLICA

CASE 7 · MINISTRY AND PASSION

The Tribute Penny

COIN	Silver denarius of Tiberius
DATE	14–37 AD
REFERENCE	RIC I 30
SCRIPTURE	Matthew 22:21

The face is the emperor Tiberius. The inscription calls him *son of the divine Augustus*, and the reverse reads PONTIF MAXIM — *High Priest*. To a faithful Jew, the coin itself was a provocation.

QUESTIONS TO ASK IN FRONT OF THE CASE

- What is the first thing you notice about the face on this coin?
- If you were a faithful Jew in Jerusalem, how would it feel to carry a coin that called the emperor the son of a god?
- The Tribute Penny sits beside the Shekel of Tyre, the coin that paid Judas. What do these two coins, side by side, say about money and loyalty?
- Jesus asked his questioners to show him the coin. Why might it matter that they were the ones carrying it?