MUSÉE ROMAIN NYON

TOP SECRET

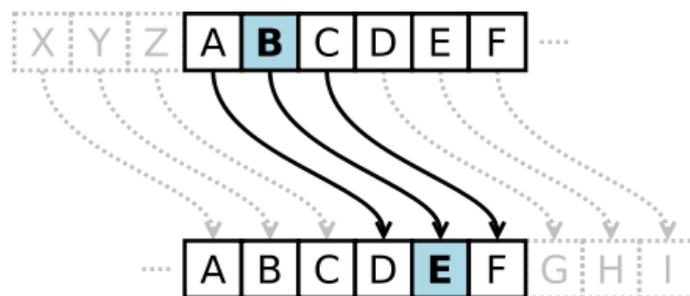## Send secret messages in Roman times

Did you know that secret codes to encrypt messages already existed in Julius Caesar's time? When he was at war in Gaul, the great roman General sometimes had to write to his officers to pass on instructions for the next assault. But it was very important that these instructions remain in Roman holding and don't end up in Gallic hands, the surprise effect being a key aspect of these instructions!

Suetonius, a roman historian who wrote the story of Julius Caesar, tells us that the General used a special system to code his messages. Today, this system is called "Caesar's code" or "Caesar's cypher", in his honor.

What does this "Caesar's code" consist of?

The premise is to shift the alphabet's letters and substitute a letter by another that is further down the alphabet.

For instance, if we decide to shift for 3 letters, then A becomes D, B becomes E, and so on. Like so:

The phrase   ***Julius Caesar was never Emperor***

becomes   ***Mxolxv Fdhvdu zdv qhyhu Hpshuru***   by transposing the letters.

Very readable isn't it? Whenever the intercepted a message from Julius Caesar, the Gallic never understood a word!

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How to make your own secret messages using "Caesar's code"?

Cut-out these two lines of the alphabet.

| A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K | L | M | N | O | P | Q | R | S | T | U | V | W | X | Y | Z |

| A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K | L | M | N | O | P | Q | R | S | T | U | V | W | X | Y | Z |

Place them offset according to the shift you have chosen.
For example, if you have chosen to shift 4 letters:

| A | B | C | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K | L | M | N | O | P | Q | R | S | T | U | V | W | X | Y | Z |

The A becomes D, the B becomes A, the C becomes F, and so on. At the end of the alphabet, you come back to the start: the X becomes A, the Y becomes B and the Z becomes C.

If you don't have a printer, no problem! Use a checked sheet of paper and write a letter in each square.

Write your text firsthand and then transcribe it in the coded version using the above method.

Send your message to your sister, brother or your friends, who must know the code of course! You all need to know the cypher's key, meaning the number you chose for the shifting: here being 3. Don't forget to choose the number before you start, so that you are sure to understand one another.

Here are some phrases for you to practice with. Don't forget, to be able to read it, you have to shift the other way around: for example, for n°1, C=A, U=S…

1. C UGETGT OGUUCIG   Key: 2

2. BPM MVMUG QA IXXZWIKPQVO   Key: 8

3. HTQTSNF NZQNF JVZJXYWNX BFX YMJ WTRFS SFRJ TK YMJ HNYD TK SDTS   Key: 5

4. SDTS BFX FQXT HFQQJI STANTUZSZR GD NYX NSMFGNYFSYX   Key: 5

Answers :
1. A secret message
2. The enemy is approaching
3. *Colonia Iulia Equestris* is the roman name of the city of Nyon
4. Nyon was also called Noviodunum by its inhabitants

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Create a stamp to sign your message

All that is left for you to do is sign your message. Instead of using wax and a seal, like the Romans used to do, you can easily make your own stamp that will become your signature.

You will need:

- A piece of wood, a lid, a duplo, a cork… basically something that will be used as a base
- Foam paper
- Scissors
- Ink for stamps
- A ball pen
- Glue

1. Draw the shape of your signature on the foam paper. Maybe try a few times on scrap paper before doing so. Better choose something simple.
2. Cut out your drawing with the scissors. Ask an adult if it's too tricky.
3. If you want to insert some details, use a ball pen and press heavily so that the line is well imprinted.
4. Stick your foam paper signature on the base you chose.
5. All you have to do now is to use it! Tap your stamp on the ink, place it on the paper you want to sign and press heavily!

Here are some examples found on the internet with their links:

Foam stamps : https://www.teteamodeler.com/vip2/nouveaux/creativite3/fiche746.asp

Dea Vita : https://deavita.fr/brico-diy/bricolage-papier-mousse-idees-enfants/

Mavada's small cabin : http://mavada.canalblog.com/archives/2012/06/26/24584854.html