Janus – the God of Doors and Beginnings

Subjects: English · History · Latin | recommended from age 10 (A2/B1) | Video: 8:17 min



Watch the video
youtu.be/wrnsQ1al298

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

A · Before watching

1. Why do you think the first month of the year is called “January”? Make a guess.

B · While watching

1. According to Ovid, what was Janus originally – and why does he have two faces?

2. What was Janus responsible for, and what objects did he carry?

3. Why did the Romans call on Janus first in every prayer?

4. How did Janus save Rome from the Sabines?

5. What did it mean when the doors of the Ianus Geminus were open or closed?

Useful words

gate	Tor	traitor	Verräterin
beginning	Anfang	boiling	kochend
key	Schlüssel	spring	Quelle
coin	Münze	peace	Frieden

C · Put the story in order

Number the events from 1 to 8 in the order they happen in the video.

	Tarpeia secretly opens a gate to the Sabines.
	The Romans build the shrine Ianus Geminus.
	Janus is originally shapeless chaos.
	The Sabine women ask for peace between the peoples.
	As the world takes order, he becomes the god of passage.
	Emperor Augustus closes the doors three times.
	His double face appears on the bronze coin called the as.
	Janus makes a boiling hot spring burst out.

D · Think and discuss

1. The doors of Janus were almost always open. What does that tell us about ancient Rome?

2. A new start (school year, moving house, new year) is often a passage. Why might a “god of passages” have mattered so much to people?

E · Janus in our language

Explain what these words have to do with Janus.

	Meaning	Link to Janus
January		
ianua (Latin)		
janitor		
“Janus-faced”		

F · Get creative

1. In your exercise book, write a short interview with Janus, the way Ovid might have done it (8–10 lines).