

Decoding the Seal of the Commonwealth

Obverse (front of the Seal)

Fill in the rest of the graphic organizer as you determine the meaning of the different parts of this side of the seal.

Symbol	What it looks like	What it means	Why the Virginia founders might have included it
Virtus	A woman wearing a toga stepping on a man	bravery	
spear	A spear pointing to the ground		
	A sword in its sheath		
Tyranny	A man lying on the ground		
		Keeping someone in captivity	
		Punishing someone	
crown			
Virginia creeper vine and leaves			
Motto	<i>Sic Semper Tyrannis</i> (Thus always to Tyrants)		

Reverse (back of the seal)

Identifying the People

Three women stand next to each other on this side of the seal. Each woman represents a goddess from ancient Rome.

One goddess is named Libertas. In ancient Roman images and in more recent drawings, paintings, and sculptures, she usually carries a tall stick or torch and a floppy cloth hat.

Another goddess is called Ceres. Ancient Roman designs show Ceres holding wheat or another kind of grain. Ceres symbolized agricultural abundance, or having more than enough crops. After the end of the Roman republic and Roman empire, people still liked the stories of Roman mythology. Sometimes they changed the way things looked a little. By the 1600s, images of Ceres often included a cornucopia, also called a horn of plenty.

The third goddess is called Aeternitas. She is holding a globe with a bird called a phoenix standing on it. In ancient Rome, the phoenix was reborn every time it died, so people used it to stand for the idea of something lasting forever.

Look at the three women on this side of the seal. Which one is Libertas? Where is Ceres? And which woman is Aeternitas?

Look for English words

Look carefully at each of the three names:

Aeternitas

Libertas

Ceres

Each of these names is similar to a word in English. To find the English word, you may need to cover up the last letter or two of the letters of the name. For Aeternitas, cover up the first letter, too.

Draw a line to match the ideas the Romans and early Virginians connected to each goddess

Godde ss	I dea
Aeternitas	riches (having more than enough)
Libertas	freedom
Ceres	power lasting a long time

There's a surprise! The motto, or saying, on this side of the seal is different from what the committee proposed and the legislature approved in 1776. The original phrase was "*Deus Nobis Haec Otia Fecit.*" These words mean "God has granted us this leisure."

The current word is *Perseverando*. It means to persevere or to keep going. The Virginia legislature changed to this motto in 1779.

Why do you think that the legislature decided to change the motto only three years after they approved the design of the seal?