Known to the ancients, lead takes its name from the Anglo-Saxon word for the metal and its symbol comes from the Latin plumbum (from which we get the modern word "plumber" since old plumbing was done with lead pipes).

Although lead is not very common in the earth's crust, what is there is readily available and easy to refine. Its chief use today is in lead-acid storage batteries such as those used in automobiles. In pure form it is too soft to be used for much else. Lead has a blue-white color when first cut but quickly dulls on exposure to air, forming Pb2O, one of the few lead(I) compounds. Most stable lead compounds contain lead in oxidation states of +2 or +4.

Various isotopes of lead come at the end of the natural decay series of elements like uranium, thorium and actinium. These are Pb-206, Pb-207 and Pb-208

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