

Roman Slavery

Latin GCSE > Component 3B

Monday 28th November 2022

Roman Domestic Enslavement

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LO: to learn what Roman domestic enslavement was like.

LO 2: to compare Roman domestic enslavement with other forms of enslavement.

Using your headphones, watch the video on slavery in the Roman world on the website.



Slaves and slavery

1

Slaves were workers with no rights who were owned by Roman citizens, or by the state. They were bought and sold like any other property, and their lives were controlled by their owners.

Slavery in the Roman world

2

A slave was the property of his or her enslaver, regarded as a commodity that could be bought or sold like a cow or a donkey. Enslaved people had no liberty and no rights. They could not leave their employment and they could not choose what to do, but had to obey the orders of their master. Slave owners had complete control over their slaves, even the power of life and death.

3

Enslaved people had no right to a family life, were not allowed to marry, and could not own property. They did not even keep their own name; the enslaver would choose a new name for them. In this way, the enslaved person suffered a total lack of freedom and loss of identity.

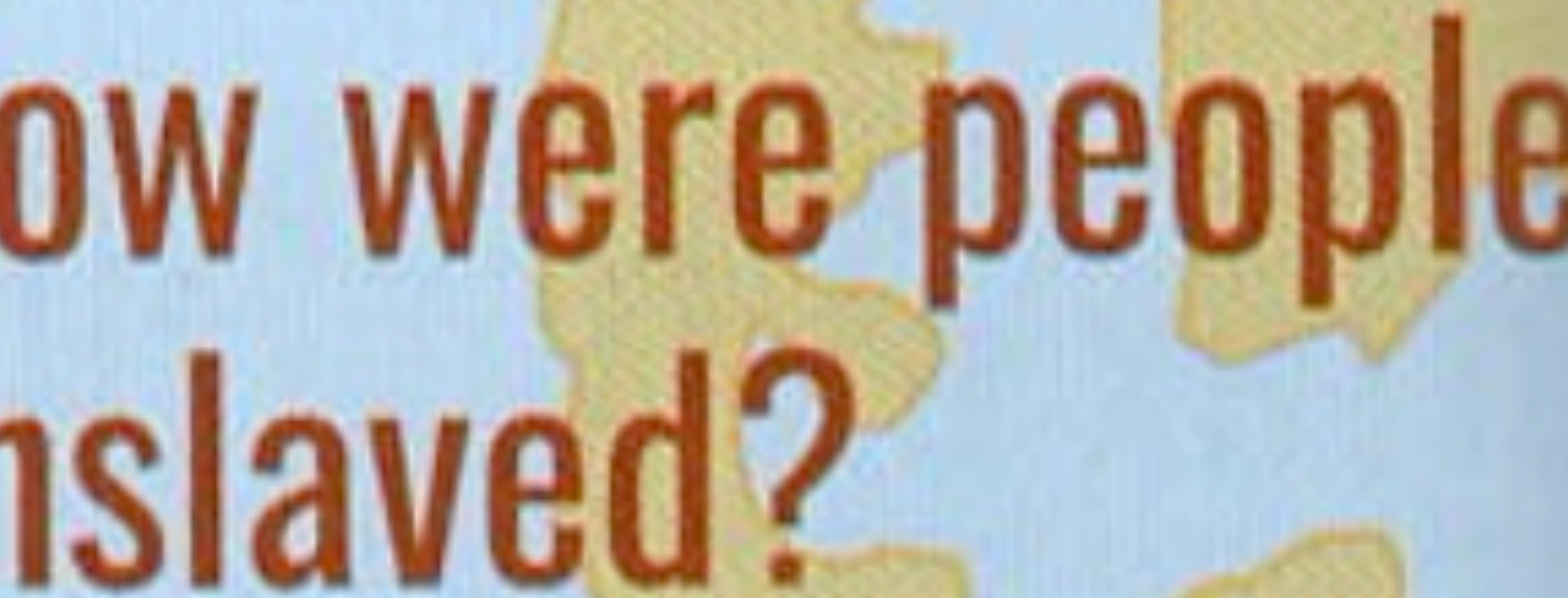
4

Enslaved people had many different ethnic backgrounds and were born in various places, including the countries and regions we now call Italy, France, Britain, Spain, Germany, Greece, Egypt, North Africa, and Turkey. They weren't distinguished from free people by skin colour or race, or even by dress or occupation. Slaves and free people often worked alongside each other.

Although the living conditions of slaves varied, what did not vary was the acceptance of slavery. The Romans, and other people who lived around the Mediterranean, regarded slavery as a normal part of life, and there was no movement to abolish it. Even some former slaves would, once they became free, buy slaves of their own.

Slave or servant?

Many enslaved people, like Currax, Quartilla, and Lucrio, were part of a *familia*. This was not the same as a modern family. The Latin word, familia, means household, i.e. all who live in the house. Household slaves lived in their enslaver's house and did the work of domestic servants: cooking, cleaning, attending to the owners of the house, and looking after children. Some worked in a trade or business for or alongside their enslaver.



How were people
enslaved?

How were people enslaved?



1. Prisoners of war

The Romans believed that they had the right to enslave people they captured in war. In the second and first centuries BC, Rome was expanding its territory and acquiring an empire. Roman armies captured vast numbers of people in war and took them to Rome to be sold as slaves. The geographer Strabo records one such event from 167 BC:

Aemilius Paullus [a Roman general] captured seventy cities in Epirus [in Greece] and enslaved 150,000 human beings.

Prisoners of war continued to be a source of slaves, although not in such large numbers. In the first century AD Rome was still conquering territory overseas and enslaving the conquered peoples. After the sack of Jerusalem in AD 70, the victorious Roman army captured thousands of Jews, enslaved them, and brought them to Rome.

How were people enslaved?

Vocabulary

‘vernae’

=

home-born slaves;
Slaves who were
born to a slave in
your household

3. Born a slave

Children of female slaves automatically became slaves themselves. These home-born slaves were known as *vernae*. The Romans regarded verna as the property of the enslaver. The mother of the child had no rights. The enslaver could decide to sell the mother or the child and thus separate them from each other.

How were people enslaved?

4. Abandoned children

Parents who couldn't afford or didn't want to bring up their children sometimes abandoned babies in rubbish heaps, at crossroads, or in other public places. Anyone could take the infant to bring up as a slave. Even after many years as a slave, a freeborn Roman could legally claim freedom. This would be difficult to prove, but there is some evidence that it did happen.



How were people enslaved?

5. Choosing slavery

Some desperate people even sold themselves into slavery because of extreme poverty or debt. There was no welfare system in the Roman world and for some people life as a slave might have seemed preferable to being a homeless beggar.

How were people enslaved?

List the 5 ways people were enslaved in the ancient world.

Answer in full sentences.

Slaves were sold by auction to the highest bidder.



BUYING SLAVES

We have already seen how one could become a slave and how you would then be sold. It is also important to consider how much a slave cost and how the buying of slaves was arranged.

➤ How much did a slave cost?

In order to see how much a slave cost, it is firstly important to see how much people were paid so that we can then see how much a slave cost in proportion to their income:

Roman money values

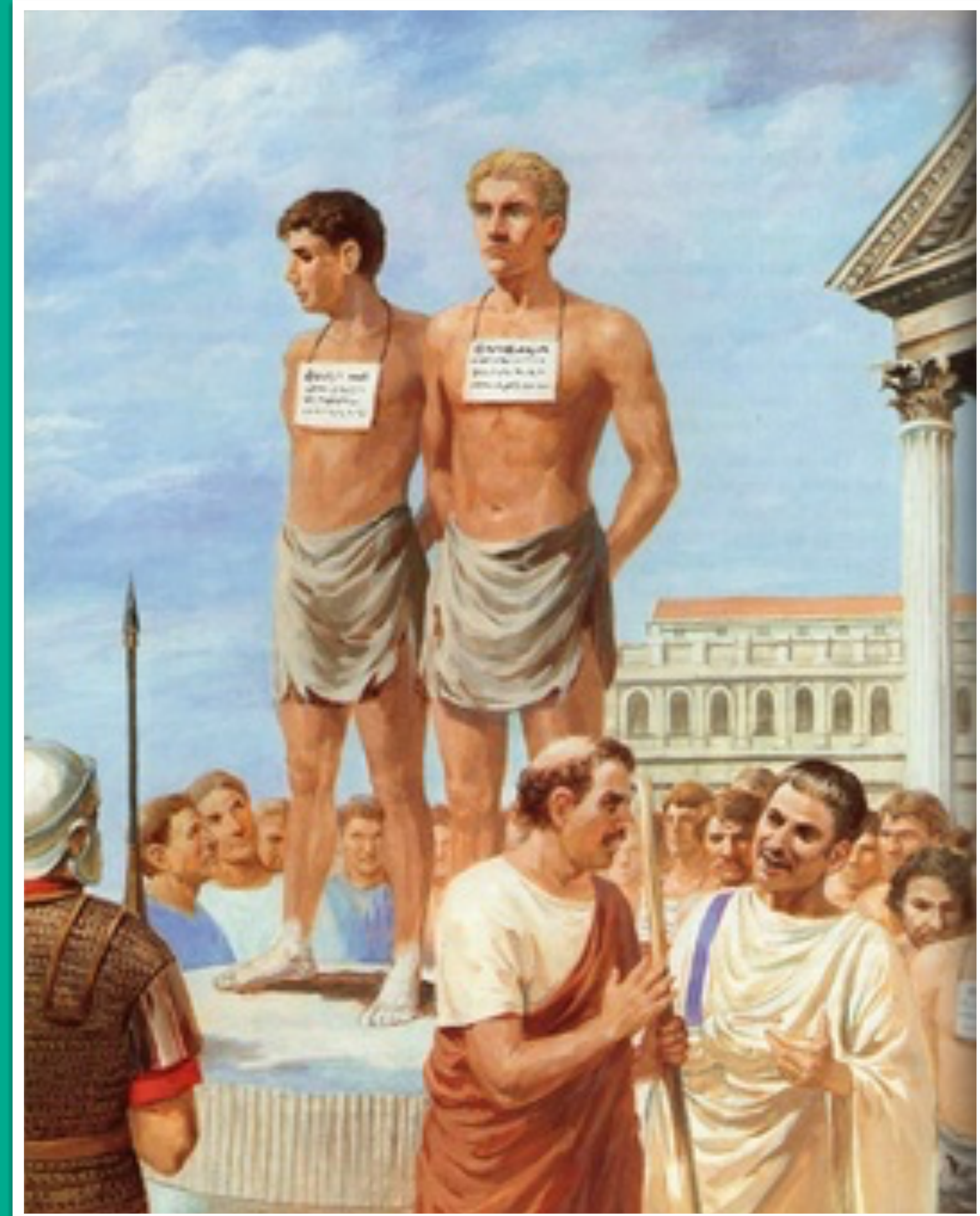
4 sesterces = 1 denarius

Roman rates of pay (in sesterces per annum)

Legionary soldier	pre 50 B.C.	450
	50 B.C. – AD 83	900
	after AD 83	1200
	by AD 220	3000

Some prices of Roman slaves

Average price of an unskilled slave	2 nd century B.C.	300 – 600?
	1 st century A.D.	2000
Cheap price for a young & educated slave	20 B.C.	8000
A very learned slave	20 B.C.	700, 000



➤ Choosing and buying a slave

As well as putting chalk on the foot of someone who had not been a slave before, other signs and marks were used to tell the buyer more about the slave he was looking at. If a slave had run away and been recaptured, the letters FUG were branded on his forehead (**FUG** = fugitivus = runaway). If a slave had stolen something, the word **FUR** (meaning ‘thief’) was branded onto his skin. Thus a buyer could find out about a possible slave just by looking at him.

➤ Legal control over buying and selling slaves

There were some rules about buying and selling slaves, although these were not usually for the benefit of the slave. Aediles were elected officials whose duties included supervising markets to check that the buyers were not cheated:

“That part of the edict of the aediles which covers the sale of slaves is phrased as follows: “Let care be taken that the bill of sale for each slave be written in such a way that it can be known exactly what disease or defect each one has, and which one is a runaway or a wanderer, or not innocent of any offence.””

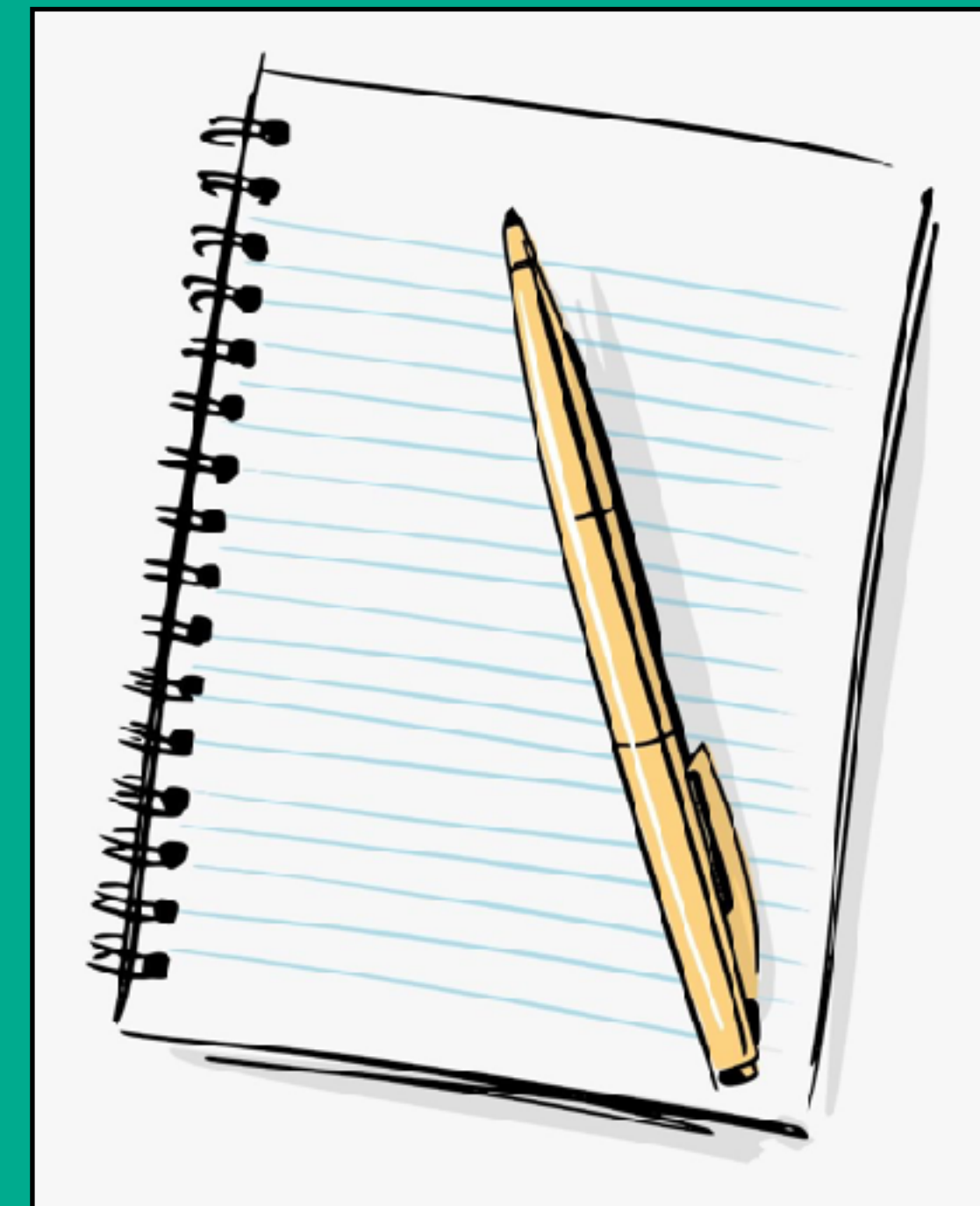
The slave market

When a Roman wanted to buy a new slave he might go to the slave market. Every town would have a slave market. There were two in Rome. One was in the Forum Romanum, behind the Senate House. The other was in the Campus Martius. The poet Horace gives an idea of what a slave market might have been like. He imagines a slave dealer speaking to a potential buyer:

This boy is fair and handsome from head to toe. He can be yours for 8,000 sesterces. A home-born slave, obedient to his master. He has some knowledge of Greek – he's equipped for any art. With moist clay like this you can mould anything! What's more, he will sing – his voice is untrained but it will be a pleasant accompaniment when you are drinking ... None of the slave dealers would do this deal for you. And I wouldn't do this favour for everyone.

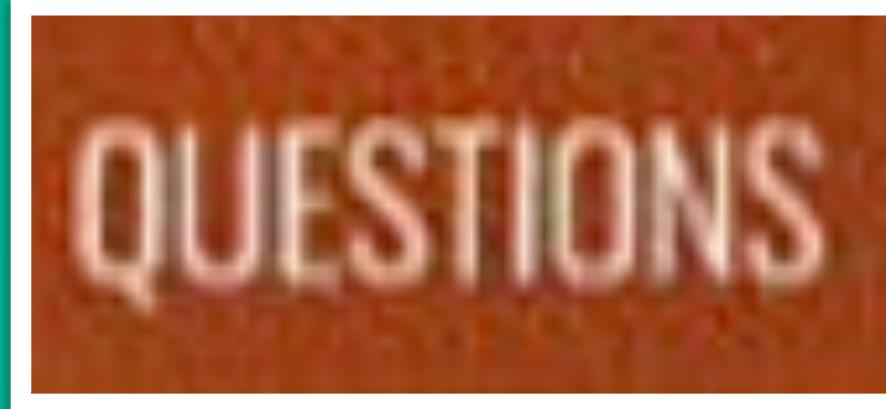
QUESTIONS

1. What good qualities of the boy does the slave dealer point out?
2. What does this passage tell us about the way Romans regarded the people they enslaved?



Answer the questions in full sentences.

Answer the questions in full sentences.



➤ Evidence on buying slaves

Here is an extract from the sale of a slave-boy called Apalaustus, from Romania.

‘Dasius . . . has bought and received by legal transfer from Bellicus, son of Alexander, the boy Apalaustus, or whatever other name he has, for the sum of 600 denarii. This is a guarantee that the boy has been handed over in good health, has not been convicted of stealing or any other crime, is not a layabout, has never run away, and does not suffer from fits.’

Questions:

- 1) How many sesterces did Apalaustus cost the buyer? [1]
- 2) What else would guarantee that the boy was not a criminal or that he had never run away? [2]
- 3) Why do you think that good health was so important in a slave, from the buyer’s point of view? [2]