

Roman Children

GCSE Latin > Component 3 'Roman Family Life'

Monday 6th March 2023

Today

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- LO: to learn and understand Roman 'coming of age' rituals.

A recap

Childbirth

Childbirth was very dangerous in Roman times. Medical science was primitive, and we know from tombstones that women often died giving birth. Children often died when they were still very small.



A new baby was bathed and picked up by its father. This showed that it had been accepted into the family.

Women married early partly because they believed that childbirth was safer when they were young. Some richer women, after giving birth to an heir, avoided having more children by using sponges as contraceptives.

On the ninth day after the birth a naming ceremony took place. The child was given a *bulla*, a charm to ward off evil spirits.



Something new

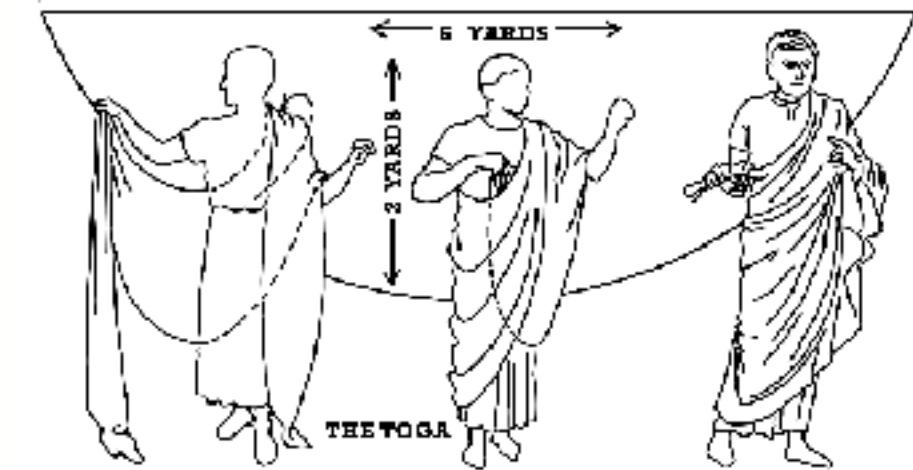
Becoming an adult



When a boy was about 14 years old, usually after he had finished his basic education, a ceremony was held at which he formally became an adult. With family and friends he went to the *forum*, where he discarded his childhood clothes and *bulla*. He was given an adult's *toga* and his first shave, and was registered as a citizen. A party was held to celebrate.

toga virilis, or toga pura

- An unadorned *toga* in the off-white colour of the undyed wool that was worn by adult male citizens.
- At around 14-17 years old, a boy would lay aside his *bullā* and *toga praetexta*, assumed the 'manly toga', and became a citizen.



The Toga of Manhood

In the Roman calendar, 17 March was marked as a public holiday, for the celebration of the festival of *Liberalia* (in honour of the god of fertility). On a public holiday, when public and legal business was not transacted, the Forum was quieter than usual, and an observer in mid-March would have been almost certain to witness a series of short private ceremonies. Small groups of people entered the Forum, each escorting a boy, aged about 15, who was the central figure at the ceremony. The boy, looking dignified and perhaps a little nervous, wore a new plain white toga. His retinue was composed of relatives and family friends – some may have been magistrates or people of influence, who would themselves normally expect to be accompanied as they came down to the Forum. Passers-by saluted and called out greetings to the boy, and some shook his hand.

Volunteer to read please

For the boy this was the most important day of his life so far. For formal occasions, until now, he had worn the 'toga of youth' (*toga praetexta*), which carried a purple hem like that worn by the senior magistrates. But at home that morning he had put on the plain white 'toga of manhood' (*toga virilis*), and had dedicated to the household gods his old toga and the lucky charm (*bullā*) which he had worn round his neck since the day he had been given his name, nine days after he was born. Then he set out, with his father, uncles and friends, for the Forum, to be registered as a full citizen, and to have his name placed on the roll of his tribe. From there the party moved to the Capitol, to offer a sacrifice, and then home again for a family celebration. Boyhood had been left behind, and another Roman had entered public life as a young man.



A bulla.

Volunteer to read please

Cut & put in the correct order!

The father and son pair would then return to the household to join the rest of the family for additional sacrifices and a family party.

Between the ages of 14 and 17, the boy stood with his family before the hearth. This ceremony was conducted by the boy's father.

Afterwards, the boy would enjoy his new status as an adult. The wearing of the *toga virilis* was a moment of pride both for the youth and his family. It was an important coming of age ceremony throughout Rome.

There was then a procession to the Forum. Sometimes the procession occurred in conjunction with the feast of *Liberalia*, which was associated with Bacchus. During this procession, a phallus was paraded through the town and accompanied by bawdy songs.

Candidates would then offer a sacrifice at the temple of Jupiter Optatus Maximus. Inside the temple, they were introduced publicly as citizens (*cives*) and had their three names entered into the register of family groups.

He dedicated his *bulla* to the *Lares* (household gods) and laid aside his *toga praetexta* to show his separation from childhood.

He then donned the *toga virilis*.

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Mothers looked after babies incl. nursing them

As soon as Cato had a son, only some urgent business of state prevented him from being present when his wife bathed the baby and dressed him in his swaddling clothes. The mother nursed the baby herself and often nursed the children of the slaves as well so that, by bringing them up with her own son, they might be friends. As soon as the boy showed signs of understanding, Cato himself took charge of him and taught him to read, even though he had a clever slave called Chilo who was a teacher and had several pupils. Cato himself said that he didn't think it was right for his son to be scolded by a slave or have his ears tweaked if he was slow in learning, and he thought it wrong for his son to be indebted to a slave for such a priceless thing as his education. He not only sought for his son to hurl the javelin, fight in armour, and ride a horse, but also to box, to endure the heat and cold, and to swim in the waves and currents of the river. He also wrote out his *History* himself so that his son could learn about his country's ancient traditions at home. He also says that he did not use bad language in the presence of his son.

Fathers could be involved in boys' education

Teachers could hit children

Slaves often taught children

Fathers would teach boys the javelin, fighting, and horse riding.

It was odd for boys to learn survival skills.

Education

Many poorer children never went to school as they needed to work. Rich children attended a *ludus* (elementary school) when they were about six.

Most children left at the age of 11, and had any further education at home. But girls often began to prepare for marriage at this age.



As we have seen, baby girls were at more risk of being exposed by their parents than baby boys. If a girl was accepted, then a different path lay ahead of her than that of a boy. Although some girls did receive basic education in reading, writing and arithmetic from the *litterator*, they were also taught 'women's work' at home – learning how to spin and to weave, to cook and to manage the house.



Girls' Education

- Girls from good families would attend the *ludi* with boys.
- When they could read and write, girls would be taught at home by a tutor who could teach them Greek and Latin literature.
- Girls learned needle work, dancing, singing, playing the lyre, and how to run a home.

Extension: What does this education tell us about women's roles in society?

A Roman boy started his primary education at the age of six or seven. If he was the son of a rich man, he might have a private tutor at home. If not, he went to school (**ludus**) where he learned to read, write and count under the guidance of the elementary teacher or **litterator**, as he was called.

The school was usually run by a single teacher (**magister ludi**) in a small room next to a shop or house.

4 : GROWING UP AND GOING TO SCHOOL

For the first six years of life a Roman child stayed at home and was looked after by his mother and father, or by a nurse and slaves.

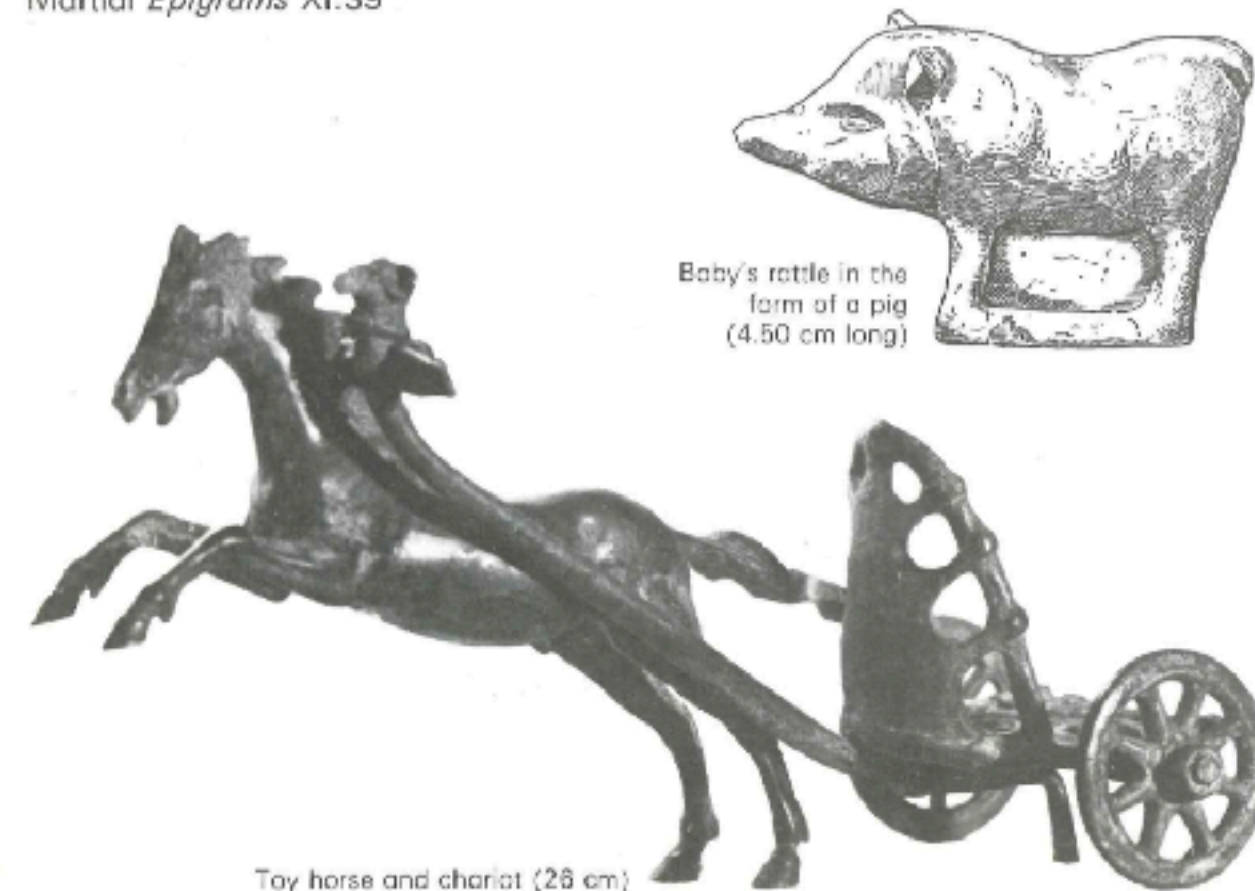
In one of his poems Martial is talking to a slave who looked after him when he was small.

You used to rock my cradle. Charidemus; you were my guardian and constant companion.

Martial *Epigrams* XI.39

As a baby, Martial probably played with a toy animal with pebbles inside that rattled, like the one in the top picture, or with a toy chariot like the one on the left, which was found in Britain.

Girls played with rag dolls like the one here (also found in Britain), and with dolls made of wood or bone with arms and legs that could move.



Baby's rattle in the form of a pig (4.50 cm long)

Toy horse and chariot (28 cm)

Rag doll (17 cm tall)

The school day

Most schools only had one room, on the ground floor of a house or behind a shop. There was usually only one class, of about 12 children. Teachers were often Greek slaves. The Romans respected the knowledge and learning of the Greeks. Remains of pupils' exercises, and descriptions by Roman writers of their education, tell us about the school day.

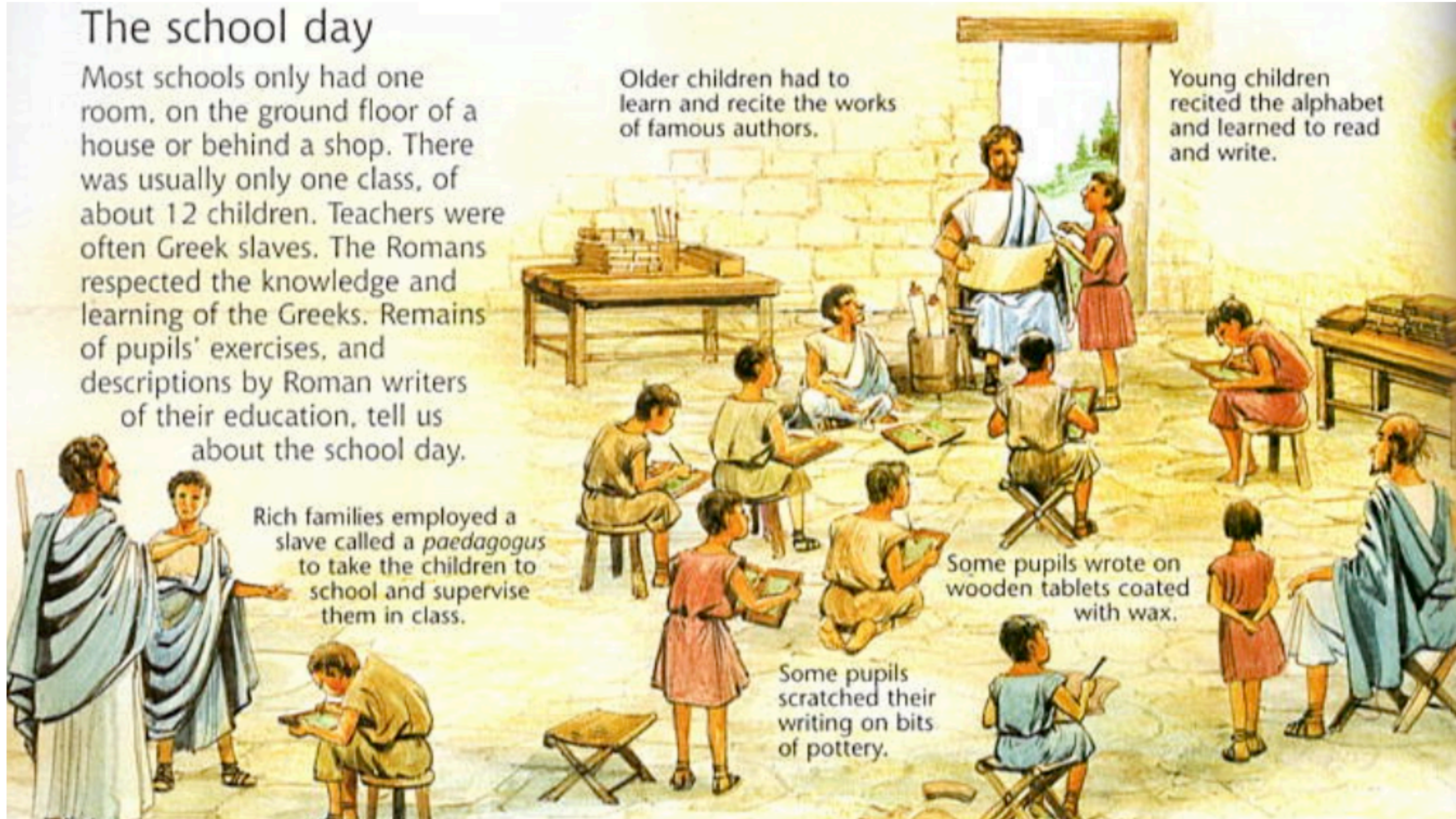
Older children had to learn and recite the works of famous authors.

Young children recited the alphabet and learned to read and write.

Rich families employed a slave called a *paedagogus* to take the children to school and supervise them in class.

Some pupils wrote on wooden tablets coated with wax.

Some pupils scratched their writing on bits of pottery.





School scene showing pupil arriving late for school. What is the boy on the far right carrying in his left hand?

The grammaticus

Around the age of 11 some boys went to a teacher known as a *grammaticus*, who taught such subjects as history, philosophy, geography, music and astronomy. One of the most important subjects was Greek, because Greek culture had such a big influence on Roman life. Works of Greek and Roman literature were studied in great detail. Greek was also necessary for Romans because most of the best books on other subjects were written by Greeks in the Greek language.

Pupils were expected to be able to imitate the styles of famous authors.



Further education

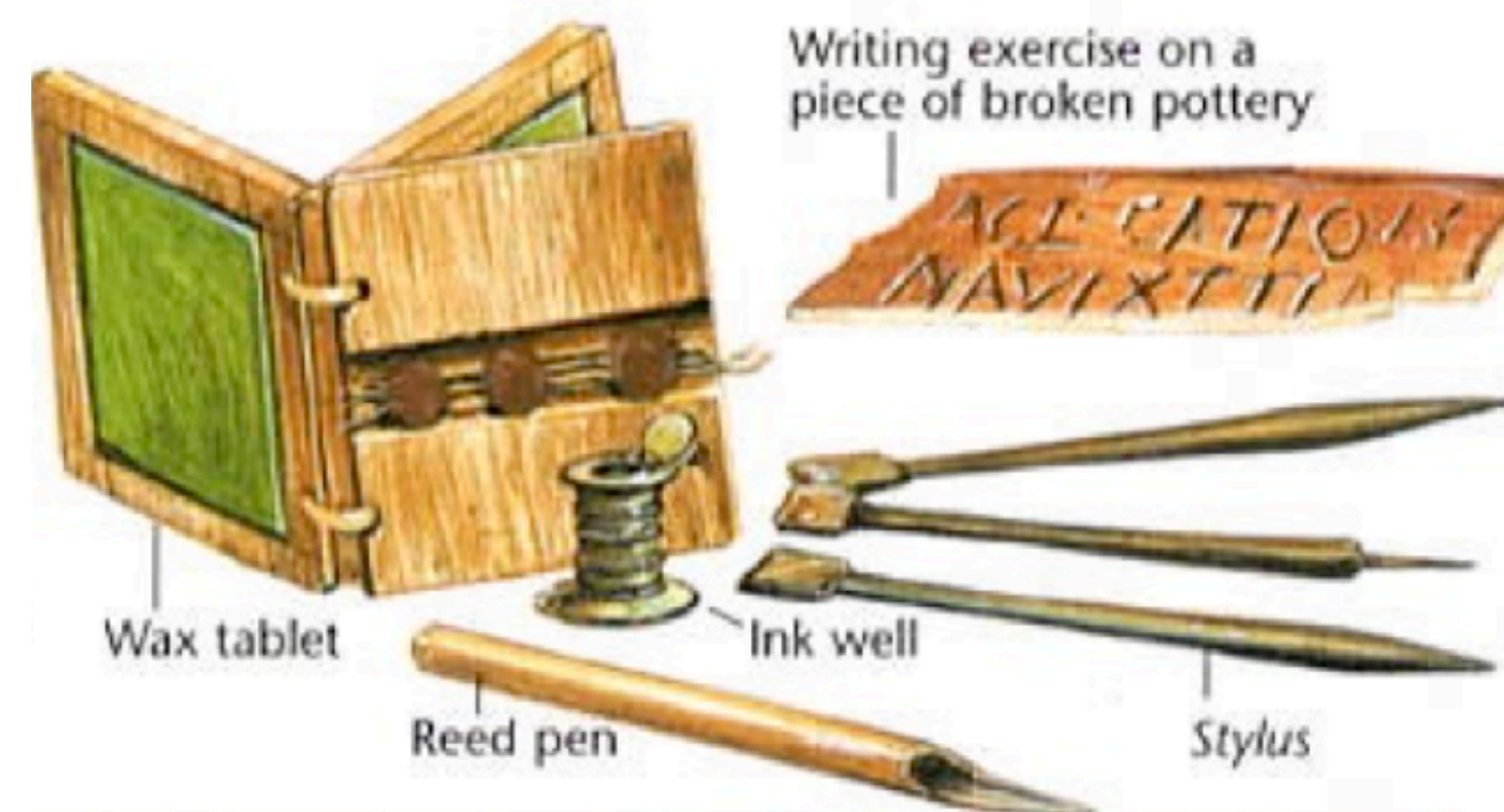
The job of the *grammaticus* was to prepare the student for study with a teacher of public speaking, known as a *rhetor*. Anyone who wanted to be a politician or lawyer had to learn to speak in public. This training began when a youth was 13 or 14, and could take many years; Cicero, a famous speaker, continued his studies until he was nearly 30. Only the wealthiest people could afford to give their children this education, so few poor people became politicians or lawyers.

The *rhetor* taught his pupils how to write and present speeches properly.



Writing

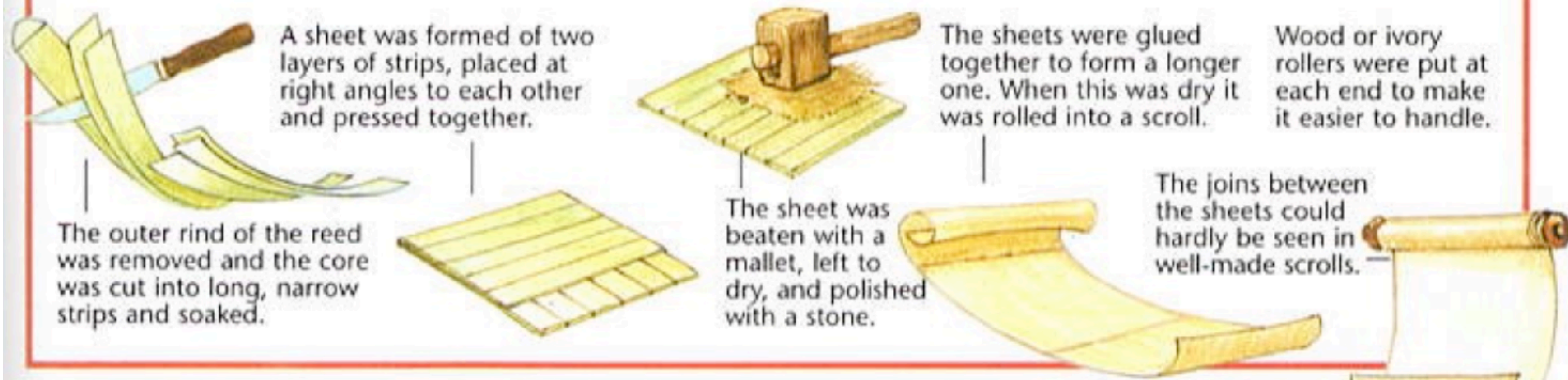
Pupils wrote by scratching on panels of wood coated with wax, using a metal pen called a *stylus*. When the tablet was used up, the wax was scraped off and more was applied. Some children wrote on pieces of broken pottery. Older pupils used pens made from reeds or metal.



Papyrus

In Roman times paper made from wood pulp hadn't been invented. Instead, a material made from an Egyptian reed called papyrus was used.

The Roman method of making papyrus paper, and joining it into scrolls, is shown in the pictures below.





Plenary

- Would you rather receive the education of a girl or a boy? Why?