

Latin Y10

Component 3: Roman Civilisation > Roman Family Life

Wednesday 22nd March 2023

LO: to develop understanding of Roman children's education

Wednesday 22nd March 2023



Starter

What are the various stages of childhood depicted here in this Roman relief sculpture?



Relief on a sarcophagus, representing the various stages of childhood

Schools in ancient Rome

Education

In ancient Rome, education was entirely optional, unlike the modern day. If a parent decided that he wanted his son to be educated, he would find the teacher himself and arrange lessons with him. Daughters were often not formally educated at all: they would learn the essentials for married life from their mothers.

Many Romans, however, felt that education was essential for a good career for their sons and went to great financial expense to ensure that they had the best education.

The school itself

The schoolroom was generally nothing more than a simple room hired by the teacher, perhaps at the back of a shop in the forum. It might be cut off from outside noise by a simple curtain.

The pupils sat on wooden stools, while the teacher sat on a high-backed chair known as a 'cathedra'. The room might be enlivened with busts of famous men.



This roughly sketched painting shows a school in session in the colonnade of the forum at Pompeii. On the right a boy is supported on another's back, for a beating.



Which person in this picture is the teacher? How can you tell?

What furniture is lacking in the room which you would expect to find in a modern classroom?

The School Day

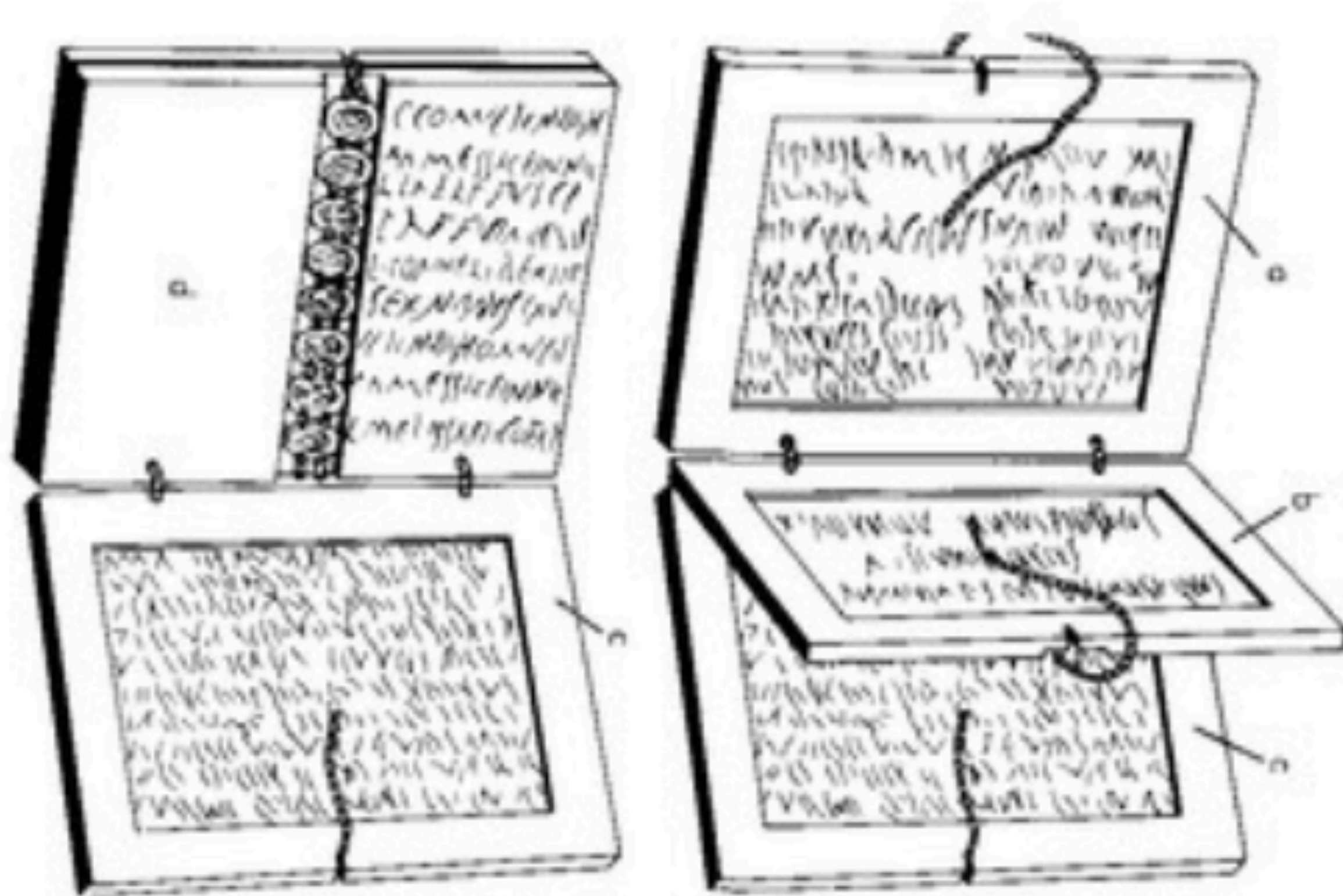
The school day began early. If pupils came from a wealthy family, they would be accompanied to school by a 'paedagogus' (a slave responsible for overseeing the children's schoolwork and for carrying their equipment to school). Lessons would continue until about lunchtime and then students would go home for a quick lunch. There were more lessons after lunch, followed by a trip to the baths.



tabulae and stili.

School Equipment

Unlike the modern day, the equipment used by teachers and pupils was very basic.



What do you think these were used for? How did they work? What would be the modern equivalent?

What other writing materials are shown here? What would be their modern equivalent? Why do you think that Roman school children would use this less than the pictures before?



Writing materials

The materials that Quintus used for writing were rather different from ours. Frequently he wrote on **tabulae** (wooden tablets) coated with a thin film of wax; and he inscribed the letters on the wax surface with a thin stick of metal, bone or ivory. This stick was called a **stilus**. The end opposite the writing point was flat so that it could be used to rub out mistakes and make the wax smooth again. Several tablets were strung together to make a little writing-book. At other times he wrote with ink on papyrus, a material that looked rather like modern paper but was rougher in texture. It was manufactured from the fibres of the papyrus reed that grew along the banks of the River Nile in Egypt. For writing on papyrus he used either a reed or a goose-quill sharpened and split at one end like the modern pen-nib. Ink was made from soot and resin or other gummy substances, forming a paste that was thinned by adding water.



*Papyrus rolls, a double inkwell (for red and black ink) and a quill pen.
From a Pompeian painting.*



A school scene. A pupil arrives to find his classmates already at work. Most children in fact sat on benches – not these rather comfortable looking chairs

Schools and Education

Equally important for the youth who had just come of age was the fact that at this time he had just finished his course at the school of the *grammaticus*. A son from a wealthy Roman family was carefully brought up and thoroughly educated. As a child he was looked after by a nurse, under the supervision of his mother, but as he grew older his father took a greater interest in his development, his skill at riding and games, and his willingness to stand up for himself. From his father, too, he learnt a great deal about the achievements of his ancestors: Rome, it seemed, would not have been the same without them. Just before he began to attend school, at seven, a boy was entrusted to a Greek slave as a personal attendant (*paedagogus*). The *paedagogus*, who became his constant companion, was responsible for his behaviour and appearance, and began to teach him to speak Greek. Sometimes he acted as a personal tutor, and taught his pupil to read, write and do simple arithmetic. However, many young Romans of good family went to an elementary school (*ludus*) of their parents' choice, where they were taught these same subjects by a schoolmaster (*ludi magister*).

Few schoolboys will have looked back with any pleasure on their first five years in school. They probably envied those of their friends who had been given private tuition at home. Almost any room served as a classroom – some were open to the street at one end, and the noise from outside was a constant distraction. The pupils sat on wooden benches, without desks, holding their wax writing-tablets on their knees. From dawn to mid-afternoon, with a break for lunch, they were compelled to practise writing, and to recite the names of letters, chanting the alphabet backwards and forwards, and singing out their multiplication tables for hours on end.

There were good teachers and bad. The bad ones, not surprisingly, made a splendid target for the satirists:

You rascally schoolmaster, hated by the girls and boys in your class, why do you disturb your neighbours? Though the cock has not yet crowed, you shatter the silence with your savage threats and cruel blows.

(Martial, *Epigrams*, 9.68)

That was what Martial thought, while Horace nicknamed his teacher 'the swiper'. But perhaps it was unreasonable, as a wiser Roman once remarked, to expect perfection from a schoolmaster when he was paid for one year what a successful charioteer could earn in an afternoon.



A wax tablet with a schoolboy's exercise in Greek. The master has written the top two lines and the child has copied them below.

After elementary school came the school of the *grammaticus*. Many children left school before this secondary stage, which involved the study of grammar and literature. The work was hard and demanding, and must often have been unbearably tedious. The great works of Greek and Latin literature were read and carefully analysed, details of grammar and idiom and figures of speech studied and understood. The student was frequently required to read aloud, to answer questions on style, metre and content, and to learn long passages by heart. So great was the concentration on literary studies that there was little room in the curriculum for history, mathematics or finding out about other lands and peoples. But enthusiastic pupils could at least find a challenge in the exercises in speech-making which formed the final part of the *grammaticus*' course. These, at any rate, were of practical value for the future.

Higher Education

After the *grammaticus* the young Roman faced the final period of his education, and he would know what to expect. He was now to study rhetoric – the art of public speaking – under the guidance of a *rhetor*. He would know, too, some of the details of the syllabus, and the exercises which would give him practice in composition; writing speeches, for example, in praise of famous men, or of characters in history, composing attacks on Rome's enemies past or present, arguing for or against a particular point of view. He would have to learn how to write a speech, how to research and arrange his subject matter, and how to deliver a speech – what tone of voice and diction to use and what gestures to make. When his training was completed he would be able to undertake simple cases in the courts, or to deliver a speech on a public occasion.

Science and technical subjects

We have not so far mentioned the teaching of science and technical subjects in Roman schools. It is true that the Greeks had made important discoveries in mathematics and some aspects of physics; it is also true that the Romans were experienced in such things as the methods of surveying and the use of concrete in building. But these things played little part in school work. The purpose of ordinary Roman schools was to teach those things which were thought to be most necessary for civilised living: the ability to read and write, a knowledge of simple arithmetic, the appreciation of fine literature and the ability to speak and argue convincingly. Science and advanced mathematics were taught to only a few students whose parents were interested and wealthy enough to pay the fees of a specialist teacher, nearly always a Greek. Technical skills were learnt by becoming an apprentice in a trade or business.

Teachers in Ancient Rome

There were three different stages of education, just as we have in the modern day. Pupils would learn different material and skills in each of the separate stages.

What were the teachers like?

Martial, a poet known for his satirical exaggeration, gives us the impression that school teachers could be fierce and quick to anger. However, surely not all teachers could have been like that?!

'What have you to do with us, wicked schoolmaster, hated by boys and girls alike? The crested cockerels have not yet broken the silence and you are already thundering on with your cruel, continuous roaring and beatings. Bronze echoes just as loudly as you when the anvil is struck, and the shouting rages more gently in the amphitheatre when the supporters cheer on the winning gladiator. We, the neighbours, do not ask to sleep all night. It is a small matter to stay awake, but serious to stay awake all night. Dismiss your pupils. Are you willing to receive as much to be quiet, chatterbox, as you do to shout?' (Epigrams IX. 68)

	Litterator	Grammaticus	Rhetor
Age of students			
Subject(s) taught			
Skills learnt by students			
Tasks students performed in class			

What about girls' education?

The education of their daughters caused Roman fathers less anxiety. After all, it was not necessary for them to distinguish themselves in public life. But most girls from good families attended elementary school with the boys, under the supervision of a nursemaid. When they could read and write well enough, their education was continued at home by a tutor, who gave them a good grounding in Greek and Roman literature. They also learnt needlework, and to dance, to sing and play the lyre, while at the same time gaining experience in the running of a home, directing the household slaves and supervising the kitchens.

Homework

Due Monday 27th March

- Answer the following questions

Revision of Roman Schools

The basics

- 1) Was education compulsory or optional in ancient Rome?
- 2) Which part of the family would probably not have been educated?
- 3) Why was this?
- 4) Who decided on the teachers?
- 5) Where were 'schools' often located?

Evidence of schools



- 6) What does this picture tell us about the scale of the school?
- 7) What does this picture tell us about the facilities of the school?
- 8) Which figure is the teacher?
- 9) How can you tell?
- 10) Why is the person on the right carrying such a small bag?

School equipment



- 11) What item of equipment is shown in this picture?
- 12) How would it have been used?
- 13) What would be the modern equivalent?
- 14) What other items of equipment might have been used by the pupils?
- 15) Why would they have been used rarely?

The stages of education

- 16) What age of pupils would the 'litterarius' have taught?

- 17) What skills would he teach his pupils?

- 18) What age of pupils would the 'grammaticus' have taught?

- 19) What skills would he teach his pupils?

- 20) What skills, essential for public life, did the 'rhetor' teach?

A Comparison of Roman and Modern Schools

SIMILARITIES

DIFFERENCES

1 In the following questions, tick against the correct answer:

a) What was the name of the teacher who taught at the first stage of education?

A ludi magister

B paedagogus

C rhetor

[1]

b) What was the name of the teacher who taught the second stage of education?

A grammaticus

B Homer

C paedagogus

[1]

c) Which language would a Roman boy learn at school?

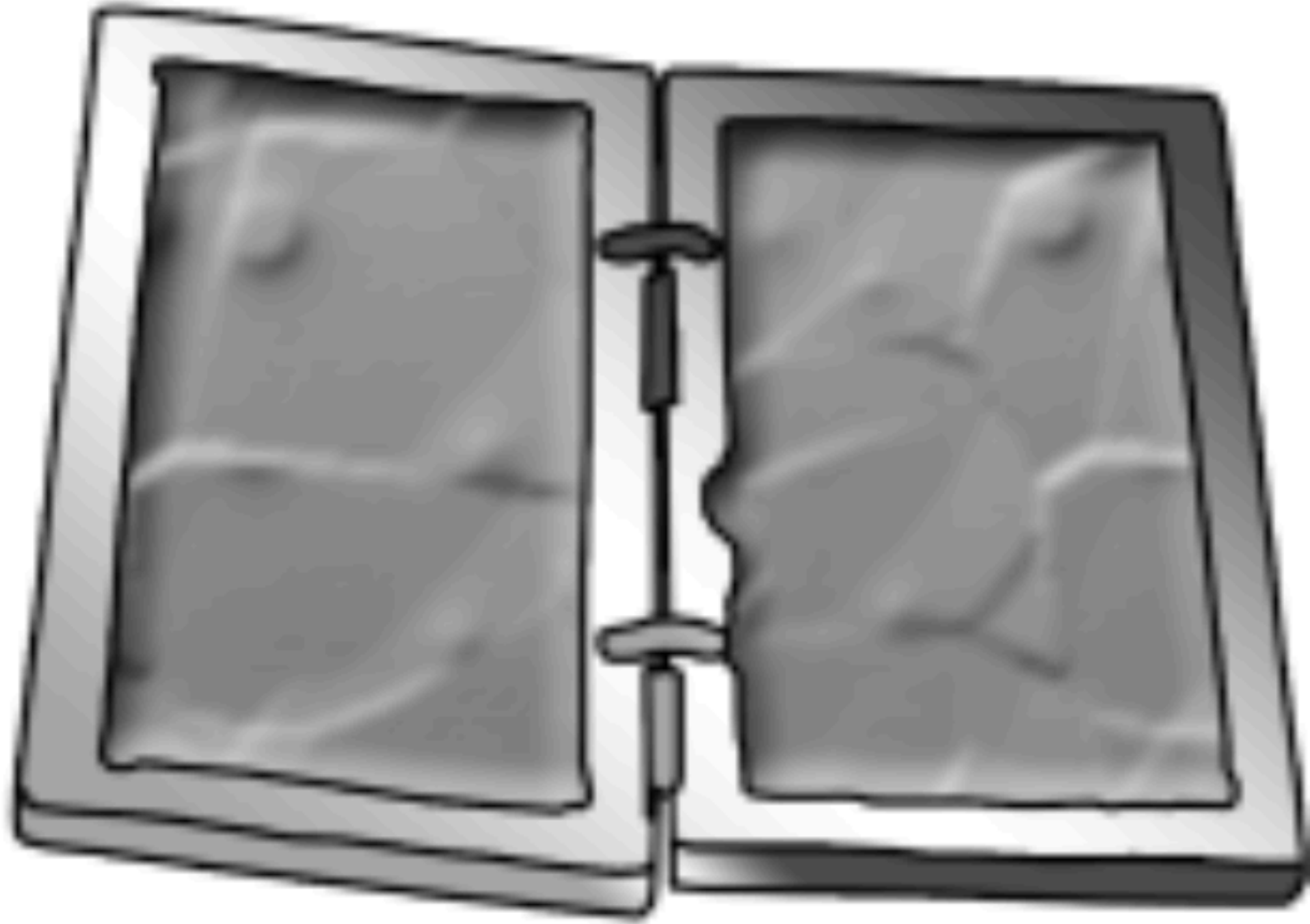
A English

B French

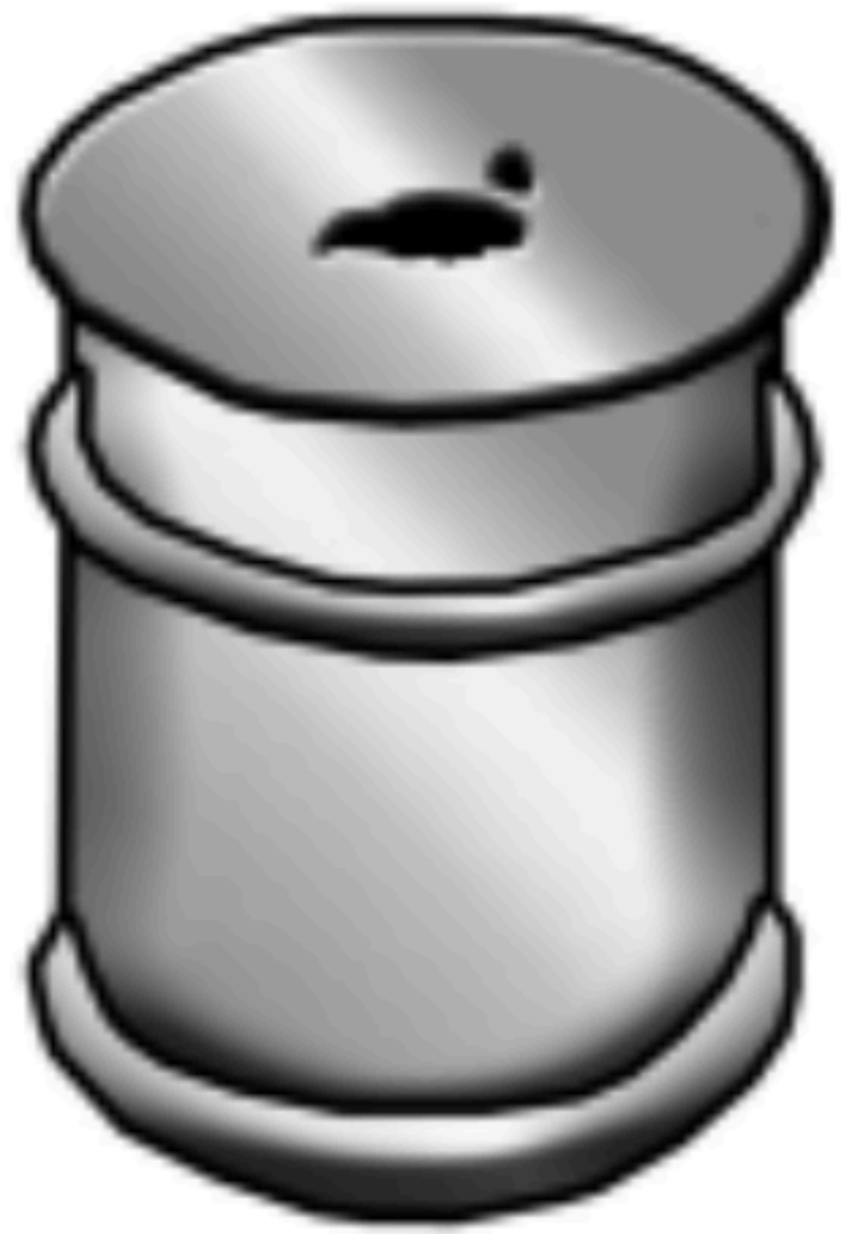
C Greek

[1]

2 In the boxes below label in English the objects and say how they were used in Roman writing.



A :



B:

.....

.....

.....



C:

.....

.....

.....

3 Here are some statements about Roman schools.

Tick the correct statements. There are three correct statements.

- A A rhetor taught public speaking
- B Schools closed at the weekend
- C Girls never went to school
- D Boys studied Virgil and Horace
- E Schools were paid for by the state
- F History and Geography were taught

[3]

4 Study this picture and label two items/people



A

B

C

D

Complete the following written task on Roman Education:

- **Imagine you have returned to Roman times.**
- **You have been to school with a rich Roman boy.**
- **What did you do at the school?**
- **What things were different and what were the same?**

You could include details about:

- Roman teachers
- Subjects taught
- Books and writing materials
- Discipline

You should write approximately 400 words.