

Family life in Rome

Life for women in Roman times was often hard. Mother was less important than father in the family. Father had the power of life or death over everyone. When a new baby was born it would be laid at its father's feet - if the father picked the baby up it would live, but if he ignored the baby it would be taken away to die. Women were expected to run the home, cook meals, and raise children. If they were wealthy, women were lucky; they had slaves to do the work.

Many girls were married at the age of 14. Marriages were often arranged between families. A man could divorce his wife if she did not give birth to a son. Many women died young (in their 30s), because childbirth could be dangerous, and diseases were common.

Most children in Roman times did not go to school. Only quite rich families could afford to pay a teacher. Most schools were in towns. Not many girls went to school, but some were taught at home by tutors, who were often educated slaves. Boys from rich families learned history, maths, and literature at school, to prepare them for jobs in the army or government. In poor families, girls and boys had to work, helping their parents.

Roman children had some toys very like ones we play with today - such as toy soldiers, rattles, balls, doll's houses, carts and pull-along animals on wheels.

Even poor children had board games, using pebbles for counters, and wooden dolls. Some dolls had moveable arms and legs. Roman children had ivory letters to practise their spellings with. Favourite Roman pets were dogs, birds and monkeys.



1. Who was the most important person in a Roman family? **Father**
2. Give two reasons why a woman in Roman times might die at an early age. **Child-birth / diseases**
3. How did richer boys prepare for working as an adult? **Learned history, maths and literature**
4. In what way do you think a father had too much power over his baby children?
He could choose to let them die
5. Do you think Romans preferred girls or boys? **Boys**
6. What did poor children have to do instead of learning with a teacher? **Help their parents**
7. How did Roman children practise spelling? **Ivory letters**
8. Which type of Roman pet would be considered very unusual today? **monkey**
9. How old, in general, were girls when they were married? **14**
10. Name four Roman toys.
Toy soldiers, rattles, balls, doll's houses, carts and pull-along animals on wheels