

What was life like for children in Roman Britain?

Discipline for children was very firm in Roman times as it was thought to make them strong, to improve their character and, for boys, to prepare them for life in the army.

Before the Roman invasion, most British children learnt about their histories and their tribal customs through stories and songs shared with their families around a fire at night. But once the Romans were here then, for the posh kids at any rate, you had to learn to read and write. And what they were learning to read and write was, of course, Latin.

This is a wax tablet and it's what school children in Roman Britain would have used when they were learning to read and write.

It's really cleverly designed, because it's basically just two bits of wax put on top of some wood, and they're joined together with a bit of string or leather here. And this doesn't look like it, but this is a Roman-style pen - it's just a bit of pointy metal. And the very clever thing is that you could write down your word, and I'm going to write a word, "Londinium", which is what the Romans called London. But, if you made a mistake, then you could rub it out with this flat end of the pen.

So, I'm writing Londinium and it will look like I've made a mistake at the end, because when they were writing capitals, the Romans didn't use a U, like we use, they used a V instead. So, it looks like I've written Londinivm, but I haven't. I've actually written the Roman name for London - Londinium.

Some girls were educated, but it was mainly the boys. And if you were poor or a slave, then it was very, very unlikely that you'd get the chance to be taught at all.

Those children privileged enough to receive an education learned reading, writing and maths, as well as other subjects, such as how to speak in front of an audience, which would prepare them for important jobs, like being in the Roman army.