

Read this and check with an adult if needed:

## ROMAN TOYS

Even though it's been thousands of years since the Ancient Romans were around, one thing's for sure: toys are just as popular now as they were back then.

The children of Ancient Rome had many toys and games they used to entertain and amuse themselves, and their discovery by archaeologists has taught us a lot about how the Romans lived.

When a child was just born, they would be given something called a *crepundia*, which was sort of like the Ancient Roman version of a rattle.

The *crepundia* was a brightly colored necklace decorated with lots of small ornaments, in the shape of flowers, swords, axes, or suns. The noise the necklace made when moved was supposed to be fun for the baby, as were the colors it was made from.

For toddlers, the toys became a little more advanced. "Pull toys" were built for children who got bored of their *crepundia*, like little wooden horses with wheels, or toy chariots with clay gladiators to drive them.

It's likely that these kinds of toys served the same role as matchbox cars or Hot Wheels nowadays. They were usually made from wood or a type of stone called terracotta, but most commonly wood. Terracotta was quite fragile, and wouldn't have been a good choice for a child's toy.

Dolls were, of course, very popular with children of all ages, young or old. They were usually made with fabric/stuffing that was wrapped in terracotta or wood.

It's unknown whether it was acceptable for boys to play with dolls at the time, but we do know that they were considered more commonly a girl's toy.

On the day of a girl's wedding, there was a ceremony where she would have to sacrifice her toys (including her dolls) to the gods as she embraced her new role as a wife.

Older boys and girls would use their imaginations to play as much as they would physical toys. Poorer children used things like rocks, pebbles, acorns, pinecones, and animal bones to play games they made up themselves.

Marbles were used too, in much the same way they are today. Hide-and-seek was a popular game among Roman children, and most variations on the game of "Tag" (like Tip The Can/Kick The Can) can be traced back to Ancient Rome.

Toys used by older children were typically more expensive, and therefore less common – for example, hobby horses, balls, and yo-yos were common among boys and girls.

An example of a toy used mainly by boys was the slingshot. This toy was seen as good practice for when the boy would learn to hunt.

Wooden swords were used by children for the same reason; because they were fun, and because they gave the boys fighting experience.

When the weather was warm, children would go swimming, either in a nearby river or in a specially built swimming pool. All Roman children learned to swim as part of their education.

But children didn't stop playing games altogether when they became adults; the games just changed.

There's evidence to suggest that gambling was a common hobby for adults in Ancient Rome, and examples of dice made from animal bones have been dug up by archaeologists at dig sites.

Early Roman board games have also been discovered, made with stone and chalk, that seem to be an early version of the game we know as "backgammon" today.

### QUESTIONS:

- Name one toy that was commonly used by girls, and one which was commonly used by boys.  
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- Where did Roman children go to swim?  
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- What was a common hobby for adults in Ancient Rome?  
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- When did girls have to burn or give away their toys?  
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- What was a baby's rattle called in Ancient Rome?  
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- What did toddlers mostly play with?  
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- What were dolls often made from?

**Extension = investigate online and draw/label some Roman toys**