

Roman Education (Based on *Stories of Daily Life from the Roman World* by Eleanor Dickey)

This could lead into a discussion of Roman education, and what “school” was like for the young Romans.

- Each student had an individual educational experience. School was a particular privilege for the wealthy.
- Homeschooling was common, and poorer students may not have been taught “formally” at all.
- A school was a large room or outdoor space with a main teacher and one or more assistants. There may have been seats, such as benches or a chair, or students may have even sat on the ground. No desks- book stands were used when teacher was showing a passage for reading, writing or recitation.
- Most of the students were boys, some girls- particularly at the primary level.
- Teachers were mainly men, but evidence of few women.
- Teachers were paid tuition by father at the end of each teaching period. Often the father would come to observe his son’s progress before he paid the teacher.
- Seems that there was no particular start time to a school day. Students would show up when they did, early in the morning, formally greet their teacher and fellow students, and begin their individualized lessons.
- Students came to school with a slave, who carried their school materials (wax tablet, stylus) and a paedagogus, a slave who led a student to and from school to ensure safety, as well as directed the child’s daily activities.
- There were three main types of assignments: reading, writing and memorization.
- Reading was a much more difficult skill to master in ancient times than in modern times. The idea of children’s books did not exist in ancient times. Children learned to read from archaic poetry and difficult ancient texts written by authors such as Virgil and Cicero, which were full of obscure words and complicated grammar.
- Combined with a lack of suitable children’s reading material, books were not common. Paper had not been invented, and papyrus was expensive. “Books” were written on scrolls, which were sheets of papyrus glued together and rolled up.
- The conventions of ancient books were to leave no spaces between words. There was no capital and lower-case distinction. There was no paragraph structure, and no punctuation.

Lesson Idea to Emulate How Roman Students Read Text

1. Provide students with the attached text of *The Cat in the Hat* by Dr. Seuss (no spaces, no punctuation, no paragraph or sentence structure). See if they can figure out what the text is and what story it is. (See below for selection.)
2. Then give them a harder text written in the same way, perhaps from a book that they are reading in English class concurrently. As I would most likely do this lesson with my 7th grade, I have included a text of *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. (See below for selection.)
3. Then give them a selection of simple Latin, from your textbook or novella that they are reading. Perhaps even have it handwritten as well as typed, so that students can see the difficulty of reading handwriting on top of no spacing, no punctuation and no paragraph structure. (The sample provided is from a Latin novella that my students read in 7th grade or Upper School Latin

I, *Piso Perturbatus* by Lance Piantaggini.) Also, you could handwrite (or have multiple people handwrite) this text so that you can discuss the further layer of trying to decipher someone's handwriting, on top of the other difficulties. (See below for selection.)

4. To take it a step further, you could show them a sample of an actual text of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Have students discuss the difficulties of learning to read in ancient times vs. modern times.

THE SUN DID NOT SHINE IT WAS TOO
WET TO PLAY SO WE SAT IN THE HOU
SE ALL THAT COLD COLD WET DAY I
SAT THERE WITH SALLY WE SAT TH
ERE WET TWO AND I SAID HOW I WISH
WE HAD SOMETHING TO DO TOO WE
TO GO OUT AND TOO COLD TO PLAY
BALLS SO WE SAT IN THE HOUSE WE D
ID NOTHING AT ALL SO ALL WE COU
LD DO WAS TO SIT SIT SIT SIT AND W
E DID NOT LIKE IT NOT ONE LITTLE B
IT

MAYCOMB WAS AN OLD TOWN BUT IT
T WAS A TIRED OLD TOWN WHEN I FI
RST KNEW IT IN RAINY WEATHER T
HE STREET TURNED TO REDSLOP
GRASS GREW ON THE SIDEWALKS
THE COURTHOUSES AGGED IN THE
SQUARES SOMEHOW IT WAS HOTTE
R THEN A BLACK DOG SUFFERED ON
A SUMMERS DAY BONY MULE SHIT
CHED TO HOVER CARTS FLICKED
FLIES IN THE SWELTERING SHADE
OF THE LIVE OAKS ON THE SQUARE
MENS STIFF COLLARS WILTED BY N
INE IN THE MORNING LADIES BATH
ED BEFORE NOON AFTER THEIR TH
REE O'CLOCK NAPS AND BY NIGHT F
ALL WERE LIKE SOFT TEACAKES W
ITH FROSTINGS OF SWEAT AND SW
EET TALCUM

PISOESTPUERPISOPUERPECULIA
RISESTPISONINONPLACETNEGOT
IUMPISONINEGOTIUMESTCURRE
REPISONIPUGNAREESTNEGOTIU
MPISONINEGOTIUMESTQUAERER
ECIBUMCOQUERECIBUMQUOQUE
ESTNEGOTIUMPISONIPISONINEG
OTIUMESTQUAEREREETCOQUER
EETCONSUMERECIBUMPISONINO
NPLACETNEGOTIUM