

Roman Wax Tablets (R-WT)

This set includes two double-sided wax tablets to explore the Roman writing system, record keeping and the importance of written communication. The wax tablets were used with a stylus to scratch letters into the wax. They are a rich source of evidence about life in Roman Britain.



Questions you could ask children about the artefacts

Initial Discussion

- What is this object?
- Does it resemble anything the children have seen?
- What do you think the item was used for and by whom?
- Does anyone know what it is called?

Collect any other questions the children might have about the artefacts and display them as you try to find the answers through your learning sessions.

Other questions to consider:

- Where does the object come from?
- Who might have made this object? And how were they made?
- Why were they made?
- **What do the objects tell us about Roman life?** *This last question can be returned to at the end of the investigation.*

All About the Artefacts

Wax Tablet and stylus

The wax tablets are hollowed pieces of wood filled with wax. The stylus may have been made of metal such as bronze or wood. They were pointed at one end to write in the wax, and then flat on the other end to erase the writing.

Romans would use the wax tablets to make lists, leave messages, write letters and keep records. You could erase writing by smoothing over the wax using the blunt end of the stylus.

The most famous find of these tablets in England was found at the fort of Vindolanda near Hadrian's Wall. Although all the wax from the tablets had long since gone thin slices of wood with indentations on had been preserved by the waterlogged ground. They showed evidence of shopping lists and letters such as the following-

"Claudia Severa to Lepidina, Greetings! A warm invitation to you, sister, for the third before the Ides of September, my birthday. Come, and make the day enjoyable by your presence".

Evidence of the Romans written work can be found on stone, papyrus, pottery, tiles and tablets. We know that formal education in Rome began at the age of seven for the middle and upper classes.

For ideas and inspiration on ways of using the artefacts see our Learning with Artefacts free download.

Reference Websites:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/class-clips-video/articles/zynj6rd>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/zwmpfg8>