

# Education

Private fee-paying schools existed in Greece by about 500 BC. No law required that children go to school. There were schools for girls but not many. The Greeks believed that girls could learn all they needed to know about running a household in the family home – there was no need for them to go to school.

In Athens, boys from poorer homes went to school aged seven for about three or four years to master basic **literacy**. Boys from better-off homes might go for up to ten years, starting at an earlier age and finishing later. The richer ones went with a trusted slave who made sure they stuck to their studies and reported back to their parents each day. Classes were usually small, up to twelve. Pupils who did badly were beaten with a stick.

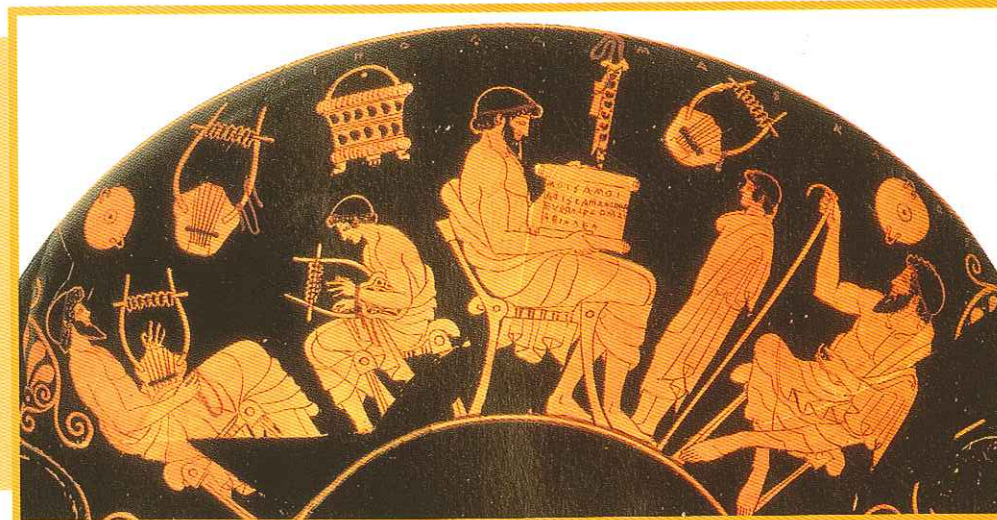
## What was taught at school?

There were three kinds of teacher. One taught reading, writing, arithmetic and literature, which meant learning long passages of poetry, particularly by the poet Homer (see page 27), by heart. Stories of the great heroes of the past were supposed to make boys want to grow up to be brave too.



Here a music teacher listens to his pupil play the pipes. The music master's lyre can be seen behind the boy's head.

This painted cup from around 500 BC shows a school scene from ancient Greece. We can see a lesson in playing the lyre (left) and reading aloud from a scroll (right).



The second was a sports coach, who supervised wrestling, gymnastics and athletics. The third was a music master who taught the **lyre**, singing and chanting rhythmic poetry. Children from poorer homes may have missed out on this sort of education. The very rich might have a tutor at home but would probably still go to the local gymnasium for sports coaching and to the music master as well. This would enable them to take part in competitions – a constant feature of school and public life. Greeks liked winners!

## Writing instruments and materials

The earliest Greek writings were scratched onto clay tablets or written on animal skins that had been scraped and stitched together as a continuous roll. By 600 BC the Greeks had begun to buy papyrus from Egypt. This was a kind of paper made from strips of pith from the reeds that grew along the river Nile. As these reeds would not grow in Greece, the Greeks were forced to go on importing the papyrus. Reed pens were used to write on it, with ink made from soot and vegetable gum. From 200 BC onwards the Greeks also began to use parchment, made from animal skins scraped as smooth as papyrus. As these materials were expensive, learners began to practise their letters in sand trays and then moved on to scratching them with a bronze or bone stylus on wax tablets, which could be melted smooth and used again.