

GROWING UP

Only one Greek child in ten learned how to read and write because most did not go to school. Girls stayed at home and learned useful skills like weaving and cooking from their mothers or from slaves. Boys from poor families had to work and earn money.

If boys did go to school, they were taken there by a slave. He stayed with them during lessons and made sure they paid attention. Boys studied reading, writing, maths and lots of poetry (adults hoped this would teach them to be brave like the heroes in the poems). They used an abacus to do sums or worked out the answers in their heads. The Greeks had no signs for numbers, so written sums were impossible.



▲ Greek parents made their children work hard, but they loved them, too. This tombstone is carved with a touching portrait of a girl who died young, and her pet dog.

◀ A Greek schoolboy (centre) stands in front of his teacher (left), who is holding a scroll with writing on it. (The Greeks did not have books.) The boy's slave sits on the right. He holds a big stick, to punish the boy if he does not learn his lessons well.

Greek children loved to play, and many of their games and toys were like ours today. They had dolls, rattles, yo-yos, dice, spinning tops, seesaws and puppets, and they played hockey, tug-of-war and blind man's buff. But some of their games were rather different. One favourite was played with the anklebones of dead sheep.

Teenagers were kept busy, so they would not misbehave. Girls were married at 12 or 14. Teenage boys were made to work or study, or they were sent to sports centres to get healthy exercise. At 18, they had to join the army for two years.



GROWING UP IN SPARTA

In Sparta, a Greek city-state, boys' lives were very hard. At seven, they were taken away from their families to live in army camps. They were kept cold and hungry, and baths were banned. They were often beaten. If they died, it proved they were too weak to survive. Spartan girls stayed at home but learned tough sports and fighting like boys.

▼ This bronze statue shows a teenage athlete from Sparta, taking part in a race. Her tunic is very short and tight, compared with other Greek female clothes (see page 17).

The Spartans believed that exercise when young would make women bear healthy children.

