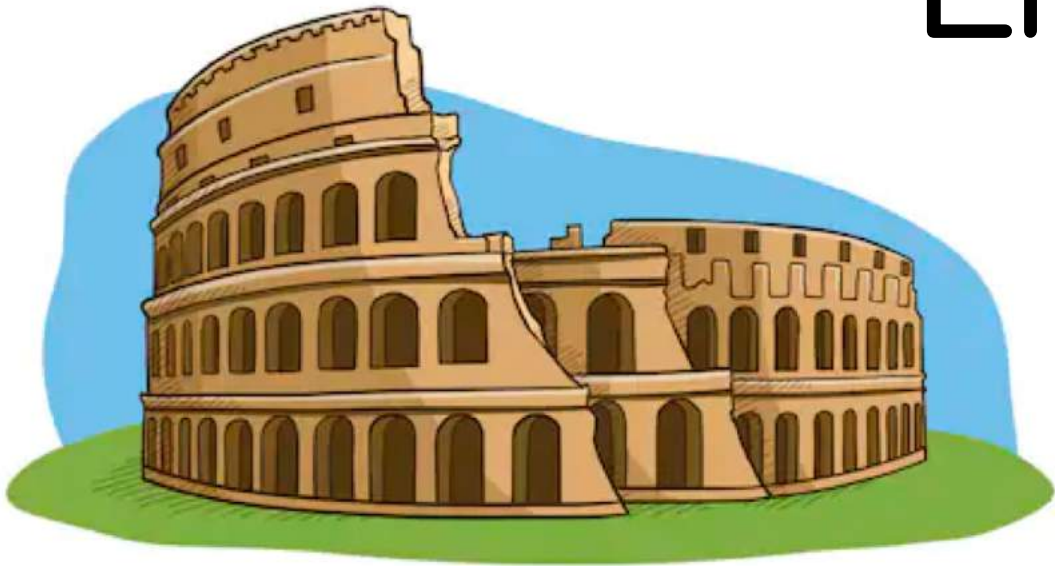


# The lives of the rich and poor in the Roman Empire



Life in ancient Rome depended very much on which social class you belonged to. Roman society was hierarchical, meaning some people were considered to be much more important than others:

**Slaves** were at the bottom of the social pyramid. They were the poorest people in society. They had no rights and had to work constantly.

Next came **plebeians**. They were the ordinary working people of Rome. Although they were poor, they were allowed to vote.

**Patricians** were the aristocracy of Rome. They were rich and came from noble families.

**Senators** were important people who helped make the laws of Rome. Two people were chosen every year to help run the empire. These people were called **consuls**.

The **emperor** was the most important man in the whole empire. Ultimately, he had absolute power over everyone and everything in the empire.

# Food and Drink

The Romans ate three meals a day. They had breakfast (which they called ientaculum), lunch (which they called prandium) and their main meal in the evening (which they called cena).

Romans generally ate foods they could grow, rear or catch. As you might expect, the poor people in Rome did not eat the same food as the wealthy. The main food of the poor was a porridge call "puls." Puls was made by mixing ground wheat and water. Sometimes they might get some vegetables or fruit to eat with their puls. The poor ate very little meat.

The wealthy ate much better than the poor. They would often have fancy dinner parties that lasted for hours and had several courses. They would have a variety of foods including fruit, eggs, vegetables, meats, fish, and cakes.



# Homes

If you lived in a city, you probably lived in an insula. This was an apartment building between three and five stories high. These were often cramped and badly built. If you were richer, you would live in larger single homes called domus. These usually had many rooms off an atrium which was a room in the centre of the house with an open roof.

Poor Romans who lived in the countryside would live in shacks or cottages while rich Romans would live in large, sprawling villas.



An atrium in a  
wealthy Roman  
home.

# Education

Watch this video! - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/clips/z2fvr82>



# Clothing

**Toga** - The toga was a long robe made up of several yards of material. The wealthy wore white togas made from wool or linen. Some colours and markings on togas were reserved for certain people and certain occasions. For example, a toga with a purple border was worn by high ranking senators and consuls.

**Tunic** - The tunic was more like a long shirt. Tunics were worn by the rich around the house and under their togas. They were the regular dress of the poor.

Wealthy women had their hair curled, pinned into place, plaited in the back, or put into a bun. Jewellery was mostly worn by women. Wealthy women wore a wide variety of jewellery including earrings, necklaces, tiaras, and bracelets. Men usually only wore rings.



# Religion

Religion was important to all Romans, whether they were rich or poor. It was one of the only matters where the rich and poor shared the same opinions. It was one of the most important things in their lives.

# Punishments

If a rich Roman committed a crime, the worst punishment they were likely to receive was having to clean!

If a poor Roman committed a crime, they could be crucified or even drowned!