

Title: Roman chickens
Subject Area: History
Key Stage 2
NC link: 2 and 9.

Learning Objective:

- Children look at how chickens were kept in Roman times.
- They draw their impression of a Roman chicken coop.

Resources:

- Paper, pencils and rulers.
- Photocopied worksheets, one per pupil.

Starter

- Discuss and read together the passage about chicken keeping in Roman times from the sheet.

Main Teaching Activity:

- Children are challenged to draw their impression of what a chicken coop looked like in Roman times. A plan of the coop may be encouraged with labels.

Plenary

- Ask volunteers to explain and show the features of their coops. Discuss.
- Ask: How do these differ from our chicken house? Size, security, materials...

Differentiation

Highlight key works from the final paragraph to help weaker children include all the key parts in the coop.

Roman Chickens



Chickens in Roman times were looked after well. The chickens were cared for by the Pullarius, who opened their cage and fed them pulses or a special kind of soft cake.

The Romans priests would consult chickens for advice on behalf of troubled or uncertain people. They observed to see if the chicken would fly or feed. For example a chicken would be offered food before a battle, if the chicken ate readily then it was a good omen but if the chicken refused to eat then it was a bad sign. In 249bc, the Roman general Publius Claudius Pulcher had his chickens thrown overboard when they refused to feed before a battle saying "If they won't eat, perhaps they will drink." He promptly lost the battle against the Carthaginians and 93 Roman ships were sunk. Back in Rome, he was tried and heavily fined.

In 161bc the Romans tried to stop people fattened chickens. They made a law, but does not seem to have been successful. Fattening chickens with bread soaked in milk was thought to give especially delicious results. Lots of Roman recipes are for chickens.

Roman farmers would have kept chickens in flocks of about 200 birds, which could be supervised by one person if someone is watching for stray animals. Chicken coops faced southeast and were next to the kitchen, as smoke from the kitchen stove was thought to be beneficial for the animals. Coops consisted of three rooms and had a hearth. Dry dust or ash was provided for dust-baths.

Draw what you think a Roman chicken house would have looked like: