

What did Romans do in their spare time?

Most people in Roman times did not have much spare time, they were too busy working. They liked board games. We know this because archaeologists have found counters and dice in the ground.

The Romans enjoyed watching fights between gladiators, and fights between people and animals. These bloodthirsty shows were put on in front of crowds in large arenas called amphitheatres. Gladiators fought one another, usually in pairs. They also fought wild animals such as lions or bears. When a gladiator was beaten (but still alive), the audience would wave scarves or put their thumbs out if they wanted him killed. If he'd fought well, and they wanted him to live, they would close their thumbs onto their fingers. Different types of gladiators used different weapons. For example, a man with a sword and shield might fight a man with a three-pronged spear or trident, and a big net.

Romans enjoyed the theatre. Most plays were funny comedies, though there were serious tragedies as well. Actors often wore masks to show whether their character was happy or sad! They also wore wigs - an old man had a white wig, a slave had a red wig. Roman emperors put on free shows at theatres and amphitheatres as it was a good way to make themselves popular.

In Rome there was a huge stadium called the Circus Maximus, used for chariot races. Chariot races were held in Britain too, which were thrilling but very dangerous. Chariots were small two-wheeled carts, driven by one man and pulled by four galloping horses. They raced around an oval track. There were often smashes during the seven-lap races.

1. Why did many Romans have little spare time?
2. What is an amphitheatre?
3. How did actors show whether their characters were happy or sad?
4. What is a chariot?
5. Why do you think putting on free shows could help to make an emperor more popular?
6. Why do you think that gladiator fights no longer happen today?

