

Over 2,000 years ago, the Romans had sophisticated systems for water and drainage in place. This was important as the public baths were more than just a place to keep clean, as Dinah Starkey explains in this article from an educational magazine.

Bath times with the Romans

Something for everyone

In Roman times, everyone, men and women, rich and poor, visited the public baths that could be found in every town. The baths played a central part in people's daily lives. A visit to the baths was the Roman equivalent of a trip to the health club: it combined a workout in the gym and beauty treatments with a chance to meet friends and do a bit of networking.

Marble or murky water?

The baths ranged from the luxurious to the downright squalid. There were baths panelled with marble and set with dazzling mosaics, and there were baths where fumes from the furnace overcame the bathers and toenail clippings floated in the murky water. In the more up-market establishments, such as the baths of Caracalla in Rome, there were dozens of columns made from marble and imported stone. The floors and walls gleamed with polished marble panelling in ten different colours, the roof glittered with glass mosaics and there were alcoves for more than a hundred statues.



Roman baths

Working up a sweat

The Romans began bathing by rubbing perfumed oil into their skin and then proceeded to exercise to work up a sweat, for example by running, wrestling or boxing. From the exercise room bathers then moved through into the tepidarium (the warm room) and from there into the caldarium (the hot room) to really sweat out the dirt. After a while, the bathers returned to the tepidarium for the serious business of getting clean by scraping off

dirt and sweat with a curved metal strigil. Finally, some bathers could finish off their session with a breathtaking plunge into the ice cold water of the frigidarium (the cold room).

Time to relax

Those who could afford it might also treat themselves to a massage or a shave. Sometimes there was a large pool where bathers could relax before going home. There were even snacks for sale: evidence has been found that the Romans enjoyed such delicacies as cutlets, sausages, bread, cakes, nuts and hog's fat!



Octagonal Frigidarium

No fun for the neighbours

Seneca, the Roman philosopher, shows that it wasn't so much fun to live near the baths. "I live right over a public baths. Just imagine the noise. I hear the grunting of the body builders. Then a ball player arrives and begins to count shots. Add the people who like to sing in the bathtub. And the people who jump into the pool with a deafening splash. On top of all this, don't forget the professional hair remover, forever screeching as he advertises his services. He only shuts up when he starts work – and makes someone else do the yelping! Then there are the drink-sellers, the sausage-sellers and the cake-sellers, each with his own special call..."

Q2.

1. In the first section *Something for everyone*, explain how the writer tries to help the modern-day reader understand the part played by public baths in Roman society.

Support your explanation by referring to an example in the section.

1 mark

2. Explain how the choice of language in the second section (*Marble or murky water?*) emphasises the contrasts between *luxurious* and *squalid* public baths.

Refer to specific words and phrases from the section and comment on them.

3 marks

3. How does the third section *Working up a sweat* show that, for the Romans, going to the baths was not an entirely relaxing experience?

1 mark

4. Why is Seneca's description of the public baths included in this article?

1 mark

5. How does Seneca's choice of language build the impression that Roman baths were noisy and unpleasant places to live near?

1 mark

Mark schemes

Q2.

1. Award **1 mark** for an explanation which recognises that the writer tries to help the modern-day reader understand the part played by the public baths in Roman society, by reference to:
- ◆ equivalence with present day activities, eg:
 - *She describes it as the same as a modern day spa*
 - *She uses modern words like networking*
 - *The Roman baths was a place for friends to meet up, for a work out in the Gym and beauty treatment*
 - *The writer compares the roman baths to modern day things like the health club and beauty treatments.*
 - ◆ the central part played by baths in everyday life, eg:
 - *It helps the reader understand that it was like the only place where people could bathe. And it was for anyone and everyone*
 - *He tried to show the reader that every single person used the baths, men, women, rich and poor*
 - *The baths were used by everyone, men and women, rich and poor. This shows that it was considered as part of their daily life*
 - *You can tell the writer thinks the public baths were important when he says 'The baths played a central part in people's daily lives.'*

Do not accept

- *a quotation without explanation.*
- *an explanation without textual support.*

1 mark

2. Award **3 marks** for answers which offer a detailed explanation of how language is used in the second section to emphasise the contrasts between the luxurious and the squalid public baths, commenting on how the writer's choice of language contributes to the overall effect. References to the text support developed answers.
- *Some of the baths are obviously expensive because they are made of marble. They sound shiny and clean because they 'gleamed' and 'glittered'. Both words start with a 'gl' sound which emphasises those words. The contrast is the 'murky' baths. The way the writer says 'downright squalid' which makes them sound really terrible. 'Murky' means that the water is unclean and cloudy. They smell of 'fumes' so they are really horrible smells.*
 - *It says how some are 'panelled with marble and set with dazzling mosaics' And how others are stunk out by furnace fumes and 'toenail clippings floated*

in the murky water'. Referring to it as 'dazzling' conjures up its clean, pretty and expensive. And then talking about 'murky' water and toenail clippings shows it's dirty and unhygienic.

Award **2 marks** for answers which offer some comment on how the language used in the second section shows contrasts between the luxurious and the squalid public baths. There is limited understanding of the overall effect. Answers should make appropriate references to the text.

- *To most people 'marble' is a very rich material/rock, which is considered very luxurious, whereas 'murky water' is referred to as disgusting and 'squalid' - the two of them (marble and murky water) are very different.*
- *The word 'luxurious' means absolutely lovely and clean, yet 'squalid' means disgusting and yucky. The writer emphasises this as he says the squalid, muddy water and toenail clippings floating around, but it was also beautifully tiled and brilliant mosaics on.*

Award **1 mark** for answers which identify features of the writer's use of language in the second section. Comments may show some limited awareness of the contrasts and effect of the writer's choice of language without development. One or two references are included.

- *'Toenail clippings in the murky water' build up imagery that contrasts with 'luxurious' and 'dazzling mosaics'.*
- *It says one bath had marble and dazzling mosaics but the other had fumes from the furnace and toe-nail clippings floated up in the murky water.*

up to 3 marks

3. Award **1 mark** to answers which identify and comment on expressions that convey the element of effort accompanying bathing.

- *Because everyone had to box, wrestle and they even had to do running.*
- *It was a "serious business" they only ever relaxed AFTER exercise, scraping themselves and freezing baths.*
- *For example, 'a breathtaking plunge into ice cold water' sounds quite painful.*

1 mark

4. Award **1 mark** for an explanation of the idea that the first hand account gives authenticity / authority to the article, eg:

- ◆ First hand account gives authenticity / authority to the article, eg:
 - *It has the effect of giving another point of view from a person who was there at the time*
 - *This gives the effect of feeling what it was really like through someone else's eyes*

1 mark

5. Award **1 mark** for answers which explain the cumulative effect of the various loud, chaotic and frenzied intrusions is unpleasant.

- *It makes all the noise sound like a toneless piece of yelping like "the hair*

remover forever screeching".

- *He uses all different examples of noise like a ball player counting shots.*
- *It shows that it was very noisy and annoying when you hear people screeching or singing really loudly.*
- *She tells you many reasons why baths were noisy and complains that it was annoying.*

1 mark