

The **Old·est Still Works**

Some in·ven·tions work so well they never change. The a·ba·cus is a math tool that was in·ven·ted thou·sands of years a·go. This sim·ple tool has hard·ly changed since then. It has rods with beads on them, set up to help us count.

The word a·ba·cus comes from the Greek word for dust. Some peo·ple think that the first a·ba·cus may have been a board. It seems that this board was cov·ered with dust or sand. The u·s·er then put marks on the dust with a poi·n·ter.

The Chi·nese, Ja·pa·nese, and Ro·mans all used a kind of a·ba·cus. The Chi·nese a·ba·cus was used a·bout 3000 years a·go. In Chi·nese com·mun·i·ties, you can still see shop·kee·pers us·ing this tool. In the hands of an ex·pert, it can be as fast as an e·lec·tric cal·cu·la·tor.

In class·rooms to·day, chil·dren are us·ing the a·ba·cus to learn a·bout place val·ue to count in units of tens. They make their own mod·els, us·ing beads or beans as the coun·ters. This an·cient tool still works for them, too.