

# Pompeii

Pompeii was an ancient Roman city, built on the slopes of a volcano called Mount Vesuvius. In the year 79 AD, Mount Vesuvius suddenly erupted. The debris from the volcano destroyed Pompeii and buried the city under tonnes of ash. This text is full of information about Pompeii.

## A Typical Roman City

In the first century AD, Pompeii was a thriving port city. It had a population of between 10,000 and 20,000 people, and it was a popular holiday destination for people who lived in Rome.

- 5 Like other Roman cities, Pompeii had a central square, known as a forum, where markets were held and the city's business was conducted. The city also had temples to Roman gods, including Jupiter and Apollo; theatres where plays and concerts were held; and a huge amphitheatre where people went to see sports and
- 10 other entertainments, such as gladiator games and chariot races. An aqueduct brought fresh water into the city, supplying public fountains and baths. Some wealthy citizens even had running water in their homes.



## Disaster Strikes

- 15 According to Pliny the Younger, a Roman administrator who wrote about the eruption of Vesuvius, on 20<sup>th</sup> August 79 AD, the people of Pompeii felt some small earthquakes. Tremors like these were common in the area, so people weren't too worried, even when the quakes became more frequent over the next few days. Because people didn't realise that these earthquakes were an early warning sign of a volcanic eruption, they were taken completely by surprise when,
- 20 around midday on 24<sup>th</sup> August 79 AD, Mount Vesuvius erupted. The volcano sent a huge cloud of rock, ash and poisonous gas into the air, and Pompeii was completely buried by up to 25 m of debris. The eruption happened so quickly that very few people had time to escape, and thousands lost their lives.

## A Lost City Rediscovered

- 25 Pompeii had disappeared under a thick layer of volcanic rock and ash, and the city was gradually forgotten. It lay almost entirely undisturbed for more than sixteen centuries, until archaeologists began excavating the site in the 1700s. They were amazed to discover that the city had been frozen in time by the volcano. Instead of decaying, buildings, paintings, mosaics, everyday objects and even human remains had all been preserved under the layers of volcanic debris. As a result,
- 30 the city provides an incredibly detailed picture of what life was like in the Roman Empire.

Written by Catherine Heygate.



1 In your own words, explain the purpose of an aqueduct.

1 mark

2 Use the information in the text to identify two similarities between life in a Roman city and what you know about life in Britain today.

2 marks

3 How do we know about what happened in the days before Mount Vesuvius erupted?

1 mark

4 How did the people of Pompeii feel about the earthquakes that happened between 20<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> August 79 AD? Why did they feel like this?

2 marks

5 Why is Pompeii important for our understanding of daily life in the Roman Empire?

2 marks

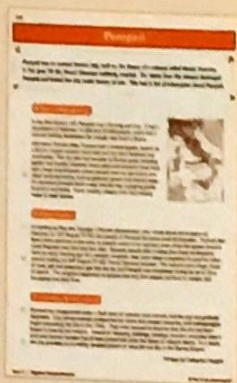
6 Do you find the subheadings in this text helpful? Explain your answer.

2 marks

Total  
out of 10



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## Question Book:

Year 5, pages 14-15

## Author / Source:

Catherine Heygate

## Genre:

Non-fiction — reference text

## Cross-curricular links:

- History (the Roman Empire)
- Geography (volcanoes)
- Art (mosaics)

## Introduction

In the first century AD, Pompeii was a thriving Roman city. However, the devastating eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD destroyed the city, killing its inhabitants and burying the site under several metres of volcanic ash. In the mid-eighteenth century, archaeologists began excavating Pompeii and found that much of the city had been extraordinarily well preserved by the layers of ash covering it. As a result, Pompeii is now one of our most important sources of information about life in the Roman Empire. Before pupils read the text, make sure they understand what a volcano is.

## Answers

1. E.g. To carry water into a city.
2. E.g. People in Roman cities had running water in their homes like many people do today, and they went to the theatre for entertainment like some people do.
3. E.g. Because Pliny the Younger wrote about it.
4. E.g. They weren't worried about them. Earthquakes were common in the area, and they didn't know that they were a sign that the volcano was going to erupt.
5. E.g. Because the city was preserved by the rock and ash from the volcano, so we can find out about life in the Roman Empire by studying all the things that have survived.
6. Any appropriate answer. E.g. Yes, because they break the text up into shorter sections, and they tell you what each section is about, so they make the text easier to read and understand.

## Extra Activities

- The last question in the Question Book asks pupils to comment on the layout of the text. As a class, discuss pupils' answers to this question, and ask them to suggest additional features that would make the text easier to understand (e.g. illustrations, underlining, a glossary).
- Ask pupils to find out more about the aspects of Roman life mentioned in the first section of the text. They should use their research to write an informative text about life in the Roman Empire, using the presentational features identified in the class discussion to ensure that their text is easy to understand.
- Using the information in the text and their own research, ask pupils to write a newspaper article reporting the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD.
- Explain the difference between active, dormant and extinct volcanoes. Assign pupils volcanoes from around the world to research (e.g. Arthur's Seat, Krakatoa, Novarupta). Pupils should use their research to create a fact sheet with key information about their volcano, including a map of its location, whether it is active, dormant or extinct and the date of its most recent eruption (if known).
- Roman buildings were often decorated with mosaics, many examples of which are preserved in Pompeii. Show pupils some pictures of Roman mosaics, and then ask them to design and make their own, using coloured paper or cardboard to make their tiles.