

**ROMAN EMPIRE (27
BCE - 476 CE): POMPEII
AND HERCULANEUM 79
CE**



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Description

Through an examination of both primary and secondary sources on the subject, including various types of visual media in addition to electronic and written sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain what happened to Pompeii and Herculaneum as a result of the Vesuvius eruption of 79 CE, what archaeologists believe the architecture, art and artifacts found in the cities can tell modern visitors about ancient Roman society, and what challenges conservationists might face in saving the ancient cities for generations to come.

Subjects

Art, Art History, World History

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

90 minutes

Tour Links

- Pompeii Ruins
- Herculaneum Ruins
- Archaeological Museum, Naples

Essential Questions

- What was Pompeii? What do we know about the ancient Roman town?
- Who was Pliny the Elder? How was he involved in Pompeii after Vesuvius erupted?
- Who was Pliny the Younger? How is he connected with the events in Pompeii?
- When were the ruins of Pompeii rediscovered? Why is the town important to the study of Imperial Rome today? What can be learned from a ruined town?

Academic Summary

Letter of Pliny the Younger to Tacitus, approx. 100 CE

My dear Tacitus,

... He [Pliny the Elder] was at Misenum in his capacity as commander of the fleet on the 24th of August [sc. in 79 AD], when between 2 and 3 in the afternoon my mother drew his attention to a cloud of unusual size and appearance. He had had a sunbath, then a cold bath, and was reclining after dinner with his books. He called for his shoes and climbed up to where he could get the best view of the phenomenon. The cloud was rising from a mountain-at such a distance we couldn't tell which, but afterwards learned that it was Vesuvius. I can best describe its shape by likening it to a pine tree. It rose into the sky on a very long "trunk" from which spread some "branches." I imagine it had been raised by a sudden blast, which then weakened, leaving the cloud unsupported so that its own weight caused it to spread sideways. Some of the cloud was white, in other parts there were dark patches of dirt and ash. The sight of it made the scientist in my uncle determined to see it from closer at hand.

He ordered a boat made ready. He offered me the opportunity of going along, but I preferred to study-he himself happened to have set me a writing exercise. As he was leaving the house he was brought a letter from Tascius' wife Rectina, who was terrified by the looming danger. Her villa lay at the foot of Vesuvius, and there was no way out except by boat. She begged him to get her away. He changed his plans. The expedition that started out as a quest for knowledge now called for courage.

He launched the quadriremes and embarked himself, a source of aid for more people than just Rectina, for that delightful shore was a populous one. He hurried to a place from which others were fleeing, and held his course directly into danger.

Was he afraid? It seems not, as he kept up a continuous observation of the various movements and shapes of that evil cloud, dictating what he saw.

Ash was falling onto the ships now, darker and denser the closer they went. Now it was bits of pumice, and rocks that were blackened and burned and shattered by the fire. Now the sea is shoal; debris from the mountain blocks the shore. He paused for a moment wondering whether to turn back as the helmsman urged him. "Fortune helps the brave," he said, "Head for Pomponianus."

At Stabiae, on the other side of the bay formed by the gradually curving shore, Pomponianus had loaded up his ships even before the danger arrived, though it was visible and indeed extremely close, once it intensified. He planned to put out as soon as the contrary wind let up. That very wind carried my uncle right in, and

he embraced the frightened man and gave him comfort and courage. In order to lessen the other's fear by showing his own unconcern he asked to be taken to the baths. He bathed and dined, carefree or at least appearing so (which is equally impressive). Meanwhile, broad sheets of flame were lighting up many parts of Vesuvius; their light and brightness were the more vivid for the darkness of the night. To alleviate people's fears my uncle claimed that the flames came from the deserted homes of farmers who had left in a panic with the hearth fires still alight. Then he rested, and gave every indication of actually sleeping; people who passed by his door heard his snores, which were rather resonant since he was a heavy man. The ground outside his room rose so high with the mixture of ash and stones that if he had spent any more time there escape would have been impossible. He got up and came out, restoring himself to Pomponianus and the others who had been unable to sleep. They discussed what to do, whether to remain under cover or to try the open air. The buildings were being rocked by a series of strong tremors, and appeared to have come loose from their foundations and to be sliding this way and that. Outside, however, there was danger from the rocks that were coming down, light and fire-consumed as these bits of pumice were. Weighing the relative dangers they chose the outdoors; in my uncle's case it was a rational decision, others just chose the alternative that frightened them the least.

They tied pillows on top of their heads as protection against the shower of rock. It was daylight now elsewhere in the world, but there the darkness was darker and thicker than any night. But they had torches and other lights. They decided to go down to the shore, to see from close up if anything was possible by sea. But it remained as rough and uncooperative as before.

Resting in the shade of a sail he drank once or twice from the cold water he had asked for. Then came a smell of sulfur, announcing the flames, and the flames themselves, sending others into flight but reviving him. Supported by two small slaves he stood up, and immediately collapsed. As I understand it, his breathing was obstructed by the dust-laden air, and his innards, which were never strong and often blocked or upset, simply shut down. When daylight came again 2 days after he died, his body was found untouched, unharmed, in the clothing that he had had on. He looked more asleep than dead.

On 24 Aug 79 CE (year 832 AUC under the old Roman calendar), Mount Vesuvius, a large stratovolcano less than 10 miles east of modern Naples, erupted, spewing molten rock, ash and fumes high into the air. Pyroclastic flows followed the initial blast, sending clouds of gas and ash with temperatures approaching 2000 degrees into the

surrounding towns and cities. The catastrophe lasted a full two days as the volcano belched over and over in a series of eruptions. Wind currents and topography carried most of the destruction west and south. Anything in its way was destroyed: people, animals, vegetation and even towns. Although exact numbers will never be known, an estimated 16,000-20,000 people lost their lives during the eruption. The most famous of these people lived in the ancient Roman port city of Pompeii.

From what archeologists have been able to discern from the evidence available, by the time of the eruption in 79 CE, Pompeii was a bustling Roman port city specializing in trade and tourism. The city boasted a population of perhaps 20,000 people (including perhaps as many as 5,000 slaves). From the evidence collected, it appears as though most of the free citizens were commoners (plebians), but there was also a small and important group of wealthy patricians.

The only written sources on the eruption of 79 CE that survive come from Pliny the Younger, a lawyer, author and magistrate from the time. Approximately 25 years after the disaster (around 100 CE — the exact date is unknown), Pliny the Younger wrote two separate letters to the Roman historian Tacitus, who was at that time putting together a collection of stories about famous Roman heroes (the fragment of Tacitus's work that survives is known as "Histories"). According to Pliny the Younger's description of the event, Pliny the Elder, the younger man's uncle, was a Roman naval commander who perished in the eruption. Both men witnessed the eruption from across the Bay of Naples. Pliny the Elder then directed a rescue operation while the younger man stayed back out of harm's way. Although the letters were obviously written in such a way as to glorify Pliny the Elder's bravery and accomplishments, historians believe that the younger man's accounts of the eruption are accurate. Archeological evidence seems to back up his descriptions of multiple eruptions over two days. It is believed that the 4th and 5th eruptions brought the pyroclastic clouds to Pompeii.

For centuries, Pompeii and Herculaneum lay buried, undisturbed and forgotten. In 1599, while digging an underground channel to divert the Sarno River, workers came across the ancient walls in Pompeii, but they were simply reburied. In 1738, workmen digging foundations for a summer palace for the King of Naples discovered Herculaneum. Ten years later, in 1748, international excavations in the area rediscovered Pompeii. Since then, excavations have been ongoing in both towns. Over the last 250 years, Pompeii has been a popular tourist destination, giving visitors an unrivaled glimpse into a moment in time.

Much, though not all, of the ancient city has been excavated, and work continues to this day. Many of the original artifacts that survived the eruption, including such mundane items as carbonized loaves of bread that were found in ancient ovens, original mosaics from the houses, and casts of people and animals caught in and killed by the pyroclastic clouds, have been removed from the ancient site and can now be seen in the Archaeological Museum in Naples. This includes perhaps the most famous, and infamous, images and artifacts found at Pompeii: those of an erotic nature. Excavations have unearthed almost 50 buildings across the city where it is believed that prostitutes plied their trade. Many of the common homes had erotic images and artifacts. Historians have debated for centuries as to the significance of such findings. Was Pompeii representative of Roman society in the first century, or was it unique as a port

city catering to sailors from different part of the empire? Theories abound, but no one knows for sure.

What is certain is that Pompeii and Herculaneum are the best preserved examples of ancient Roman life. Unfortunately, the sites are showing severe deterioration due to exposure to the natural elements and foot traffic. In 2010, the “House of the Gladiators” collapsed, probably due to water issues after heavy rains in the area. In an effort to save the site for future generations, parts of the city are now closed to visitors, and an estimated 1/3 of the city remains buried.

Through an examination of both primary and secondary sources on the subject, including various types of visual media in addition to electronic and written sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain what happened to Pompeii and Herculaneum as a result of the Vesuvius eruption of 79 CE, what archaeologists believe the architecture, art and artifacts found in the cities can tell modern visitors about ancient Roman society, and what challenges conservationists might face in saving the ancient cities for generations to come.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain what happened to Pompeii and Herculaneum as a result of the Vesuvius eruption of 79 CE.
2. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain what archaeologists believe the architecture, art and artifacts found at Pompeii and Herculaneum can tell modern visitors and scholars about ancient Roman society.
3. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain what challenges conservationists might face in saving the ancient cities for generations to come.

Procedure

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: What is archaeology? Why is it important? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of documents and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Pompeii (20 min)
- Video – Pompeii (10 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the articles and sources on the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE and the destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum, taking notes as appropriate. (20 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of these articles and sources before class.
- Group Activity – Socratic Seminar: Pompeii and Herculaneum. (15 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment / DBQ – Essay: Explain in detail what happened to Pompeii and Herculaneum as a result of the Vesuvius eruption of 79 CE, what archaeologists believe the architecture, art and artifacts found in the cities can tell modern visitors and scholars about ancient Roman society, and what challenges conservationists might face in saving the ancient cities for generations to come.

Extension

On tour: Ancient Ruins of Pompeii

While on tour in Italy, students will visit the ruins of Pompeii where they can see for themselves the best example of an ancient Roman city in all its splendor. Wear comfortable shoes, as walking through the city can at times be hard on the feet. Also, bring extra bottles of water (please remember to take your trash with you), as the city can be dusty during dry spells. Many student groups take a group picture at the Temple of Jupiter in the main forum, getting a shot with the ever-present Vesuvius looming in the background. Still an active volcano, Vesuvius erupts every 60 years or so (it last erupted in 1944 during WWII). Suggestion: make sure to take time to get a drink from the big citrus stand by the main entrance, where you'll see a huge assortment of local lemons and blood oranges displayed (see image below). The drinks are amazing ... or perhaps it's the setting. No matter. Enjoy them both.

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- <http://faculty.cua.edu/pennington/pompeii/plinyletters.htm>
Letters of Pliny the Younger to Tacitus about Pompeii (primary source) – from Ken Pennington, Professor of Ecclesiastical and Legal History at the Catholic University of America (Washington, DC)
- www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/pompeii-inscriptions.asp
Inscriptions from Pompeii (primary sources) – from the Ancient History Sourcebook at Fordham University
- <http://faculty.cua.edu/pennington/pompeii/PompeiiinFlames.html>
Pompeii (website) – from Ken Pennington, Professor of Ecclesiastical and Legal History at the Catholic University of America (Washington, DC). This is Professor Pennington's main site on Pompeii. It contains great photos and information on the ancient city. Highly recommended for all students and teachers.
- www.harcourtschool.com/activity/pompeii/
Unraveling Ancient Mysteries: Pompeii (website) – from Harcourt Education
- www.authorstream.com/Presentation/tomgriffith-146392-pompeii-education-ppt-powerpoint/
Pompeii and Herculaneum (PowerPoint)
- www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video). Great 2-minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA. Highly recommended for teachers.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPfhyti7qqc
Pliny the Younger describing Mt. Vesuvius eruption in 79 AD (video) – 3-minute video appropriate for all classes.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=esWCJaDIC6Y
Pompeii Live – History Documentary (video). This 90-minute video from the British Museum is probably too long for most in-class showings, but it is well worth watching. It takes viewers on a tour around Pompeii while the narrator discusses the eruption of 79 CE. A great resource for all students and teachers.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=4mg0j7Uzsg0
Pompeii Rediscovered (video) – from the History Channel, this 30-minute video gives a great overview of Pompeii, its people and the eruption of 79 CE. Highly recommended all students.

Background Information

- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pompeii>
Pompeii – Wikipedia article
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_Vesuvius
Mount Vesuvius – Wikipedia article
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pliny_the_Elder
Pliny the Elder – Wikipedia article

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pliny_the_Younger
Pliny the Younger – Wikipedia article
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eruption_of_Mount_Vesuvius_in_AD_79
Eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79 – Wikipedia article
- www.passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/italy/rome_heading_south
On the Road: Rome, Heading South – from Passports Educational Travel
- www.passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/italy/pompeii_sorrento_and_capri
On the Road: Pompeii, Sorrento and Capri – from Passports Educational Travel

Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans

- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/ancient-rome-rape-of-the-sabine-women
Ancient Rome – Rape of the Sabine Women
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/ancient-rome-romulus-and-remus
Ancient Rome – Romulus and Remus
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/roman-republic-punic-wars
Roman Republic (509 BCE – 27 BCE) – Punic Wars
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/roman-empire-nero-and-the-great-fire-64CE
Roman Empire – Great Fire of Rome 64 CE
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/roman-empire-pompeii-eruption
Roman Empire – Pompeii and Herculaneum 79 CE
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/roman-empire-pompeii-villa-of-the-mysteries
Roman Empire – Pompeii: Villa of the Mysteries
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/roman-empire-pax-romana
Roman Empire – Pax Romana
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/roman-britannia
Roman Britannia – An Overview
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/roman-britain-hadrians-wall
Roman Britannia – Hadrian's Wall
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/roman-gaul-gallic-wars
Roman Gaul – The Gallic Wars: Caesar's Greatest Triumph
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/spain/hannibal-barca-of-carthage-second-punic-war
Hannibal of Carthage: Enemy of Rome
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/turkey/byzantine-istanbul-constantinople
Byzantine Empire – Constantinople: New Rome

Key Terms

- Conservation
- Herculaneum
- Patrician
- Plebian
- Pliny (Elder and Younger)
- Pompeii
- Pyroclastic cloud
- Vesuvius

