

**PAIRED TEXTS**  
stories that share a  
topic or theme

**Nonfiction**

Women vote  
in an election  
in the 1920s.

# MOUNTAIN OF DOOM

Nearly 2,000 years ago, the eruption of Mount Vesuvius destroyed the city of Pompeii. It was the worst disaster of the ancient world. Now imagine you are there. **By Lauren Tarshis**

Gary Hanna





It's a typical day in beautiful Pompeii, in the year 79 A.D. The main street teems with people—women swishing by in long robes, men in tunics, children with leather sandals that slap against the hot stone streets. Vendors shout for your attention, offering slices of juicy melon and sizzling hunks of roasted meat. A parrot calls out from the shoulder of a shopkeeper. “Salve!” he squawks—“hello” in Latin, the language of the Roman Empire.

You're surprised by how modern this ancient city seems. It has a library, theaters, and grand temples. You stop at a market, where you sample dozens of delicacies. Don't you want to try some roasted mice stuffed with nuts and rose petals?

Now look at the beautiful marble and bronze statues across the street. These monuments, which stand throughout the city, honor the mighty emperors who built Rome into one of the most powerful empires in the world.

By now, you're thirsty, so you stop at a public fountain made of carved stone. You scoop up the cool water. No wonder Romans are proud of their water. Nowhere else in the world has such a sophisticated system of aqueducts—underground tunnels that deliver fresh water to fountains, bathhouses, and homes.

As you rest by the fountain, an enormous man **lumbers** past, his arms scarred, his muscled legs thick as tree trunks. This man is a gladiator set to do battle that afternoon in Pompeii's amphitheater, a stadium that holds 20,000 people.

Romans love to watch gladiators attack each other with fists, swords, clubs, or knives. Sometimes contests are staged between men and wild animals, such as lions and bears. If these blood sports sound gruesome, that's because they are. Gladiators often die in the arena.

## THE VOLCANO

Maybe by now you've noticed it: the massive mountain that looms behind the city. That's Mount Vesuvius. You haven't given it much thought, and neither have the people of Pompeii. Why should they? It's just a big mountain, silent and still, its gentle slopes covered with trees and vineyards.

Except Mount Vesuvius is not just a mountain. It is a volcano. Vesuvius sits atop a crack in Earth's crust—the hard, rocky layer that covers the surface of our planet like the shell of an egg. From miles below, molten rock, or magma, seeps up through the crack.

The people of Pompeii have no idea that an enormous lake of magma boils under Vesuvius, steaming with explosive, poisonous gases. How could they? Vesuvius has been **dormant** for 1,500 years. There is not even a word for volcano in Latin.

But now Vesuvius is waking up. For months, magma has been rising through the center of the volcano. Pressure is building. A catastrophic eruption is coming.

For the past few weeks, strange things have been happening. Talk to the farmers who tend the vineyards. They'll tell you about a **pungent** smell—like rotten eggs—wafting from the mountaintop. Is it a warning from the gods? Like the ancient Greeks before them, the Romans believe that gods and goddesses control everything in the world. Some say that mighty Jupiter, god of the sky, is angry with the people of Pompeii. Nobody understands that the terrible smell is sulfurous gas, part of the explosive brew simmering inside Vesuvius.

Meanwhile, extreme heat underground has dried up springs. Goats and sheep are dropping dead on the mountainside, their lungs seared by poisonous gases. Most alarming of all: Small earthquakes rumble through



The Roman Empire, shaded in red on this map, stretched across Europe and Northern Africa. Pompeii is in the country we now call Italy.

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Shutterstock.com (volcano, smoke, lava, parchment); Jim McMahon/Magnum (map); Getty Images (gladiator helmet); Bettmann Archive/Getty Images (Pompeii ruins)



# UNLOCKING THE SECRETS OF POMPEII

Objects found in the ruins of Pompeii give us a fascinating window into ancient Roman life.



## THE FOOD

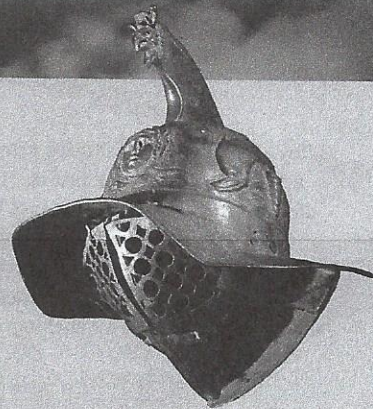
This loaf of bread was found perfectly preserved in an oven in the ruins of a Pompeii bakery. In addition to bakeries, fast-food restaurants called *thermopolia* offered citizens a place to grab a bite to eat.

## THE BATHROOMS

Archaeologists studied the remains of human poop to learn what people ate. Figs, olives, peaches, honey, and *garum*, a sauce made of fermented fish guts and salt, were favorites.



This is a 2,000-year-old toilet!



## THE ENTERTAINMENT

This helmet belonged to a gladiator. In ancient Rome, most gladiators were enslaved and had no choice but to fight in the arena.

the city, an indication of growing strain on the land. These are all signs pointing to an **imminent** eruption. The people of Pompeii should have evacuated days or even weeks ago.

If only they understood.

So what are you doing standing around?

You should run. Now!

## A BOILING AVALANCHE

But it's too late.

BOOM!

A powerful explosion shatters the air. The earth shakes violently. People tumble to the ground. Horses and donkeys scream. Birds scatter by the thousands. You see a terrifying sight: a gigantic column of what appears to be gray smoke spewing from the top of Vesuvius.

It isn't smoke though. The intense heat produced by the eruption has turned millions of tons of solid rock into superheated foam. The foam shoots 12 miles into the sky. When it hits the freezing air above Earth, it turns into tiny pebbles called pumice. The pumice spreads out, carried by the wind, and pours down on Pompeii.

Mixed with hot ash, the pumice falls with painful force and clogs your nose and throat. Many people flee. Go with them! Push your

## EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT

When Vesuvius erupted, Pliny the Younger was a teenager living in nearby Misenum. He later wrote about that day. His words are the only surviving eyewitness account.



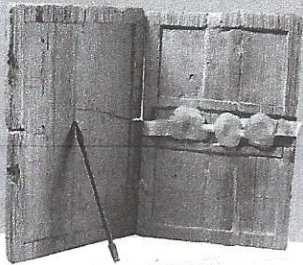
### "A Black and Dreadful Cloud"

We stood still, in the midst of a dangerous and dreadful scene. The sea seemed to roll back upon itself. On the other side, a black and dreadful cloud, broken with rapid, zigzag flashes, revealed masses of flame. . . . Night came upon us, not such as we have when there is no moon, but that of a room when it is shut up, and all the lights put out. . . . I might boast that not a sigh or expression of fear escaped me, had not my support been grounded in that miserable though mighty consolation that all mankind was involved in the same calamity, and that I was perishing with the world itself.

\*This excerpt has been lightly edited for clarity.

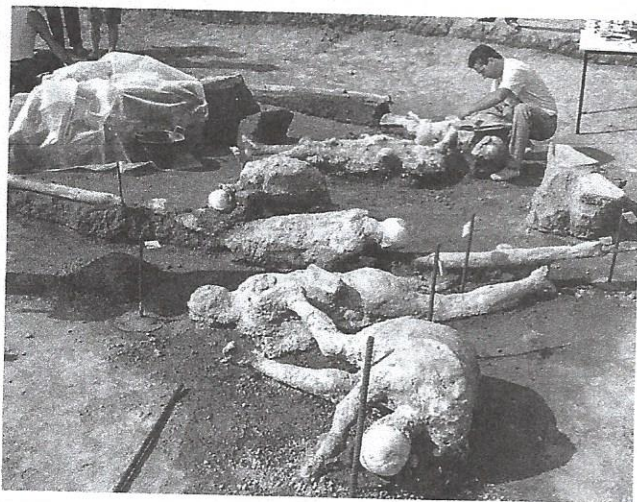


Boys from wealthy families attended school or had private tutors. (Girls did not go to school.) Students wrote on tablets like this one, using an instrument called a *stylus* to write on a layer of wax. Writing was erased by warming the wax and smoothing it over.



Like an ancient form of social media, the walls of Pompeii were covered in messages ranging from advertisements and declarations of love to simple notes about what a person had done that day.

As the volcano loses energy, the molten rock and ash mix together to create boiling waves that rush down the mountain at 180 miles per hour. This burning,



Those who did not escape the volcano were covered in pumice and ash that then hardened. As the bodies rotted away, people-shaped holes were left behind. Experts made casts, or statues, by filling the holes with plaster, as in the photograph above. These casts show people in their final moments.

Will there be enough warning before the next big explosion? Or will people suffer the same fate as those in ancient Pompeii—swallowed by fire, buried in ash, and lost to time? ●

Soon, Pompeii is all but forgotten.



BEHIND  
THE  
SCENES

Don't miss the video at Scope Online!

# MY JOURNEY TO POMPEII

Author Lauren Tarshis on how she brought the world of ancient Pompeii to life Interview by Mackenzie Carro

**Mackenzie Carro: Why did you want to write about Vesuvius?**

**Lauren Tarshis:** Vesuvius is a fascinating, terrifying, exciting, unexpected, shocking disaster story, but it's also so much more! It's a window into almost everything we know about ancient Rome: what people wore, what they ate, what kids played with, what their homes were like, how people worshipped—all because of what was discovered when Pompeii was excavated.

**Carro: How much research was required?**

**Tarshis:** A huge amount! I actually went to Pompeii. As a researcher, you can learn a ton by watching videos, reading books, interviewing experts, and going to museums. But I benefited so much from actually being there: walking through the streets, looking up to see that volcano above me, and trying to imagine how it could shift from this peaceful mountain into a monster raining down death and destruction.

**Carro: How did you decide which details to include?**

**Tarshis:** A challenge for writers, especially when you love your topic, is that you want to tell your readers everything. But I kept asking myself, "What is necessary to tell this story?" I'm writing a four-page article, not a book. I'm not making a movie. I also knew that my article would be designed to give a lot of sensory detail. Understanding what your author's purpose is before you sit down to write helps you decide what details will best support the journey you want to take the reader on.

**Carro: Speaking of journeys, why did you choose to write in second person?**

**Tarshis:** The coolest thing about being in Pompeii was that feeling of walking in the footsteps of the people who lived there. I wanted to give readers the experience of being there. I felt that second person would deliver that connection in the most powerful way.

**Carro: It totally works, by the way. It's riveting.**

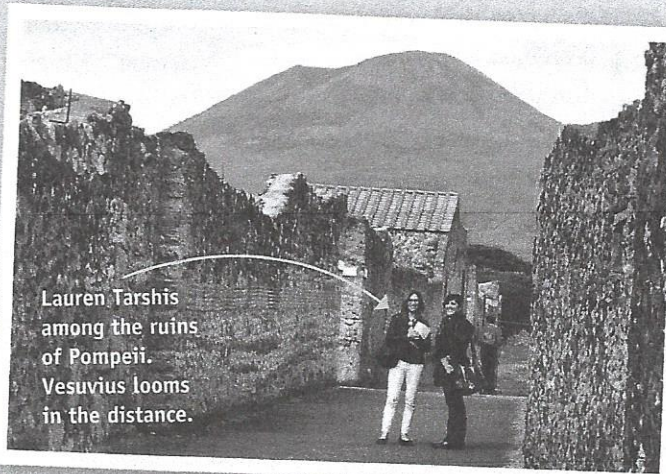
**Tarshis:** Oh, I'm so happy!

**Carro: Why is it important to learn about events from the distant past, like the eruption of Vesuvius?**

**Tarshis:** There are so many reasons. First, they help us understand where we are today. I want readers after they read one of my books or stories to think, "How does this impact my life today?" I also think learning about the past builds empathy. To feel the flesh and blood of those who lived before us can help us understand that they were human beings—just like us.

**Carro: Any advice for kids who want to write historical stories?**

**Tarshis:** Look at your journey through history—your research journey—as its own exciting experience. Learn all you can. Then as you're writing, put yourself in the chair of your reader. Ask yourself, "What's going to make my reader want to keep reading and then want to learn more on their own?" That will help you create something interesting and exciting. ●



Lauren Tarshis among the ruins of Pompeii. Vesuvius looms in the distance.

## Expository Writing Contest

Explain how author Lauren Tarshis helps readers understand what it was like to be in Pompeii the day Vesuvius erupted. How did her research help her? Draw on the article, the interview, and the video at Scope Online to support your ideas. Send your essay to **Vesuvius Contest**. Five winners will get *Eruption!* by Elizabeth Rusch. See page 2 for details.

**ERUPTION!**

Get this activity online.



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Close-Reading Questions

## "Mountain of Doom"

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1. Why do you think author Lauren Tarshis decided to address the reader directly? (author's craft, point of view)

2. Identify sensory details that Tarshis uses in the first paragraph. (author's craft)

3. What information does Tarshis include to help readers better understand the time and place in which her story takes place? (setting)



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Preparing to Write Bringing the Story to Life

Follow the directions in the boxes below to help you organize the ideas and details you will use in your response to the writing prompt on page 21.

## Descriptive Language

One way author Lauren Tarshis helps the reader understand what it was like to be in Pompeii the day Mount Vesuvius erupted is by using descriptive language: vivid words and sensory details that help the reader imagine what people saw, heard, smelled, tasted, or felt.

1. List sentences or paragraphs from the article that contain vivid language and sensory details. Explain what each sentence or paragraph helps the reader imagine or understand. We provided one example for you. Find at least three more. Be sure to include page numbers to show where each example comes from.
  - Tarshis writes, "The main street teems with people—women swishing by in long robes, men in tunics, children with leather sandals that slap against the hot stone streets. Vendors shout for your attention, offering slices of juicy melon and sizzling hunks of roasted meat. A parrot calls out from the shoulder of a shopkeeper. 'Salve!' he squawks—'hello' in Latin, the language of the Roman Empire" (18). This description helps the reader imagine the ancient city of Pompeii—its warmth, what people wore and ate, the smells and sounds of the bustling streets. These details also help the reader understand the contrast between what life was like before and after the eruption that no one knew was about to happen.



**Point of View**

Another way Tarshis helps readers understand what it was like to be in Pompeii the day Vesuvius erupted is by using second-person point of view and addressing readers as though they were in Pompeii during the eruption.

2. List examples of Tarshis's use of second person. How does each example help readers understand what experiencing the eruption was like? (Think about how the article would be different if Tarshis had not addressed readers directly.)

**Research**

The research Tarshis conducted played an important role in helping her bring the story to life.

3. How did Tarshis's research help her? What kind of information did she include to help readers better understand the time and place in which her story takes place? Use details from "My Journey to Pompeii" and "Mountain of Doom" to support your answer.



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Finding Text Evidence

**Directions:** Read "Mountain of Doom." Then complete the activity below.

**1. Choose the TWO pieces of text evidence from the article that best support the statement below.**

**STATEMENT:**

**The eruption of Mount Vesuvius was violent and destructive.**

- Ⓐ "As the volcano loses energy, the molten rock and ash mix together to create boiling waves that rush down the mountain at 180 miles per hour." (p. 20)
- Ⓑ "It's just a big mountain, silent and still, its gentle slopes covered with trees and vineyards." (p. 18)
- Ⓒ "Vesuvius sits atop a crack in Earth's crust—the hard, rocky layer that covers the surface of our planet like the shell of an egg." (p. 18)
- Ⓓ "In the weeks that follow, people search Pompeii for survivors. There are none." (p. 20)

**2. Choose the ONE piece of text evidence from the article that best supports the statement below. Then complete the sentence to explain your choice.**

**STATEMENT:**

**Pompeii was surprisingly modern in many ways.**

- Ⓐ "People hide in their homes, believing that this strange storm of ash and rock will soon end." (p. 20)
- Ⓑ "Nowhere else in the world has such a sophisticated system of aqueducts—underground tunnels that deliver fresh water to fountains, bathhouses, and homes." (p. 18)
- Ⓒ "Vendors shout for your attention, offering slices of juicy melon and sizzling hunks of roasted meat." (p. 18)

I chose \_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



**3. Read the lines below from the article. Then write a statement that they all support.**

- Ⓐ "Goats and sheep are dropping dead on the mountainside, their lungs seared by poisonous gases." (p. 18)
- Ⓑ "Nobody understands that the terrible smell is sulfurous gas, part of the explosive brew simmering inside Vesuvius." (p. 18)
- Ⓒ "Small earthquakes rumble through the city, an indication of growing strain on the land." (pp. 18-19)

**STATEMENT:**