

VIDEO

**GO TO
WEB VIEW**



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ILLUSTRATION BY GARY HANNA; JIM McMAHON/MAPMAN® (MAP)

DAY OF DISASTER

Nearly 2,000 years ago, a volcano destroyed the city of Pompeii.

Thousands died. It was the worst disaster of the ancient world.

Now imagine that you are there. BY LAUREN TARSHIS



THE ROMAN EMPIRE The Roman Empire stretched across parts of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Pompeii is located in the country we now call Italy.

Let's travel back in time to ancient Rome.

It's going to be a long trip—nearly 2,000 years. Close your eyes and imagine it: There were no computers, cars, or electric lights, and America wasn't a country yet.

Back then, much of Europe and the Middle East were part of what is known as the Roman **Empire**. The capital of the Roman Empire was the city of Rome.

Your journey will be fascinating, but it will also be frightening—because you're about to witness one of the worst disasters in the history of the world.



PAUSE AND THINK: Where will your trip be taking you?



A Summer Day

It's a typical summer day in the beautiful city of Pompeii. The year is 79 A.D. Pompeii's main street is packed with people—women in robes, men in long shirts called tunics, and children wearing leather sandals that slap against the hot stone streets.

This city appears surprisingly modern, with a library, shops, and restaurants. You stop at a market that offers dozens of delicacies, such as roasted mice stuffed with nuts and rose petals.

As you exit the market, you glance up and notice it—Mount Vesuvius, the massive mountain that looms behind the city. You don't give Vesuvius much thought, and neither do the people of Pompeii. After all, it's only a big mountain, sitting silent and still.

Except Mount Vesuvius is not just a mountain. It is a dangerous volcano.



PAUSE AND THINK: What was the city of Pompeii like in the year 79 A.D.?

The Volcano

Mount Vesuvius sits atop a crack in Earth's crust. That's the hard, rocky layer that covers our planet like the shell of an egg. The crack in the

VOCABULARY

empire: a large group of countries or regions controlled by one ruler or government

molten: melted by heat

eruption: the act of erupting—sending out rocks and ash in a sudden explosion

preserved: kept in good condition over a long period of time

ruins: the remaining pieces of something that was destroyed

BENEATH THE SURFACE

Why did Mount Vesuvius erupt? And how did it cause so much destruction?

1. Extremely hot, melted rock called magma flowed up through a crack in Earth's crust.

2. For months, the magma boiled under Vesuvius. This caused pressure to build.

3. Vesuvius finally erupted, sending ash and melted rock called lava 12 miles into the air.

4. The ash and tiny pebbles called pumice rained down on Pompeii, burying the city.

5. A lava flow rushed down the mountain at up to 180 miles an hour—burning everything in its path.

crust allows **molten** rock called magma to flow up from miles below.

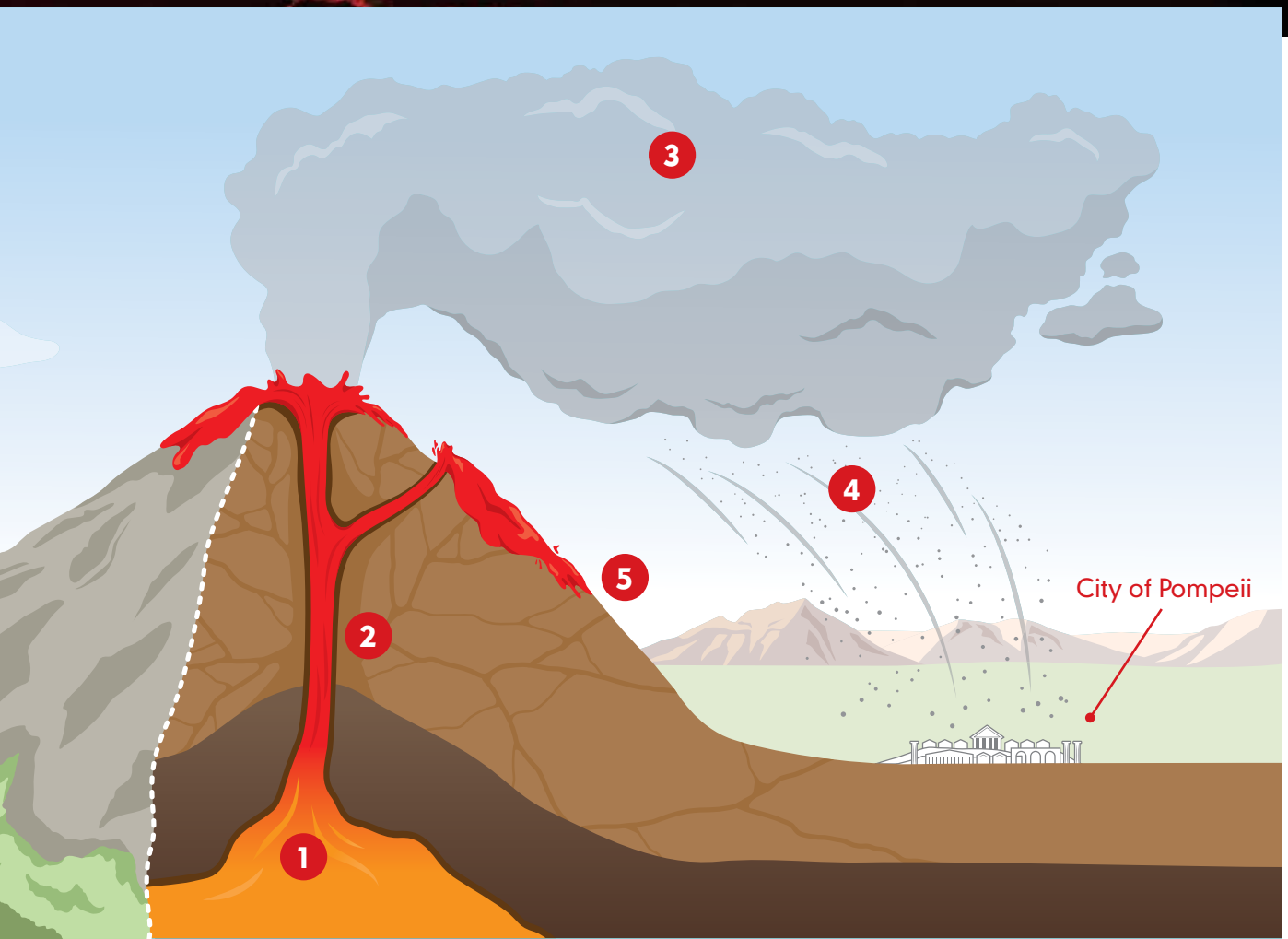
An enormous lake of magma boils under Vesuvius, but the people of Pompeii don't know that. They have no experience with volcanic eruptions. Vesuvius has been dormant—or asleep—for 1,500 years.

But for months now, magma has been rising through the center of the volcano. Pressure is building. A gigantic **eruption** is coming.

The people of Pompeii should have evacuated weeks ago. If only they understood the danger. But you do—so what are you doing standing around? Run!



PAUSE AND THINK: Why are the people of Pompeii in danger?



A Powerful Explosion

But actually, it's too late. *BOOM!* A powerful explosion shakes the city. People fall to the ground, and horses scream. Thick, gray smoke spews from the top of Mount Vesuvius.

Except it's not smoke.

The intense heat from the eruption has transformed millions of tons of solid rock into super-hot foam. This foam shoots 12 miles into the sky at rocket speeds. When it hits the freezing air high above Earth, the melted rock turns into tiny pebbles called pumice.

The pumice pours down on Pompeii with painful force. It is mixed with hot ash, which makes it difficult to breathe. You grab the hand of a little boy who has become separated from his family, and together you run for your lives.

Other people decide to stay behind, to guard their homes and businesses. They believe this bizarre storm of ash and rock will soon end.

They are gravely mistaken.



PAUSE AND THINK: What is pumice? What did it do after the eruption?

More Terror

The sky turns black. As hours pass, the weight of the pumice causes roofs to collapse, trapping people inside their homes.

But that's not all.

Suddenly, a mixture of ash and melted rock called lava rushes down the mountain at up to 180 miles an hour. When it hits Pompeii, the people left behind die instantly.



In the weeks that follow, people search Pompeii for survivors but find none. Indeed, the entire city appears to have vanished. Pompeii is buried under more than 10 feet of rock.



PAUSE AND THINK: What killed the people who stayed behind in Pompeii?

A Lost World

You survived your day in Pompeii. You were among the lucky people that got out of the city before escape became impossible. But before you go home, let's take one more trip—to Pompeii today.

For nearly 1,700 years, Pompeii was forgotten. It was rediscovered in 1748, and scientists have been studying it ever since. The layers of pumice and ash that covered Pompeii formed a shell over

the city, which **preserved** everything beneath it—as if the city was frozen in time. Over the centuries, experts have unearthed jewels, artwork, and statues. They even found the remains of a basket of eggs and a bowl of chicken soup.

As you walk through the **ruins** of Pompeii today, you can examine what remains of houses, shops, and temples. You can also see Mount Vesuvius. The volcano is silent and still—but don't be fooled.

Mount Vesuvius has erupted more than 30 times since Pompeii was destroyed—most recently in 1944. These eruptions were minor, but scientists predict that the volcano will erupt again—with great force.

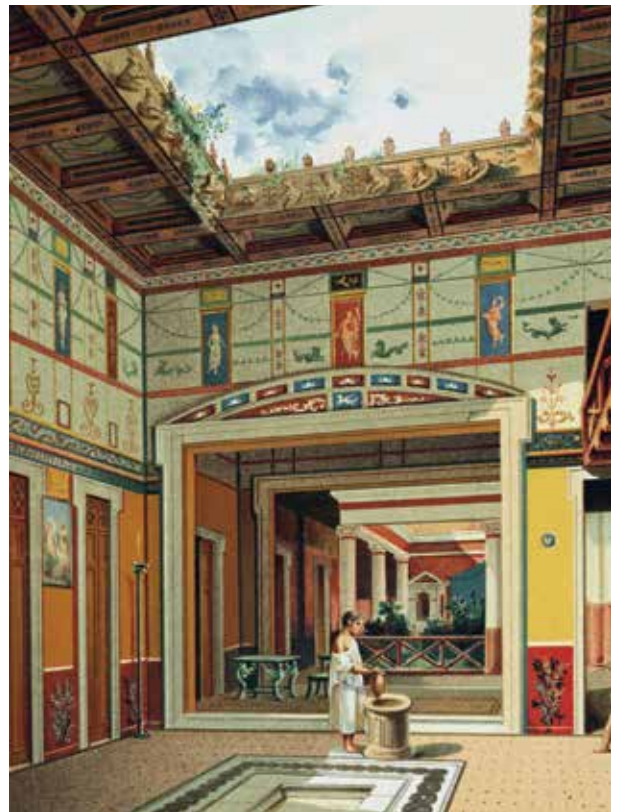
Would you want to be there to see it? •



PAUSE AND THINK: What would you find if you visited Pompeii today?

UNCOVERING A LOST CITY

This drinking cup was found in the ruins of a fancy Pompeii home, like the one below. The city's rich lived in large villas decorated with paintings and tiles.



BACK IN TIME This is what a Pompeii villa might have looked like in 79 A.D.