

City Under Ash

Andre walked down the street, careful not to trip on the uneven stones. Exploring the ancient city of Pompeii was fun. It was sad, too. He thought of the 10,000 residents who were trapped in clouds of ash and gas when Mount Vesuvius erupted in 79 A.D. He wondered what they had thought as the sky blackened and ash rained down. Maybe there wasn't time to think at all.

The signs around the city explained a lot about life in Pompeii before the eruption. Andre imagined he was a wealthy Roman citizen, vacationing in the city. He would have gone to the baths, watched chariot races, and attended plays at one of the two theaters in town. It sounded like a pretty nice life, for 2,000 years ago.

Andre was amazed how much they knew about life that long ago. According to the tour guide, the ash preserved buildings, artwork, and even forms of bodies. From these remains, historians could piece together a lot about ancient Roman life.

As Andre snapped a picture of an ancient toilet, he felt the stones under his feet shift. "Whaa..?" he said. They rumbled again. "Whoa!"

Andre took off running. All the tourists were running. And the guides were shouting. "Remain calm!" they said. But they didn't sound very calm themselves.

With his sneakers pounding on the stones, Andre rounded the corner by the amphitheater. “It’s going to blow!” he heard someone yell. Was that possible? Was Mount Vesuvius erupting again?

Andre leaned against a building and caught his breath. Which would come first, gas, ash, or rocks? And would he even know what was happening? Andre felt a chill up his spine.

But he didn’t feel any more shaking beneath his feet. The tremors seemed to be over. The guides were trying to comfort everyone. It was just a shifting, not an eruption. There was nothing to worry about.

Everyone gathered around the guide as he explained that while it was true the volcano was overdue for another eruption, people would have more notice this time. Scientists could track the volcanic activity. The explosion was not happening today.

“Phew!” thought Andre. He liked history, but he didn’t really want to live it. Especially not in Pompeii.



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NAME: _____ DATE: _____

1. What was the name of the volcano that erupted in 79 AD?
 - a. Pompeii
 - b. Vesuvius
 - c. Rome
 - d. Andre

2. Which activities does Andre imagine doing if he lived 2,000 years ago?
 - a. Going to the baths
 - b. Watching chariot races
 - c. Attending the theater
 - d. All of the above

3. Why was exploring the city sad?
 - a. Because 10,000 residents died in the ancient eruption
 - b. Because everything was covered in ash
 - c. Because the buildings were abandoned
 - d. Because the ground started to shake

4. How did the historians know so much about life in ancient Pompeii?
 - a. The descendants of people living in Pompeii told them about it
 - b. They guessed based on life in Rome
 - c. The ash preserved buildings and artwork
 - d. They had photos of what things looked like before the eruption

Instructions for teachers:

These questions can be used to assess understanding of the reading passage.

The item in bold is the correct answer for each question.

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