What Your Students Want to Know

Teachers: Use this FAQ to prepare your students for their field trip to *Pompeii: The Exhibition*. It can also serve as a "Before and After" review of their knowledge of this catastrophic time in ancient Pompeii.

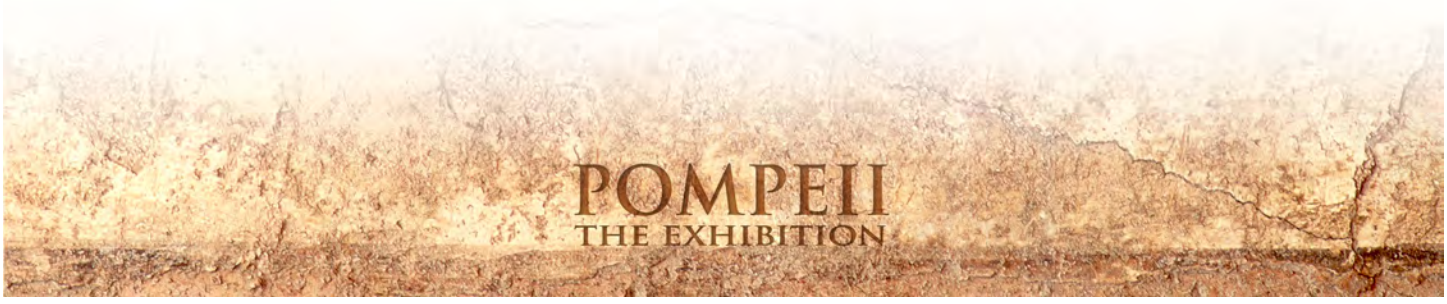
When did Vesuvius erupt and destroy Pompeii?
Mount Vesuvius erupted on August 24, 79 A.D., and sent a cloud of ashes, pumice stones, and smoldering hot volcanic gases high into the sky. People could see the eruptions for hundreds of miles. The debris made its way down to Earth as it began to cool. The volcano was dormant for generations and caught the ancient Romans off-guard.

When was Pompeii rediscovered, who discovered it, and how was it discovered?
Local inhabitants had long been aware of antiquities buried in their midst. Well diggers at Herculaneum, not far from Pompeii, discovered the theater of that city in 1738. A decade later attention shifted to Pompeii, which was not so deeply buried and more easily excavated. The ruins of the city had previously been accidentally encountered in 1592 by engineers digging a canal, but they were not interested in the antiquities and continued with their project, leaving the ancient city relatively untouched.

What happened when the volcano exploded?
Days before the eruption, frequent tremors shook Pompeii and surrounding cities. Shortly before noon the volcano erupted. People heard explosions coming from the mountain as hot ash and gas began to surface. By 1pm the dust and ash had completely covered the sky creating utter darkness. By 8pm, the eruptions had grown more violent creating the heavy debris of falling ash and pumice that buried Pompeii and its neighboring cities, Herculaneum and Stabiae.

Eruptions and earthquakes continued into the next day (August 25, 79 AD). That morning, the largest pyroclastic flows of hot ashes, volcanic gases, and debris made their way through the streets of Pompeii completely destroying the city. In just two minutes, the city streets were covered in almost eight feet of hot ash. On the morning of August 26, 79 A.D. the eruption finally stopped, leaving almost five cubic miles of pumice and ash covering approximately 186 miles of land.

How long did people have to leave the city before it was destroyed?
Most Pompeiians did not know the destruction foreshadowed by the earthquakes that took place days before the eruption. With the eruption occurring around noon and growing more violent by that evening, it is believed that the residents of Pompeii only had a few hours to evacuate the city.



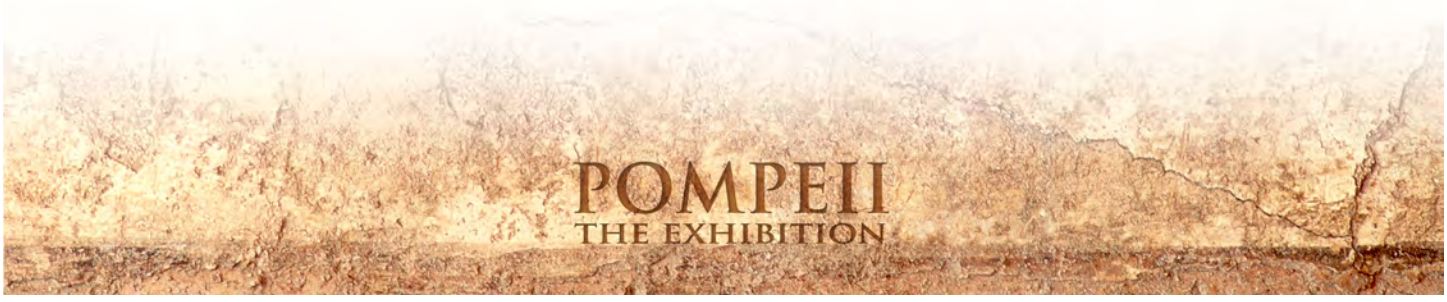
Why did some people choose not to evacuate?
For many residents, tremors and earthquakes happened so frequently that they didn't pay much attention to them. Additionally, as there wasn't a word for volcano, the people of Pompeii did not view the tremors as potential warning signs. Some residents sought the aid of gods, others felt it was a sign from the gods that they were going to destroy everyone, and still others believed no gods were left and the universe was being thrust into eternal darkness.

How was the city preserved?
The large amount of ash that covered the city acted as a preservative, leaving the city of Pompeii almost exactly how it had been left 1600 years before it was discovered.

Why did Pompeii remain undiscovered for so long?
Due to the miles of ash and pumice that covered the city, as well as the first-hand accounts of the event and unsuccessful rescue attempts, Pompeii was thought to be lost forever.

How many people died during the eruption?
It is believed that more than 2,000 people lost their lives as a result of the destructive eruption.

What is the present status of Pompeii?
Today Pompeii has been designated as World Heritage Site by UNESCO attracting more than 2.6 million tourists annually. Though sections of it are currently visible to tourists, much of the city remains protected due to the moratorium on future excavation so that the already exposed buildings can be studied, conserved, and preserved.



Rediscovery Timeline

The story of the rediscovery of Pompeii, Herculaneum, and other communities buried by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius is as fascinating as the story of the towns themselves. Use this detailed timeline of significant moments in the archaeology of Pompeii to incorporate the history of this cataclysmic event into your daily lesson plans. These milestones are connected to the wide variety of themes, people, and topics featured in both this Educator Guide and within the galleries at *Pompeii: The Exhibition*.

This information can be used in your classroom:

- For exercises in historical geography, by mapping specific locations over time.
- As a resource for biographies of key people involved in the rediscovery of Pompeii.
- To develop group study aids such as trivia contests and game or quiz shows.
- As writing prompts and research project topics across the curriculum.
- To study the evolution of technology and methodology in the fields of archaeology and history.

1709-1711: A farmer sinking a well struck Herculaneum's ancient theater in which he found handsome ancient marble sculptures. An Austrian general acquired the land, had deep tunnels dug, and for two years plundered the site for antiquities.

1738: Employing miners, soldiers and convicts, Charles I, the 22-year-old representative of a brand new Tuscan-Spanish dynasty installed in the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily, launched a treasure hunt at Herculaneum. Hundreds of sculptures, columns and frescoes were hacked from walls and removed.

1740: Originally thought to be the city of Stabiae, it was later discovered that the buried city was Pompeii. The city was crudely plundered after excavations began. For decades, there was no attempt to record or preserve the site and countless objects were destroyed. The finest frescoes and artifacts went into the royal collection, which is currently housed in the National Archaeological Museum of Naples.

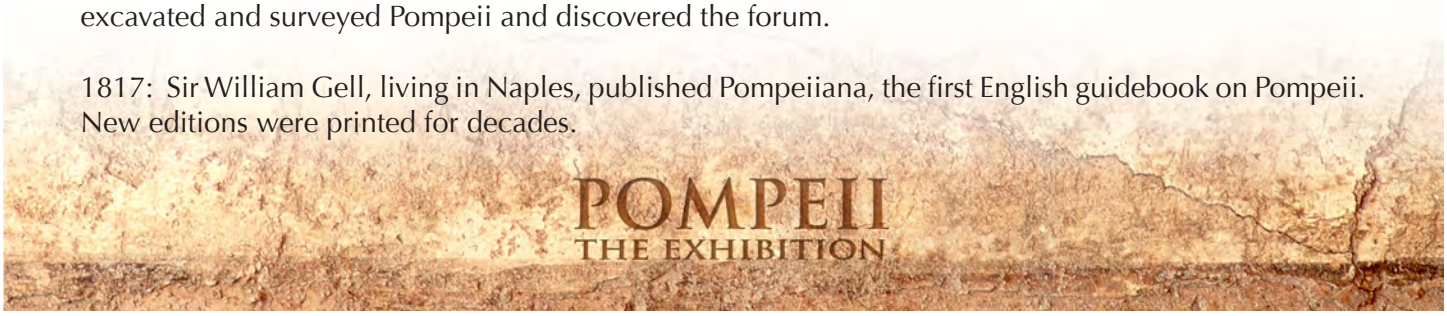
1750-1764: Karl Weber, a Swiss army engineer, directs excavations at Herculaneum and Pompeii. He is the first to conduct systematic digs and to record uncovering of the sites.

1760: The first person to attempt a methodical approach to cataloging the ruins at Pompeii was German art historian, J.J. Winckelmann. He is considered to be the father of archaeology. Because the city was buried under a shallow layer of lightweight pyroclastic matter, it was possible, and a priority, to conduct a speedy excavation in order to limit the number of thefts.

1765: Excavations at Herculaneum were suspended after the Temple of Isis is discovered at Pompeii.

1805-1815: Coming under French rule, the kingdom of Naples is run by Napoleon's sister and brother-in-law. Thanks to Queen Caroline Bonaparte Murat's keen interest in archaeology, French architects excavated and surveyed Pompeii and discovered the forum.

1817: Sir William Gell, living in Naples, published Pompeiiana, the first English guidebook on Pompeii. New editions were printed for decades.



1830-1832: The Alexander Mosaic, circa 100 BCE, was discovered during an excavation of the House of the Faun. The complex floor mosaic, 19 feet by 10 feet – a copy of a famous earlier Macedonian fresco or painting – depicted young Alexander's victory over Darius, King of Persia.

1860-1875: The archaeologist Giuseppe Fiorelli, director of excavations at Pompeii for a newly unified Italy, introduced innovative methods of discovery. Frescoes were no longer removed from walls and sent to the Naples museum but were left in place. Fiorelli cleared the streets of debris and systematically numbered the streets and buildings. From hollows left by decaying organic matter, he made plaster casts that reconstructed bodies of dead people and also those of animals and native trees.

1879: Official ceremonies marked the 1800th anniversary of Pompeii's destruction. Fiorelli's successor, the archaeologist Michele Ruggiero, continued to preserve and restore Pompeii's original appearance.

1910-1923: Archaeologists focused on clearing Pompeii's main street, the Street of Abundance (Via dell'Abbondanza), and restoring every excavated building along its path.

1924-1930: After Giuseppe Fiorelli, Amedeo Maiuri became the single most influential superintendent of excavations at Pompeii. He re-launched excavations after they were halted for 162 years, fearing encroaching construction above ground.

1935-1939: The Large Palestra (gymnasium) near the amphitheater was fully excavated and restored. Many bodies were found in the portico.

1943-1944: During World War II, Allied bombs fell on Pompeii, striking several houses in the Street of Abundance (Via dell'Abbondanza). Vesuvius also erupted for several months and parts of Naples were evacuated.

1940-1960: Volcanic rubble was in great demand for road-building – excavation records for this period were extremely poor or non-existent.

1980: Pompeii was damaged by a severe earthquake in November. Documentation of existing ruins became a priority in anticipation of future quakes.

1997: Pompeii, Herculaneum and associated sites were declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization.

2010: The National Archaeological Museum of Naples opened a new wing, dedicated to displaying paintings from the Vesuvian sites. Some of the freshly restored paintings were on view for the first time in decades.

Late 2010: Torrential rains reduced two houses in Pompeii to rubble. The House of the Gladiators had been given an overly-heavy cement roof over 60 years prior, and the House of the Moralist rested against a man-made embankment that collapsed.

Today: Pompeii takes up a quarter of a square mile. Large-scale excavation has now ceased, and one-third of the city remains underground. Archaeologists oppose undertaking fresh excavations while they focus on conserving existing buildings, re-examining and understanding earlier discoveries, and researching the pre-Roman settlement of Pompeii.

Volcanic Vocabulary

Provide an area in your classroom with dictionaries – online or hard copies – for your students to define the terms below. For additional vocabulary development, refer to the word bank ("Terms to Know") listed on the Student Activity pages in the lesson plans.

Archaeologist
A scientist who studies artifacts of the near and distant past in order to develop a picture of how people lived in earlier cultures and societies. These artifacts include physical remains, such as graves, tools and pottery.

Artifact
A handmade object or the remains of an object that is characteristic of an earlier time or culture, such as an object found at an archaeological excavation.

Caldera
A cauldron-like depression in the ground created by the collapse of land after a volcanic eruption.

Cinder Cone Volcano
A type of volcano, also known as a scoria cone, which has a single vent, a bowl-shaped crater, and steep sides (i.e. Paricutin).

Composite Volcano
A type of volcano, also known as a stratovolcano, which is usually tall and mountainous and whose steep sides have been formed over time by repeated deposits of ash, lapilli, lava, and pyroclastic flows (i.e. Vesuvius).

Convergent Plate Boundaries
Locations where lithospheric plates are moving towards one another. These plate collisions often produce earthquakes, volcanic activity, and crustal deformation.

Cryovolcano
Also known as an ice volcano, these types of volcanoes erupt volatiles such as water, ammonia, and methane instead of molten rock.

Dormant
In a state of rest or inactivity; inoperative; (of a volcano) not erupting.

Excavation
To unearth or remove objects, bodies, buildings, etc. from the environment or site in which they were originally buried.

Flank
The side of a volcano.

Lava
Molten rock that reaches the surface of the Earth through a volcano or fissure.

Lithosphere
The rigid outer shell of the Earth that includes the crust and a portion of the upper mantle.

Magma
Molten material beneath or within the crust of the Earth from which igneous rock is formed.

Magmatic Dike
An intrusive, igneous body that cross-cuts pre-existing rock.

Mosaics
The art of creating images with an assemblage of small pieces of colored glass, stone, or other materials.

Plinian Eruption
A type of volcanic eruption, also known as a Vesuvian eruption, marked by columns of gas and volcanic ash extending high into the stratosphere and characterized by large amounts of pumice and very powerful continuous gas blast eruptions. This type of eruption was named after Pliny the Younger, a Roman writer who escaped Pompeii and described the 79 A.D. eruption of Mt. Vesuvius, which killed his uncle.

Parasitic Cone
A cone-shaped accumulation of volcanic material formed by eruptions from the fractions on the flanks of a volcano, but not part of the central vent.

Pyroclastic Flow
A heavier-than-air emulsion of hot ash, pumice, rock fragments, and volcanic gas that flows down the flank of a volcanic structure. Pyroclastic flows are considered to be the deadliest of all volcanic phenomena.

Shield Volcano
A type of massive volcano with broad sloping sides often built up from the sea floor and formed almost entirely by lava flows (i.e. Mt. Kilauea).

Subduction
The process that takes place at convergent plate boundaries by which one tectonic plate moves under another tectonic plate, sinking into the Earth's mantle as the plates converge.

Subterranean
Existing, situated, or operating below the surface of the Earth; underground.

Stratovolcano
See Composite Volcano

Tephra
Material produced and ejected into the atmosphere by a volcano and classified by size:

- Ash - particles smaller than 2 mm (.08 in.) in diameter.
- Lapilli or volcanic cinders – particles between 2 and 64 mm (.08 and 2.5 in.) in diameter.
- Volcanic bombs or volcanic blocks – particles larger than 64 mm (2.5 in.) in diameter.

Tremors
A relatively minor seismic shaking or vibrating movement. Tremors often precede larger earthquakes or volcanic eruptions.

Vent
An opening exposed on the Earth's surface where volcanic material is emitted.

Volcano
An opening or rupture in a planet's surface or crust allowing hot magma, volcanic ash, and gases to escape from below the surface.

Volcanology
The study of volcanoes, lava, magma, and related geological, geophysical, and geochemical phenomena.

Volcanologist
A person who studies the formation of volcanoes and their current and historic eruptions.