



Inside the Colosseum

Historical Background Information

Long ago, the Roman Colosseum (kaw-l-uh-SEE-uhm) was used for public entertainment that included gladiator fights. Gladiators fought other men and animals for sport. Gladiators were prisoners, slaves, or volunteers. Many of these fights continued until death. Defeated or wounded fighters could ask the crowd for mercy. The crowd would cheer and boo. The emperor or official in charge would give a signal with his thumb if the man should live or die. In the picture, you can see part of the Colosseum that was hidden under the floor of the arena. There were rooms and hallways designed as preparation areas or holding areas for the entertainers and the animals. Sometimes, they flooded this area with water and placed the gladiators on small boats. The gladiators fought crocodiles and other gladiators from these boats. It was a very violent form of entertainment.



Analyzing History

Knowledge

Why would someone go to the Colosseum? Make an advertisement that tells what he or she would see.

Comprehension

Use your five senses to explain what a trip to the Roman Colosseum would be like.

Application

Would it have been an honor to be chosen as a gladiator? Explain.

Analysis

What are the good and bad things about being a gladiator? Make a chart that shows both.

Synthesis

What modern-day piece of equipment could a gladiator use for protection? How would this help him as a fighter?

Evaluation

Do you think it was difficult for a leader to end the gladiator fights forever? Why or why not?

Historical Writing

Fiction

Pretend you are a sports announcer at the Colosseum. Write a script that shows your broadcast of a battle between a gladiator and an animal.

Nonfiction

Why is life today better without gladiator fights? In what other ways could the Romans have used the Colosseum? Write a newspaper article for the editorial section that explains your ideas and opinions to the readers.

History Challenge

Research events held at the Colosseum. Then, create a three-column chart—one column for the time, another column for the event or activity, and a third column to describe the activity or event. Finally, design a schedule for a day at the Colosseum.

A Fight to the Finish

Standard/Objective

- Compare similarities and differences in the ways groups, societies, and cultures meet human needs and concerns. (NCSS)
- Students will study the lives of gladiators in the Colosseum and then write journal entries as if they are fighting in the Colosseum.

Materials

Copies of both sides of the *Inside the Colosseum* photograph card; Copies of the historical background information (page 28); Reference books

Discussion Questions

- What are the different shapes you see in this picture?
- What are two words that describe this place?
- What do you think the Romans did at this place?
- How is this place like a sports arena we have today?

Using the Primary Source

Display the *Inside the Colosseum* photograph card, and have students examine it. Ask the discussion questions above. Let students work with partners to answer these questions on paper. Let a few students share their answers with the class. Have students read the historical background information (page 28) with partners.

Then, tell students that this is the Colosseum in Rome. Have them imagine themselves as gladiators in the Colosseum. Ask students to think about the equipment that gladiators needed. Have them use reference books and Internet sites to research gladiators in ancient Rome.

Each student can then write a series of five short diary entries as a gladiator in the Colosseum. The students should date the entries beginning two days before a performance and continuing for two days after. The diary entries should reveal the thoughts and feelings of the gladiators before and after the show. The entries must reflect researched and accurate data collected by the students. Have some students share their best diary entries with the class.

As a final activity, assign students various activities from the back of the photograph card.

Extension Ideas

- Students can write résumés as if they were applying for job openings at the Colosseum and then write job descriptions for gladiators.
- With parental permission, allow students to view certain clips of the movie *Gladiator*. Point out that the beginning of the movie shows some of the front-line Roman soldiers in battle. Allow students to be movie critics and report on the accuracy of the Roman soldiers' costumes and weapons.

A Fight to the Finish *(cont.)*

Historical Background Information

In ancient Rome, the government kept the people fed and entertained. Romans believed this would keep the people from rebelling. This is why the Romans built the Colosseum (kaw-l-uh-SEE-uhm). It offered public entertainment that was often horrible and bloody.

The Colosseum hosted gladiator (GLAD-ee-ay-tuhr) fights. Gladiators were men chosen from among prisoners, criminals, and slaves to fight other men or animals. But, this fighting was not like today's fighting sports. The men fought to the death. Some of the ancient Romans were against this cruel form of entertainment. However, most of the people liked to attend. When the Colosseum first opened, fights were held for 100 days in a row. During that time, hundreds of animals and thousands of gladiators died. No one really knows just how many.

At times, wounded fighters would ask the crowd for mercy. The crowd would cheer or boo. The person in charge would listen to the crowd. Then he would give a sign to the fighters. This sign would either let the fighter live or allow him to be killed.

A gladiator might have a shield, a helmet with a visor, and a stabbing sword. A buckler was a small, round shield used as protection. A scimitar (SIM-uh-tur) was a short, curved sword. It could be used instead of the stabbing sword. Sometimes, both swords were used together.

Most performances lasted all day. The day might start with exotic animal shows. The gladiator events would be held in the afternoon. In almost all of the events, death played a role. A gladiator battling an animal, such as a lion, would fight until he or the animal died. In some cases, the gladiators who won over and over again became famous. They were like sports figures today.

The people of ancient Rome did not react toward these awful shows like people might react today. Although they watched these bloody battles, they didn't like certain parts. For example, the blood smelled awful. The sand was often stained with blood. Colored sand was used to hide the blood.

The army leaders viewed these fights as a teaching tool for the Roman soldiers. The troops would watch the men fight and learn new methods for stabbing. It also gave the Romans a chance to display their strength and courage to visitors from outside Rome.

Emperor Honorius (hoh-NAWR-ee-uhs) made gladiator fights against the law around A.D. 400. But, the Romans continued to have animals fight each other to the death for another 100 years.

