

Colosseum

A Reading A-Z Level U Leveled Book
Word Count: 1,158

LEVELED BOOK • U

Connections

Writing

Create a brochure that persuades people to visit the Colosseum. Include important information from the book in your brochure.

Social Studies

Create a timeline for the Colosseum's construction. Use the information from the book and outside research to complete your timeline.

Colosseum



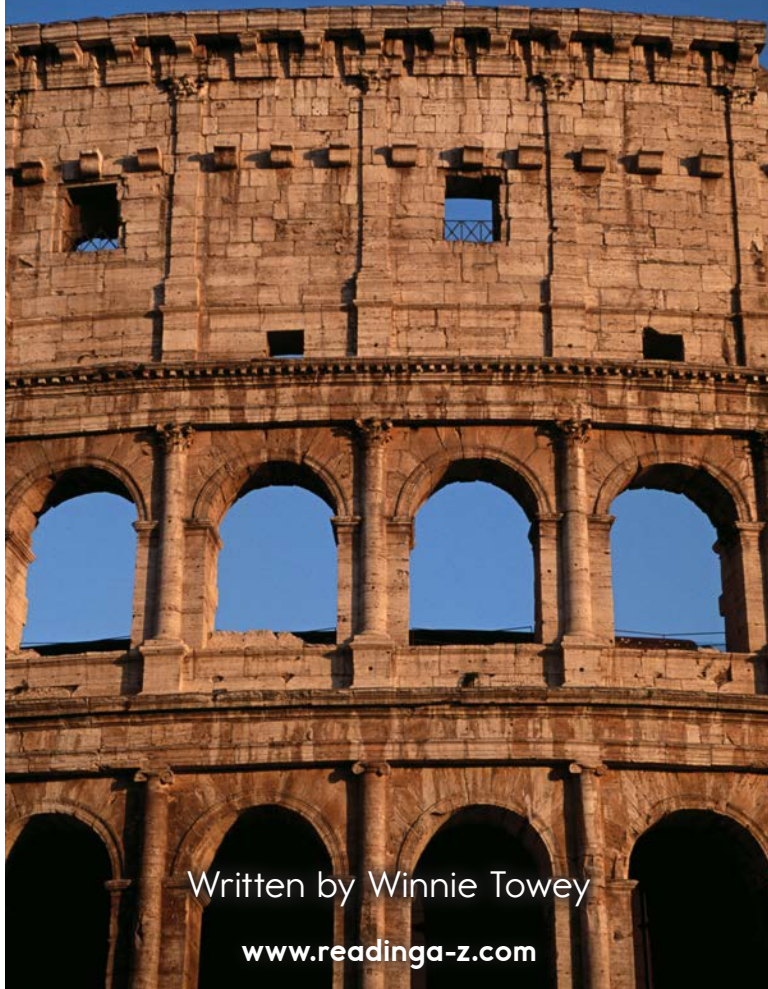
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Focus Question

What is the Colosseum, and why is it still popular today?

Words to Know

architecture	landmark
brutal	pulley
dynasty	quarry
empire	spectators
gladiators	vandalism
hypogeum	velarium

Front cover: Some of the events held at the Colosseum lasted for over one hundred days.

Title page: The Colosseum, a remarkable architectural achievement, only took eight years to build.

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World Landmarks
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Correlation

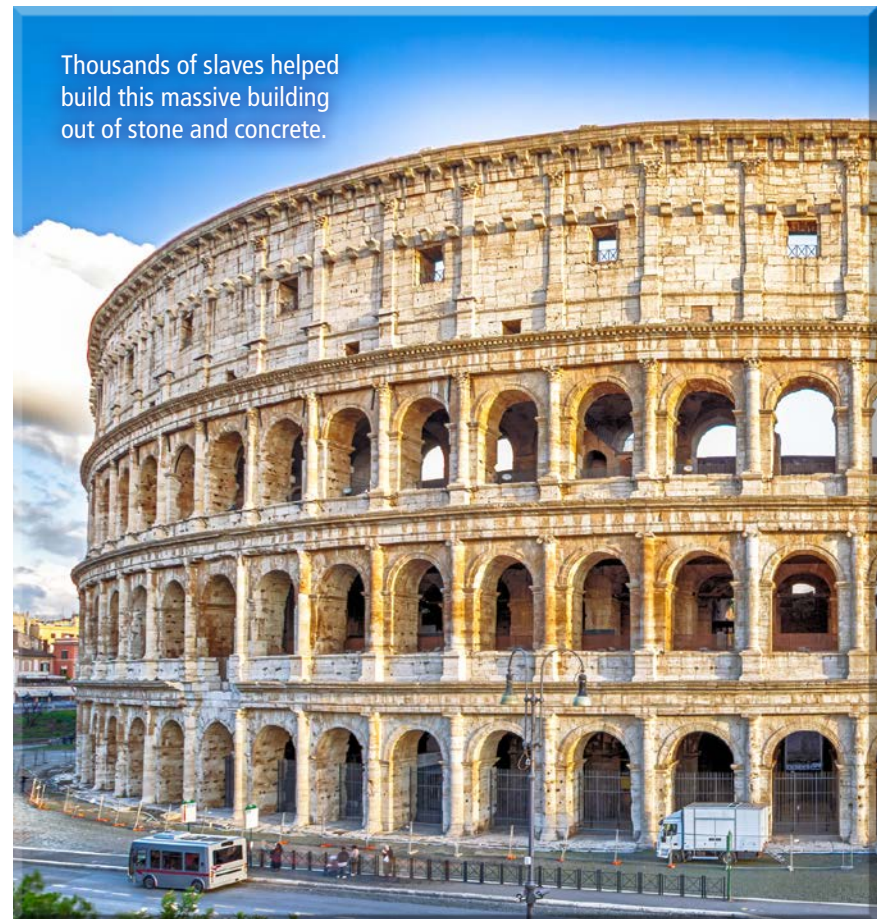
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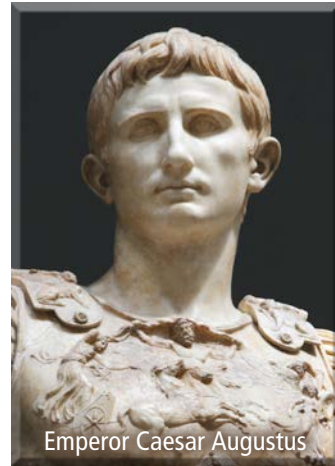


What Is the Colosseum?

Have you ever been to a big stadium to watch your favorite team play football or baseball? Do you remember how you felt when your team came onto the playing field? Now take a step back almost two thousand years to the Roman **Empire**. Imagine you are seated among ancient Romans in the largest, oldest, and most famous sports arena in the world—the Roman Colosseum.

Rome, Past and Present

The Roman Empire began with the Emperor Caesar Augustus in 27 BCE. It ended in 476 CE. At one point, the Roman Empire covered much of Europe as well as the Middle East and parts of North Africa.



Ancient Rome has had lasting effects on the world. Many countries model their laws after those developed by the Romans. The ways that buildings were made during the Roman Empire continue to influence modern building designs. For example, Romans perfected the use of concrete, a strong building material still in use.

Today, Rome—also known as the Eternal City—is a busy place. Visitors from across the globe come to enjoy its museums, monuments, and food.

Although a ruin, the Colosseum remains an amazing piece of **architecture**. It is an important **landmark** in Rome, the capital of Italy and one of the biggest cities in Europe. The Colosseum is also one of the most famous monuments in the world, standing for the glory of ancient Rome.



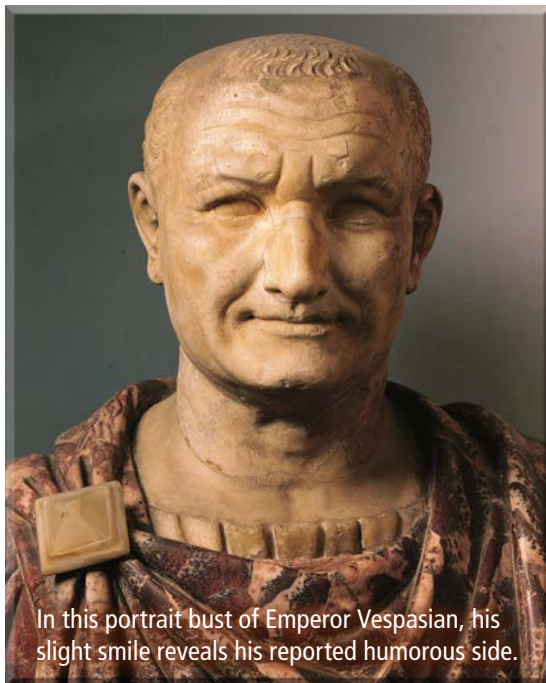
The History of the Colosseum

The Colosseum was built as a very large outdoor theater called an *amphitheater*. An amphitheater is a round or oval building with tiers of seats rising in curved rows around an open space. Audiences went to an amphitheater to see different types of games.

In the first century CE, the Roman Empire was expanding around the Mediterranean area and into northwestern Europe. Its population was about fifty to sixty million, or approximately one-fifth of the world's population. As the Romans grew in power, they began to build large buildings, such as the Colosseum.

The original name of the Colosseum was the Flavian Amphitheater. The Flavians were a Roman family that commanded the empire between 69 and 96 CE. Their **dynasty** began under Vespasian, who started building the Colosseum.

Emperor Vespasian became very popular with the people because he built the Colosseum on land where the palace of a previous, unpopular emperor had stood. Now, the land wasn't for the emperor but rather for the people. The Colosseum was also built to showcase the power of Rome to the world. After Vespasian died, his son, Titus, oversaw the completion of the Colosseum.



In this portrait bust of Emperor Vespasian, his slight smile reveals his reported humorous side.

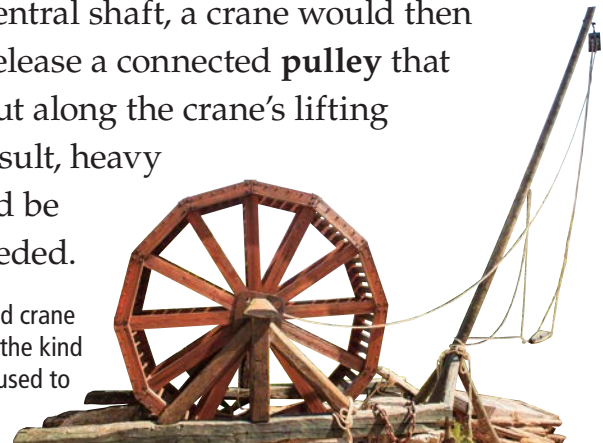
Building the Colosseum

About 33,000 metric tons (36,376 tn.) of soil were removed from a large area to make a deep hole for the Colosseum. Next, huge stone supports 12 meters (40 ft.) tall were placed for its foundation. Then, concrete was poured into the pit. Once the concrete was dry, workers added brick walls to support the weight of the amphitheater. Prisoners brought to Rome as slaves did most of the physical work.

Historians think that more than 292,000 cartloads of heavy stone blocks were used to build just the outer wall of the Colosseum. As the building grew higher, lighter stones were used to lessen the weight.

Romans invented wooden cranes to lift the heavy stones and concrete. Slaves would climb into a large wheel and walk inside of it. Rotating along the central shaft, a crane would then pull in or release a connected **pulley** that extended out along the crane's lifting bar. As a result, heavy stones could be lifted as needed.

This reconstructed crane is an example of the kind ancient Romans used to lift heavy stones.





This aerial view of the Colosseum shows its massive size. The structure could hold fifty thousand Romans at one time.

Important Features

The Colosseum is roughly the size of a modern sports stadium. It measures 189 meters (620 ft.) long and 156 meters (512 ft.) wide. The Colosseum could hold fifty thousand spectators—many more than any other amphitheater at the time. Its floor was made of wooden planks covered in loose sand brought to Rome from Egypt.

The Colosseum had four main floors with eighty arches on each of the first three floors. These arches supported the weight of the stones above them and, on the first floor, were used as entrances and exits.

A huge cover called a **velarium** could be extended over the Colosseum. It was made of canvas and held in place by ropes attached to wooden beams at the top of the arena. The velarium provided much-needed shade for spectators. Without it, they would have spent entire days baking under the Sun.

Beneath the Colosseum was a complex underground system of rooms and hallways called the **hypogeum**, which means “underground” in Latin. There, fighters called **gladiators** and animals waited before emerging into the arena.



A system of lifts brought animals and men from the hypogeum to the floor of the Colosseum.



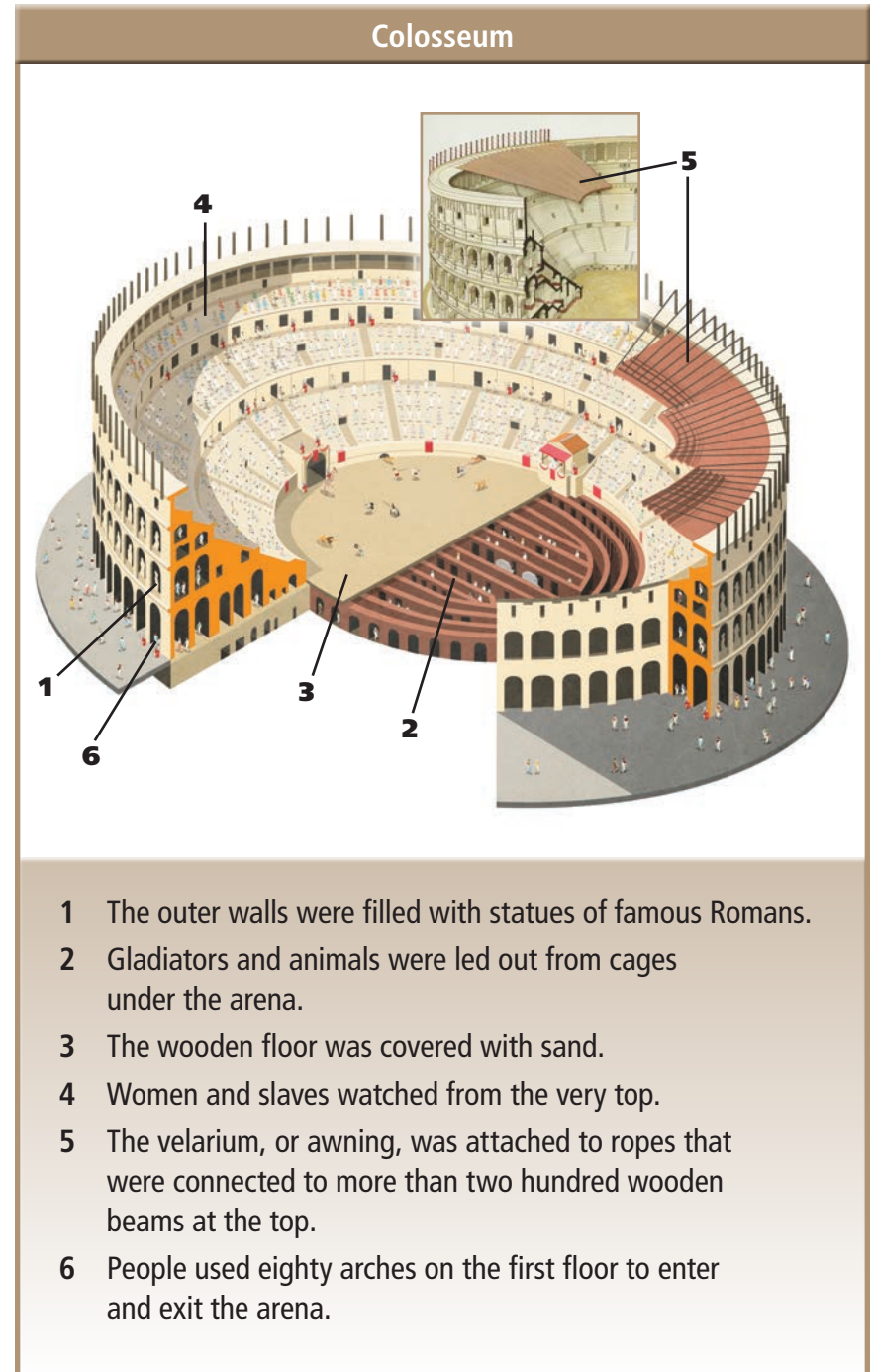
This ancient mosaic from Algeria shows hunters gathering exotic animals for Roman games.

The Games

The main attractions at the Colosseum were the games, which started at dawn and lasted until darkness fell. One of the first events was the wild animal display. Following this came the **brutal** animal hunts. Emperors would often shoot at the animals with bows and arrows. Animal trainers then teased wild animals into fighting people.

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Nine thousand wild animals were brought to Rome from the far reaches of the Roman Empire to celebrate the opening of the Colosseum during one hundred days of games.



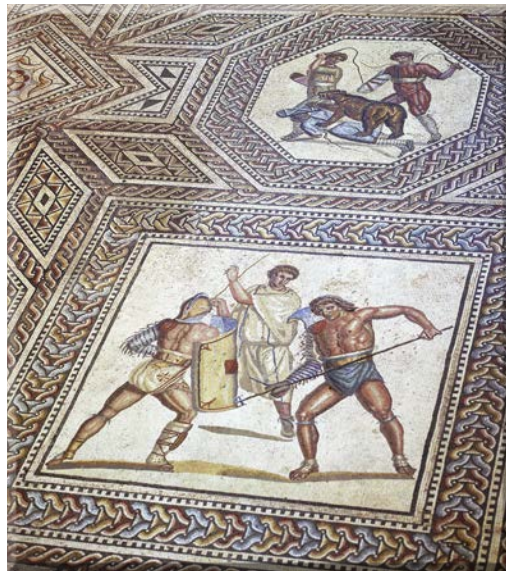
- 1 The outer walls were filled with statues of famous Romans.
- 2 Gladiators and animals were led out from cages under the arena.
- 3 The wooden floor was covered with sand.
- 4 Women and slaves watched from the very top.
- 5 The velarium, or awning, was attached to ropes that were connected to more than two hundred wooden beams at the top.
- 6 People used eighty arches on the first floor to enter and exit the arena.



These ringside seats were reserved for the most important people in Rome.

In the afternoon, the famous gladiator contests took place. Gladiators were trained at a gladiator school called a *ludus*. Some gladiators were prisoners of war, criminals, or slaves seeking freedom. Others were freemen and retired soldiers who wanted fame and fortune. Gladiators often fought to the death. At times, they would ask for mercy. The crowd was consulted as to whether a fighter should be allowed to live.

A referee (*summa rudis* in Latin) watches closely as gladiators battle each other in this ancient mosaic from a Roman house in Germany.



Over time, Christianity began to take hold across the empire. Romans also faced financial and military problems. Emperors preferred to spend money on fighting wars rather than on repairs to the Colosseum.

The importance of this ancient building began to decline around 300 CE. By 600 CE, it had been severely damaged by neglect, lightning, and earthquakes. Afterward, it was sometimes used as a **quarry** for other buildings. Builders took pieces of the Colosseum to use for their own purposes.



Gaspar van Wittel made this painting of the Colosseum's ruins in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century.

The Colosseum Today

Over many years, natural disasters and **vandalism** have destroyed nearly two-thirds of the Colosseum. Since the early 1990s, several repairs have brought this nearly two-thousand-year-old landmark closer to its ancient glory. Its walls were cleaned in June 2016 at a cost of more than \$33 million.

Much of the soot and grime that had piled up over the years was due to automobile fumes. The number of cars now allowed in the area has been reduced. Only cabs and buses may travel around the Colosseum on weekdays. On weekends, only people riding bicycles or on foot are permitted.

The Colosseum is one of the most famous and recognizable monuments to have survived from the ancient world. It is also one of the most popular places in Italy. Between four and six million people venture inside its stone walls every year. In 2007, the Colosseum was chosen as one of the New Seven Wonders of the World. Today, it stands as a symbol of the power and greatness of the Roman Empire.



Glossary

architecture (<i>n.</i>)	the design and construction of buildings (p. 5)
brutal (<i>adj.</i>)	ruthless, cruel, or violent (p. 11)
dynasty (<i>n.</i>)	a series of rulers from the same family in a country (p. 7)
empire (<i>n.</i>)	a collection of nations or people ruled by one person or government (p. 4)
gladiators (<i>n.</i>)	fighters in ancient Rome who fought in public to entertain other people (p. 10)
hypogeum (<i>n.</i>)	the underground part of an ancient structure, often a room or a network of rooms (p. 10)
landmark (<i>n.</i>)	an important historical building or site (p. 5)
pulley (<i>n.</i>)	a circular lever, usually a wheel with a rope around it (p. 8)
quarry (<i>n.</i>)	a place where marble, slate, or other kinds of stone are excavated (p. 14)
spectators (<i>n.</i>)	people who watch an event without taking part (p. 9)
vandalism (<i>n.</i>)	the intentional destruction of property (p. 15)
velarium (<i>n.</i>)	a cloth covering used to shade the audience at a Roman theater or amphitheater (p. 9)