

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Spartacus

Rome needed workers to maintain its wealth. The first people conquered by the Roman army were welcomed as citizens, but after 265BC, many conquered people were auctioned off as slaves. Many of the great architectural achievements of ancient Rome were created with the grueling labor of slaves.

A slave named Spartacus led a slave revolt that threatened the stability of the Roman Republic. Spartacus was likely from Thrace, a land northeast of Greece, but we don't know much about his early life. Spartacus may have been a soldier in the Roman army, but was condemned to slavery. He was forced to train to be a gladiator. In ancient Rome, most gladiators were armed slaves who went into battle with other slaves or wild animals for the entertainment of the Roman people. In 73BC, Spartacus and a group of other gladiators escaped captivity by seizing kitchen knives and fighting their way to freedom. The Romans sent a small force to capture the escaped gladiators, but the slaves killed most of the Roman soldiers and took their weapons.

The Roman army believed they cornered the escaped slaves on Mount Vesuvius by blocking the only path from the mountain. Spartacus and his soldiers secretly climbed down a steep cliff using vines as ropes. The slave army then attacked the Romans from behind, killing most of the unprepared

soldiers. The slaves continued to win battles with Roman armies and became folk heroes for many of the poorest people of ancient Rome. Folk heroes are popular with common people, but not with people in power. The ranks of the slave army grew as they liberated other slaves, and as word of their success grew, as many as 120,000 of the poorest people of Rome joined the revolt. Spartacus' powerful army plundered the Roman countryside for more than two years.

The slave revolt ended after a bloody series of battles near the southern tip of the Italian peninsula in 71BC. Two Roman generals, Crassus and Pompey, led a force 40,000 soldiers. The slaves were no match for the superior weapons of the Roman armies. Spartacus was killed in battle, but six thousand of his soldiers were taken prisoner and crucified. Crucifixion is a form of execution where the prisoner is nailed to a cross and left to die a slow, painful death. The crosses were placed along the Apian Way, one of Rome's most traveled roads. The sight of the crucified slaves served as a gruesome reminder of the strength and the brutality of the Roman army.

Crassus and Pompey returned to Rome as heroes. The Senate selected them to be consuls, but Crassus and Pompey were soon to come into contact with the greatest general in Roman history: Julius Caesar.

### Answer in complete sentences

\*1. Why do you think the slave revolt led by Spartacus was successful for two years?

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\*2. The text says, "The powerful slave army plundered the Roman countryside for more than two years.." What do you think countryside means?

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\*3. Spartacus was a folk hero to many people in ancient Rome. Who might be considered a folk hero in today?

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