

The Eruption of Mount Vesuvius

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Name _____

The Eruption of Mount Vesuvius

*Read the following passage about one of history's best-known volcanic eruptions.
Then answer the questions on the next page using complete sentences.*

The year is 79 AD. The thriving cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum are bustling with merchants, farmers, and manufacturers, all of whom are working to make a living selling fruit, wine, or other goods. People make their way through the market from stall to stall, purchasing items and talking with neighbors. Looming over the whole scene is Mount Vesuvius, a tall peak that stretches 4,203 feet into the clouds.

Suddenly, the cities' peace and prosperity comes to a screeching halt when the volcano explodes and a 10-mile cloud of volcanic ash, rocks, and gas is shot into the air. Smoke and debris make the air thick and the sky black. People in Pompeii begin coughing and falling to the ground as rocks rain from above. Hot ash and toxic gas pour out of the volcano and onto the city of Herculaneum on the west side of the mountain, suffocating all life.



What force of nature brought these two cities to their knees in such an unexpected way? How did this eruption occur before anyone could issue a warning? To find the answer to these questions, we must search back even further into history.

Mount Vesuvius formed a long time ago when two pieces of the Earth's crust, called tectonic plates, collided. When this occurred, one piece was pushed up and one piece was pushed under. The result was the formation of a ridge that we call a mountain. Over time, the plate that was shoved under continued to heat up, melting the crust into liquid rock called magma. Hard rock is denser than magma, so the magma began to rise, seeking an escape route. When it found a crack in the earth's surface, the magma was able to break through, causing the deadly eruption that occurred in 79 AD.

Mount Vesuvius has erupted many times since that fateful day, the last being in 1944. When will ash and stone rain from the sky once more? No one can say for sure, but scientists are working to develop tools that will allow them to warn people next time an explosion is set to occur--this time before it's too late.

Name _____



1. What two cities were located near the base of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD?

2. How did Mount Vesuvius form?

3. Why do volcanoes erupt?

4. How are scientists working to make sure a tragedy like this doesn't occur again?

5. Put yourself in the shoes of a person watching all of this occur on that day in 79 AD from a place of safety in the Bay of Naples, far away. What do you hear? See? Taste? Smell?

Unscramble the bold, red letters in the passage to reveal the secret message.

ANSWER KEY

1. What two cities were located near the base of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD?

In 79 AD, the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum were located near the base of Mount Vesuvius.



2. How did Mount Vesuvius form?

Mount Vesuvius formed when two tectonic plates crashed into each other, pushing one side down into the earth and one side up, forming a mountain.

3. Why do volcanoes erupt?

Volcanoes erupt when parts of the Earth's crust become overheated and melt into liquid rock called magma. Because magma isn't very dense, it rises to the surface to find an exit point. A crack in the earth's crust allows for magma to escape. If a lot of magma builds up without an easy escape, it creates pressure that can lead a volcanic explosion.

4. How are scientists working to make sure a tragedy like this doesn't occur again?

Scientists are developing tools to help warn them before another explosion happens so they can get people to safety.

5. Put yourself in the shoes of a person watching all of this occur on that day in 79 AD from a place of safety in the Bay of Naples, far away. What do you hear? See? Taste? Smell?

Answers will vary.

Unscramble the bold, red letters in the passage to reveal the secret message.

M O U N T V E S U V I U S

I S E X P L O D I N G
