

THE HISTORY® CHANNEL DOCUMENTARY SERIES

COLISEUM

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EDUCATION GUIDE



About the Show

The eight-part series vividly brings to life the rise and fall of the Roman Empire through the lens of one of the most exhilarating and brutal arenas in the history of humanity—the Colosseum. From the savage truth of a gladiator's life as a slave-warrior to the fascinating ways Rome's Emperors used the vast amphitheater to demonstrate total power, "Colosseum" offers viewers a unique and personal look inside history's most iconic empire. Each episode pinpoints one of eight key and diverse characters—all based on real people from history. Spanning several hundred years, the series unfolds chronologically, from the arena's astonishing opening day to its very last games. "Colosseum" utilizes dramatic live action sequences and special effects to infuse excitement into the personal narrative of each historic character. The premium series features commentary with leading experts, world-renowned scholars and more.

Curriculum Links

Colosseum will be useful for courses focusing on Global History, Western Civilization, Roman History and Architectural Innovation. Please note, the series contains scenes of intense violence and viewer discretion is advised. Viewing should be limited to mature high school and college students.

Pre-viewing Suggestion

Visit the official *Colosseum* site to learn more about the series and browse through some of the articles about Ancient Rome: <https://www.history.com/shows/colosseum>.



Key Terms

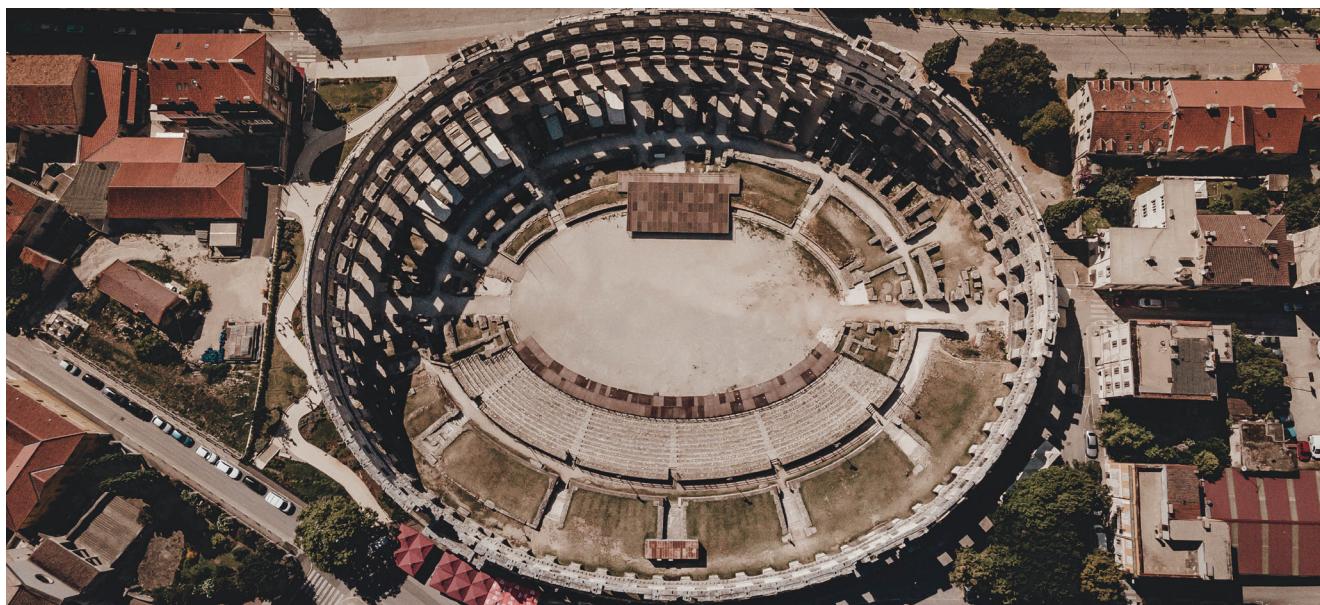
- Gladiator
- Emperor
- Dynasty
- Lannister
- Summa rudis
- Ludus
- Parmula
- Rudis
- Flavian Amphitheatre

Discussion Questions

1. The colosseum is known today as one of the most iconic ancient structures in the world. At the time, why was finishing the construction of the colosseum important to Emperor Titus?
2. The gladiatorial games were one of the first examples of spectator sport in our world's history. What similarities and differences can be drawn from the Colosseum to how we watch modern day sports and how professional athletes are viewed today compared to how gladiators were viewed in ancient Rome?
3. The Colosseum remains one of the most visited tourist attractions in Europe. Why do you think the Colosseum fascinates people to this day?
4. The series details how the Colosseum stood as an important symbol to the former emperors and citizens of the Roman Empire. What did the Colosseum symbolize back then? Why is it still important today?
5. The Flavian Dynasty ruled the Roman Empire for 27 years. Vespasian ruled for 10 years, followed by his sons Titus and Domitian. Discuss the impact the dynasty had on the Roman Empire.
6. How did Domitian differ from his brother Titus?
7. Who was the poet Martial? Why is he important?
8. How were gladiators viewed by society in Ancient Rome?
9. The series discusses how not all gladiators were the same. Episode one touches upon the different classes of gladiators. What are the main differences between a Murmillo and a Thracian? (Hint: Verus was a Murmillo and Priscus was a Thracian)
10. Several people played a role in the preparation and coordination of the games. What was the role of the lannister? The summa rudis?
11. The battles between gladiators were not the only event that took place at the Colosseum. What were the different events that took place during the 100 days of games?
12. The schools where gladiators trained were called a ludus. What was life like at the Ludus for a gladiator-in-training?
13. The first gladiators were enslaved people who were chosen to battle for mass entertainment. According to Colosseum, where was the best source for gladiators? Why?
14. What is the real name of the colosseum? Why is it named this?
15. How were gladiators able to earn their freedom?

Additional Activities

1. Rome is famous for its architecture with the Colosseum being one of its most iconic structures. Today, its influence can be spotted in architecture throughout the rest of the world. Ask students to familiarize themselves with the elements of Ancient Roman architecture and collect images of other buildings throughout the world that contain some of these elements. Then, in a discussion format, or in a PowerPoint presentation, students should present their findings, being specific about the factors the structures contain that stem from Roman architecture.
2. Newspapers as we know them today did not exist in Ancient Rome. Announcements were instead carved into stone or metal, that were then posted in public squares where citizens could read them. Pretend modern newspapers had existed back then and ask your students to assume the role of a reporter covering a moment from the series. Be creative. Students can take the liberty of being a sportswriter, opinion columnist, news reporter, etc.
3. A lesser-known fact about the Colosseum is that, though it was rare, females also competed as gladiators. Episode four, *The Gladiatrix*, tells the story of Mevia, a woman who sacrificed her status as a free citizen to fight in the arena. More can be learned about female gladiators from this article: <https://www.history.com/news/women-gladiators-ancient-rome>. Ask students to conduct additional research and write a short essay about women's roles in society in ancient Rome and how Gladiatrices challenged those ideals.
4. The Colosseum has been without a floor since the 19th century when archaeologists removed it to unveil the complex network of passages and tunnels that existed below. Recently, the Italian government approved the reconstruction of the arena floor which is set to be completed by 2023. Ask students to explore online resources that outline the plans for the retractable floor, then write a short essay explaining the importance of preserving historical sites, specifically the Colosseum.



Primary Source Activity:

Excerpt: Seneca, Epistles 7: Letter to Lucilius on the Gladiatorial Games

"I turned in to the games one mid-day hoping for a little wit and humor there. I was bitterly disappointed. It was really mere butchery. The morning's show was merciful compared to it. Then men were thrown to lions and to bears: but at midday to the audience. There was no escape for them. The slayer was kept fighting until he could be slain. "Kill him! flog him! burn him alive" was the cry: "Why is he such a coward? Why won't he rush on the steel? Why does he fall so meekly? Why won't he die willingly?" Unhappy that I am, how have I deserved that I must look on such a scene as this? Do not, my Lucilius, attend the games, I pray you. Either you will be corrupted by the multitude, or, if you show disgust, be hated by them. So stay away."

Discussion Questions:

1. Seneca fell within the minority among the Roman people with his view of the gladiatorial games. In his letter to Lucilius he describes what he saw as “mere butchery”, yet the audience cheered on, encouraging more violence. Why do you think so many Romans found the games entertaining?
2. Why does Seneca urge Lucilius to “stay away” from the games?

DID YOU KNOW?

- The emperor Commodus is best known for being the first Emperor to step into the Colosseum’s arena as a gladiatorial fighter.
- The Colosseum could seat upwards of 50,000 spectators. The seating arrangement reflected the social hierarchy, with the emperor and senators closest to the action, and women and slaves in the nosebleeds
- Contrary to popular belief, most bouts between gladiators did not result in death. Gladiators were a considerable investment, and their owners wanted to keep them alive and fighting for as long as possible.

Episode Guide

Ep.1 – The Gladiators

In 80 AD Emperor Titus opens the Colosseum with 100 days of spectacular games, including one of the most famous gladiatorial matches in Rome's history. After forming a close bond in the harsh environment of their training school, two gladiators, the barbarian Priscus, and Rome's champion, Verus, must now fight to the death in front of 50,000 spectators. Their story has come down to us through the Roman poet, Martial.

Ep.2 – The Builder

When master builder Haterius constructs the Colosseum from the ashes of Nero's Golden House, his work is far from over. New Emperor Domitian tasks him with adding in a complex network of underground tunnels: the hypogaeum. Haterius will have to balance satisfying the insatiable demands of the all-powerful Emperor, with the extreme pressures of creating an ancient architectural marvel in time for Domitian's games. Failure could cost his life.

Ep.3 – The Beastmaster

As the Roman Empire continues to expand, so does the diversity of exotic beasts brought back to entertain the Colosseum crowds. Over a million animals are slaughtered on the sands of the arena by trained beast masters, none more famous than Carpophorus. But when met with the unprecedented challenge to battle 20 wild creatures, can Carpophorus survive?

Ep.4 – The Gladiatrix

When the mighty Emperor Trajan throws his great games of 107 AD, the crowd is treated to a rare spectacle: female gladiators. The combatants are typically prisoners of war, but in one game, a Roman woman named Mevia makes history. She decides to trade her status as a free citizen of Rome to fight in the arena as a gladiatrix, a controversial and shocking choice that earns the enmity of Roman historian and satirist, Juvenal. Her choice illustrates the challenges of plebian life for women in ancient Rome.

Ep.5 –The Martyr

The public execution of criminals is a staple in the Colosseum, but during Trajan's 123 days of games in 107 AD, one of these victims is no ordinary prisoner. Bishop Ignatius of Antioch is part of a growing underground religion threatening Roman traditions: Christianity. Will his high-profile execution send a message, or spread the word of Christ further than Trajan could have anticipated?

Ep.6 –The Scientist

One of the most famous doctor/scientists of the ancient world, Galen of Pergamon makes a name for himself as a physician for gladiators in the arena. But just as Rome's Empire reaches the height of its power and influence under Emperor Marcus Aurelius, a

devastating plague sweeps through the city—and Galen catches the attention of Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Now it's up to this scientist to defend Rome from disease and keep the Emperor alive at all costs. This episode marks a turning point in the series, as barbarian attacks along Rome's northern borders intensify, beginning the long period of Rome's decline.

Ep.7 – Commodus

All of Rome's emperors have put great value on spectacles and games, but only one steps out of the Imperial Box and onto the sands of the arena: Commodus. A far cry from his father, the great Emperor Marcus Aurelius, Commodus is quick to make enemies – especially with one elite ruling body, the Senate. As the empire crumbles and Commodus's popularity plummets, a deadly game of cat and mouse ensues, centered around Rome's great amphitheater.

Ep.8 – The Pagan

By the 4th Century AD, a divided Roman Empire is rocked by devastating earthquakes, fires, barbarian invasions and deep religious divides. As Rome declines, the Colosseum, which once stood as a proud symbol of the Empire's glory, lies empty. To restore Rome, one man, a devout worshipper of the Rome's old Gods, turns to the arena. Can staging elaborate and expensive games there reverse Rome's decline?



Related Links

Colosseum Show Site:

<https://www.history.com/shows/colosseum>

Ancient Rome:

<https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-rome/ancient-rome>

10 Things You May Not Know About Roman Gladiators:

<https://www.history.com/news/10-things-you-may-not-know-about-roman-gladiators>

Parco Archeologico del Colosseo:

<https://parcocolosseo.it/en/area/the-colosseum/>

Secrets of the Colosseum:

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/secrets-of-the-colosseum-75827047/>

6 Civil Wars that Transformed Ancient Rome:

<https://www.history.com/news/6-civil-wars-that-transformed-ancient-rome>

11 Roman Emperors Who Helped Mold the Ancient World:

<https://www.history.com/news/timeline-emperors-roman-republic>

How Ancient Rome Thrived During Pax Romana:

<https://www.history.com/news/pax-romana-roman-empire-peace-augustus>

The Secrets of Ancient Rome Concrete:

<https://www.history.com/news/the-secrets-of-ancient-roman-concrete>

Did Women Fight as Gladiators in Ancient Rome:

<https://www.history.com/news/women-gladiators-ancient-rome>

10 Innovations That Built Ancient Rome:

<https://www.history.com/news/10-innovations-that-built-ancient-rome>