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POMPEII

BY CALEB WILSON

In 79 A.D. Mount Vesuvius erupted burying the vibrant Roman city of Pompeii, and many of its citizens beneath tons of volcanic ash. The City of Pompeii was an ancient Roman town near modern day Naples. The following documents are primary sources related to that event. As you analyze and examine each document consider the source and time period of its creation. I want students to use inference from the documents to determine details of the source event, and use evidence to support those determinations.

I want students to think about the two questions provided as they read the chapter. As you are reading the chapter, and answering the questions provided on each page keep in mind the two questions below. At the end of the chapter answer the questions below.

Generative Question: How does natural disaster affect civilizations.

Question: What happened to the ancient Roman city of Pompeii?

Pliny, translated by William Melmoth [revised by F. C. T. Bosanquet]

LXV

To Tacitus

Your request that I would send you an account of my uncle's death, in order to transmit a more exact relation of it to posterity, deserves my acknowledgments; for, if this accident shall be celebrated by your pen, the glory of it, I am well assured, will be rendered forever illustrious. And notwithstanding he perished by a misfortune, which, as it involved at the same time a most beautiful country in ruins, and destroyed so many populous cities, seems to promise him an everlasting remembrance; notwithstanding he has himself composed many and lasting works; yet I am persuaded, the mentioning of him in your immortal writings, will greatly contribute to render his name immortal.

Happy I esteem those to be to whom by provision of the gods has been granted the ability either to do such actions as are worthy of being related or to relate them in a manner worthy of being read; but peculiarly happy are they who are blessed with both these uncommon talents: in the number of which my uncle, as his own writings and your history will evidently prove, may justly be ranked. It is with extreme willingness, therefore, that I

execute your commands; and should indeed have claimed the task if you had not enjoined it. He was at that time with the fleet under his command at Misenum. On the 24th of August, about one in the afternoon, my mother desired him to observe a cloud which appeared of a very unusual size and shape. He had just taken a turn in the sun and, after bathing himself in cold water, and making a light luncheon, gone back to his books: he immediately arose and went out upon a rising ground from whence he might get a better sight of this very uncommon appearance. A cloud, from which mountain was uncertain, at this distance (but it was found afterwards to come from Mount Vesuvius), was ascending, the appearance of which I cannot give you a more exact description of than by likening it to that of a pine tree, for it shot up to a great height in the form of a very tall trunk, which spread itself out at the top into a sort of branches; occasioned, I imagine, either by a sudden gust of air that impelled it, the force of which decreased as it advanced upwards, or the cloud itself being pressed back again by its own weight, expanded in the manner I have mentioned; it appeared sometimes bright and sometimes dark and spotted, according as it was either more or less impregnated with earth and cinders. This phenomenon

seemed to a man of such learning and research as my uncle extraordinary and worth further looking into.

He ordered a light vessel to be got ready, and gave me leave, if I liked, to accompany him. I said I had rather go on with my work; and it so happened, he had himself given me something to write out. As he was coming out of the house, he received a note from Rectina, the wife of Bassus, who was in the utmost alarm at the imminent danger which threatened her; for her villa lying at the foot of Mount Vesuvius, there was no way of escape but by sea; she earnestly entreated him therefore to come to her assistance. He accordingly changed his first intention, and what he had begun from a philosophical, he now carries out in a noble and generous spirit. He ordered the galleys to be put to sea, and went himself on board with an intention of assisting not only Rectina, but the several other towns which lay thickly strewn along that beautiful coast. Hastening then to the place from whence others fled with the utmost terror, he steered his course direct to the point of danger, and with so much calmness and presence of mind as to be able to make and dictate his observations upon the motion and all the phenomena of that dreadful scene. He was

now so close to the mountain that the cinders, which grew thicker and hotter the nearer he approached, fell into the ships, together with pumice-stones, and black pieces of burning rock: they were in danger too not only of being aground by the sudden retreat of the sea, but also from the vast fragments which rolled down from the mountain, and obstructed all the shore. Here he stopped to consider whether he should turn back again; to which the pilot advising him, "Fortune," said he, "favours the brave; steer to where Pomponianus is." Pomponianus was then at Stabiae, separated by a bay, which the sea, after several insensible windings, forms with the shore. He had already sent his baggage on board; for though he was not at that time in actual danger, yet being within sight of it, and indeed extremely near, if it should in the least increase, he was determined to put to sea as soon as the wind, which was blowing dead in-shore, should go down. It was favourable, however, for carrying my uncle to Pomponianus, whom he found in the greatest consternation: he embraced him tenderly, encouraging and urging him to keep up his spirits, and, the more effectually to soothe his fears by seeming unconcerned himself, ordered a bath to be got ready, and then, after having bathed, sat down to supper with great cheer-

fulness, or at least (what is just as heroic) with every appearance of it. Meanwhile broad flames shone out in several places from Mount Vesuvius, which the darkness of the night contributed to render still brighter and clearer. But my uncle, in order to soothe the apprehensions of his friend, assured him it was only the burning of the villages, which the country people had abandoned to the flames: after this he retired to rest, and it is most certain he was so little disquieted as to fall into a sound sleep: for his breathing, which, on account of his corpulence, was rather heavy and sonorous, was heard by the attendants outside. The court which led to his apartment being now almost filled with stones and ashes, if he had continued there any time longer, it would have been impossible for him to have made his way out. So he was awoke and got up, and went to Pomponianus and the rest of his company, who were feeling too anxious to think of going to bed. They consulted together whether it would be most prudent to trust to the houses, which now rocked from side to side with frequent and violent concussions as though shaken from their very foundations; or fly to the open fields, where the calcined stones and cinders, though light indeed, yet fell in large showers, and threatened destruction. In this choice of dangers they re-

solved for the fields: a resolution which, while the rest of the company were hurried into by their fears, my uncle embraced upon cool and deliberate consideration. They went out then, having pillows tied upon their heads with napkins; and this was their whole defense against the storm of stones that fell round them. It was now day everywhere else, but there a deeper darkness prevailed than in the thickest night; which however was in some degree alleviated by torches and other lights of various kinds. They thought proper to go farther down upon the shore to see if they might safely put out to sea, but found the waves still running extremely high, and boisterous. There my uncle, laying himself down upon a sail cloth, which was spread for him, called twice for some cold water, which he drank, when immediately the flames, preceded by a strong whiff of sulphur, dispersed the rest of the party, and obliged him to rise. He raised himself up with the assistance of two of his servants, and instantly fell down dead; suffocated, as I conjecture, by some gross and noxious vapour, having always had a weak throat, which was often inflamed. As soon as it was light again, which was not till the third day after this melancholy accident, his body was found entire, and without any marks of violence upon it, in the dress in which he

fell, and looking more like a man asleep than dead. During all this time my mother and I, who were at Misenum -- but this has no connection with your history, and you did not desire any particulars besides those of my uncle's death; so I will end here, only adding that I have faithfully related to you what I was either an eye-witness of myself or received immediately after the accident happened, and before there was time to vary the truth. You will pick out of this narrative whatever is most important: for a letter is one thing, a history another; it is one thing writing to a friend, another thing writing to the public.

Farewell. (SIC)

[Source:](#)

Document #1 Questions

1. Why is Pliny the Younger writing this letter? (i.e. What is his PURPOSE?)
2. Why did Pliny the Elder look at the strange cloud forming over Mt. Vesuvius?
3. What can you conclude happened to Mt. Vesuvius based on the descriptions given?
4. What did Pliny the Elder do to help the neighboring towns?
5. Ultimately, what happened to Pliny the Elder due to his efforts?

Watch the video and answer the question related to the video.

[Source](#)



Pompeii Original First Discovery

Question

1. What did archeologists find under all the volcanic rock at the beginning of the 20th century?
2. Describe what you see in the video.
3. Why was this site “unspoiled” despite being over 2000 years old?



Click on the confused brain and answer the questions related to the images provided.



Crouching Man Body Cast



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Reflection

For my DBL I designed a lesson that addresses the disaster that happened in the ancient Roman city of Pompeii. Since I am not placed in a history class at the moment I wanted to design my lesson to flow with any history or social studies class that would be studying ancient civilizations or natural disasters. I wanted an interesting lesson that offered a wide range of documents that would allow students to engage fully into the lesson regardless of needs.

Designing a Document Based Lesson, or DBL, has been a great experience. I learned the importance of creating a generative question that serves as a guide for student learning. The hard part was finding documents that best fit this question. I wanted to show the students how devastating the event was and how important it is to look at a variety of sources that are out there. This also puts students into the place of the researcher as they see the evidence that modern historians were faced with in their attempt to understand the catastrophic event.

I struggled with what sources I should attach to this DBL. I wanted a first hand experience of the events along with some “modern” photographs. The hard part for me was finding what photographs I would provide the students for the DBL. There are a lot of photographs out there on Pompeii, of many different artifacts as well as the location itself. I wanted to pick photographs that best capture the event in a student friendly fashion. It was important to include the bread loaf that was fossilized by the ash because it is so relate-able to their lives. I could of simply front loaded a bunch of photographs of fossilized victims of Pompeii; however, I felt that this would just distract the students rather than help them understand the event. This could also have felt very de-contextualized.

If I had to do the DBL again I would like to find a few more documents of related to the event. I am happy with the photographs and video I have. That said, I feel that the for the lesson to be truly complete I would like a few more textual sources for students to go over and maybe contextualize between. I will continue to strive to build lesson that scaffold students knowledge and experience.

Caleb Wilson. wilsocal17@up.edu



FROM EXPLORING
HISTORY: VOL III

Available free at [iTunes](#)

This eBook is a collaborative project of Peter Pappas and his Fall 2015 Social Studies Methods Class [School of Education](#) ~ University of Portland, Portland Ore.

Graduate and undergraduate level pre-service teachers were assigned the task of developing an engaging research question, researching supportive documents and curating them into a DBQ suitable for middle or high school students.

For more on this class, visit the course blog [EdMethods](#)
For more on this book project and work flow tap [here](#).

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by Heidi Kershner
2. *Pompeii* by Caleb Wilson
3. *Samurai: Sources of Warrior Identity in Medieval Japan*
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4. *The Declaration of Independence* by David Deis
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Cover image: Door knocker

Amsterdam NL Photograph by Peter Pappas