



## Investigating a Roman Villa

In A.D. 79 Vesuvius erupted destroying all the towns and villas, including Pompeii and Oplontis, to the southeast of the volcano as well as the lives and land of many. The eruption literally preserved a moment in Roman history.

Vesuvius stands about 1,200 m (4,000 ft) high. Prior to A.D. 79 it may have been a single coned volcano. It dominated the landscape of the Bay of Naples. Did the Romans know it was a volcano? To better understand the people’s awareness of the mountains’ volcanic potential, modern volcanologists, historians, and archaeologists turn to paintings, letters, and ancient texts. The lesson introduces two primary sources to students for them to analyze and determine how people viewed their landscape.

### Preparing to Teach

1. Make copies of a biography, “Meet Pliny the Younger” (page 40), “Geographic Location of Roman Villa at Oplontis” (page 42), and the data collection sheet (page 43) for each student.
2. Prepare to share background information.
3. Post the essential questions.
4. Post the Word Bank words.

### Word Bank

**aristocrat:** noble whose wealth came from land ownership

**biography:** history of a person’s life as told by another person

**emperor:** the male ruler of an empire

**fertile:** good for plants to grow in

**Latin:** the language of ancient Rome

**Oplontis:** a luxury villa set on a cliff 40 feet above the Mediterranean shoreline, was rumored to be the summer villa of Emperor Nero’s second wife, Poppaea

**Pompeii:** an ancient Roman port town that was buried in volcanic ash when Mount Vesuvius erupted in A.D. 79

**Senate/Senator:** Rome’s most important

legislative, or lawmaking, body; a member of the senate. The senate could propose laws, hold debates, and approve building programs

**villa:** house built away from the city in a natural setting

**volcano:** A mountain that is formed by the material ejected during a volcanic eruption

### Uncover Prior Knowledge

**What can we learn about the history and lives of the Roman people by investigating a Roman villa?** Inform students that this question will guide their learning for the entire investigation.

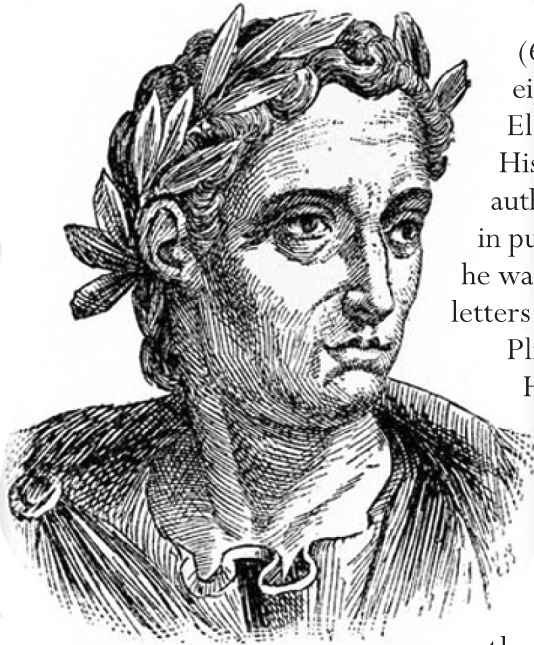
1. Tell students that they are going to play the role of an archaeologist as they investigate a Roman villa, a type of shelter used by the Roman elite.
2. Write the word Roman villa on a board and show the students a picture of a Roman villa (page xx) at the same time.
3. Ask them:
  - What does the design of the Roman villa suggest about the materials the people used to build their shelter?
  - How might the Romans have built their villas using these materials?
  - How might the Romans have used their villa?

### How did the ancient landscape of Mount Vesuvius shape the lives of Roman people?

Inform students that this question will guide their learning. Indicate Word Bank words and inform students that they will use these words as tools and define them during the lesson.

Ask students: What are some of the natural landforms that surround our town (mountains, rivers, lakes, plains, parks, etc)? How do these landforms impact what activities you do (hiking, fishing, growing crops, etc)?

## Meet Pliny the Younger – A Roman Senator



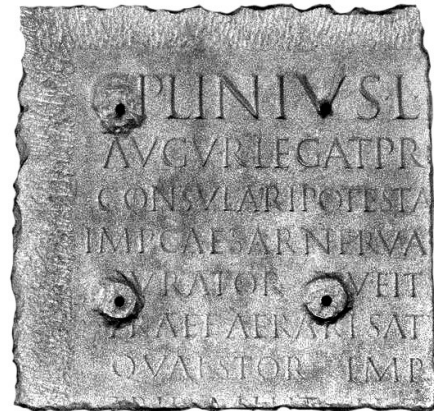
This is Pliny the Younger, a Roman **senator** and writer (62-113 AD). He was born in Como, Italy. When he was eight years old he was adopted by his uncle, known as Pliny the Elder. He was a good student and studied **Latin** and rhetoric. His Latin teacher was Quintilian, one of the most influential authors of his age. He had to study rhetoric because speaking in public was essential if he wanted to become a senator. When he was still young he served in the military. He is famous for his letters which are an important source for Roman history.

Pliny started writing at the age of 14 when he wrote a play. He loved theater and even named two of his villas Comedy and Tragedy. He wrote many letters describing a Roman villa, a dinner party, hunting, and ghost stories. But by far his most famous letter is the one describing

the great eruption of Vesuvius in which his uncle, Pliny the Elder, died.

Pliny the Elder was a scientist who died trying to rescue people. Since he was a commander of the Roman Imperial Fleet based at Misenum, he could sail across the Bay of Naples when he was called to rescue his friends.

Pliny the Younger stayed at Misenum, across the bay from the town of Pompeii, and was only 17 years old when he witnessed the eruption. He was a good student hard at work reading Livy's *History of Rome*, not really concerned about the natural disaster. At that moment he could not have known that he would write two letters that survive to this day giving an account of the greatest natural disaster of Imperial Rome. It would be years later when Pliny the Younger wrote down what he saw and heard in letters to his friend and historian Tacitus.



Draw a line from Misenum to Stabiae to indicate the rescue route taken by Pliny the Elder.