

Reading Thematic Overview

'Thieves of Ostia – Escape from Pompeii' – Caroline Lawrence

Thieves of Ostia: Escape from Pompeii by Caroline Lawrence is an exciting mystery set in the ancient city of Pompeii. The story follows a young girl named Flavia and her friends as they explore the bustling streets, uncover secrets, and solve a crime, all while facing the threat of a volcanic eruption from Mount Vesuvius.

English

After reading descriptions of Ostia and the surrounding areas, pupils can be tasked with writing their own detailed descriptions of a place they know well, using sensory details (sight, sound, smell, touch, taste). They can draw inspiration from Lawrence's vivid depictions of the Roman environment, encouraging them to incorporate specific and imaginative details.

pupils can write a simple "How to Be a Good Detective" guide based on Flavia's methods of solving mysteries. This can teach them the structure of instructional writing, including clear, numbered steps and imperative verbs (e.g., "Look for clues," "Ask questions").

Art

pupils could also be introduced to the concept of portraiture by creating character portraits based on descriptions in the book. They could experiment with various materials (charcoal, pastels) to bring Roman characters to life, developing their skills in capturing expressions and historical details.

The book offers an excellent way to study and recreate Roman shields (scutum) used by soldiers, which were often decorated with symbols and colours representing power and protection. pupils could research typical designs (e.g., thunderbolts, eagles) and then design and paint their own shield, considering colour, symbolism, and patterns, much like Roman craftsmen.

Geography

Although the main action takes place in Pompeii, the looming eruption of Mount Vesuvius raises intriguing questions about why people chose to live near volcanoes. Often, they did so because of the fertile soil and economic opportunities, despite the risks involved. This theme encourages discussions about weighing the pros and cons of such choices.

The backdrop of Pompeii allows for exploration of Roman culture, architecture, and daily life. It serves as an excellent starting point to discuss broader aspects of Roman society, its governance, and its impact on other regions, including Britain.

Science

The story provides a backdrop for discussing ancient Roman life, including physical activities like sword training and gladiator battles. pupils can examine how bones support movement, comparing modern human skeletons with those of ancient times. Discussions could explore how exercise affects bone strength, perhaps linking with the skeletons of ancient animals (like dogs) seen in the story.

The Roman diet of bread, olives, fish, and fruits opens a conversation about food groups, balanced diets, and how nutrition impacts health. pupils can discuss Roman meals compared to modern diets, identifying key nutrients and their functions.

Technology

The book provides glimpses into ancient Roman life, including their infrastructure and tools. You could explore basic mechanical systems by examining the Romans' use of levers, pulleys, and gears in daily life, especially in activities like construction or transporting goods. The book offers a cultural perspective on the food Romans enjoyed, opening discussions about cooking technology.

You could investigate the technology behind Roman cooking methods—such as open hearths, clay ovens, and mortararia (Roman grinding bowls). pupils might enjoy a practical activity involving simple grinding tools to create ingredients like Roman spice blends or grain milling.

History

The book offers a glimpse into what life was like for people in ancient Rome, which opens discussions about the reasons behind the Romans' expansion of their empire. This includes their motivations for trade, military strategies, and the quest for new resources, helping us understand why they chose to settle in places like Britain.

As the story unfolds in a Roman setting, it also provides an opportunity to talk about the lives of Roman soldiers, including their roles within the empire and how they interacted with ordinary people, especially in provinces like Britain.

