Investigating Pompeii and Vesuvius

In the year AD 79, Mount Vesuvius famously erupted, causing devastation to the nearby Roman cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum. Buildings were destroyed and many lives were lost. The entire area was covered in layers of ash and other volcanic debris. Many years later, the remains of the buildings were uncovered and some interesting discoveries made.

The bodies of the buried victims decomposed over time, leaving just skeletons behind. However, they also left hollow cavities in the space that they occupied, with compacted earth and volcanic ash all around. Archaeologists filled the spaces with plaster to create three-dimensional replicas of those who perished. Experts are now able to examine the final poses of the people of Pompeii and the resulting plaster casts have helped them to piece together clues about life in the ancient cities.

Evidence has been found of animal remains as well as human. One particular dog appeared to have been wearing a collar and was chained up to a post – this suggests that it was probably kept as a pet or guard dog. A famous plaster cast shows the dog in the position in which it died: lying on its back with its legs in the air.

Incredibly, scientists have even been able to make plaster casts of the spaces occupied by plant and tree roots in the soil. The moulded root casts have been used to identify what types of plant Romans were growing in the soil at the time.

The remains at Pompeii are now a huge modern tourist attraction. The well-preserved ancient buildings make it one of the most visited archaeological sites in the world.
**Delta – Truth or Myth?**

Some sources suggest that evidence of another dog was discovered, lying above the body of a child. There is some speculation that the faithful dog died while trying to protect the young boy from the volcanic debris. A collar is also said to have been found with the name ‘Delta’ engraved upon it.

Delta, the hero dog, has been linked with an owner named Severinus and stories say that the dog had already saved the life of its owner on several previous occasions. The tales of Delta have inspired modern fiction such as the story of ‘The Pack of Pompeii’, in which a dog of the same name features.

**Mount Vesuvius Facts and Figures**

**Height (since last eruption):** 1281m (since 1944)

**Eruption history:** The volcano had not erupted for centuries before the AD 79 disaster. However, many recorded eruptions have occurred in the centuries between the years 1600 and 2000. The last of these was in 1944. One of the biggest was in 1631 when around 3,000 people were killed.

**Local population:** More than 2 million people are said to live in the area surrounding Mount Vesuvius, either on its lower slopes or nearby.

Mount Vesuvius is located in the Campania region of Italy, near the Bay of Naples.
Questions

1. Which two cities were affected by the AD 79 volcanic eruption? Tick one.
   - Vesuvius and Pompeii
   - Herculaneum and Delta
   - Delta and Vesuvius
   - Pompeii and Herculaneum

2. What did archaeologists use to fill the spaces left behind by decomposed bodies?

3. According to the text, one dog was probably kept as a pet or guard dog.
   What evidence is there to support this suggestion?

Look at the section: Delta – Truth or Myth?
4. According to the story of Delta, why might the dog have been found lying above the body of a child?

5. Find and copy a word which means ‘more than two but not many’.

6. Why do you think this section includes the words ‘Truth or Myth’ in the title?

Look at the section: Mount Vesuvius Facts and Figures
7. Complete the table below by writing the correct figures in each row.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People killed in 1631 eruption</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Last recorded height of the volcano</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Population living in the area</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
8. Why do you think local people may have been surprised by the eruption in AD 79?
Answers

1. Which two cities were affected by the AD 79 volcanic eruption? Tick one.
   - Vesuvius and Pompeii
   - Herculaneum and Delta
   - Delta and Vesuvius
   - Pompeii and Herculaneum

2. What did archaeologists use to fill the spaces left behind by decomposed bodies?
   - plaster

3. According to the text, one dog was probably kept as a pet or guard dog.
   What evidence is there to support this suggestion?
   - The dog was wearing a collar and was chained to a post.

Look at the section: Delta – Truth or Myth?
4. According to the story of Delta, why might the dog have been found lying above the body of a child?
   - The dog was trying to protect the child.

5. Find and copy a word which means ‘more than two but not many’.
   - several

6. Why do you think this section includes the words ‘Truth or Myth’ in the title?
   - Accept: It is not clear whether the story is real; The evidence does not prove that the story was true; The author is not sure whether the events really happened.

Look at the section: Mount Vesuvius Facts and Figures
7. Complete the table below by writing the correct figures in each row.

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8. Why do you think local people may have been surprised by the eruption in AD 79?

   Children’s own responses which refer to the fact the volcano hadn’t erupted for a long time.