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Date _____

Spartacus & Ancient Rome

"I Am Spartacus"

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. Spartacus has become a legend, but once he was a real person. As Spartacus was growing up somewhere near Greece, a kingdom was growing in Rome. Eventually it became a powerful republic and then an unstoppable empire. Roman legions, or armies, marched through the town where Spartacus lived and conquered his land. Some people in his village fought back, but the Roman army was hard to beat. The Romans killed his father and took many of the other villagers captive, including Spartacus.

The Romans held Spartacus and 69 other slaves in a gladiator training school in Capua, near Naples. The land around Naples was beautiful, so many rich Romans built homes on the hills. So when Spartacus and his men broke out of their "school," they had lots of rich estates to rob. Because they were messing with the homes of the rich and famous, the Romans sent a large army to destroy the slaves.

Unfortunately, the uprising of Spartacus and his fellow slaves didn't end slavery in Rome. Spartacus and his army were defeated in 70 BC.

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2. As Rome expanded, Romans became more proud of their interesting government. At the top of the republic were two consuls. Beneath them was the Senate, a group of elected wealthy men (women weren't allowed). Senators served for life, and they helped the consuls decide what was best for Rome. Sometimes they took advice from the tribunes, men elected to speak for the poorer classes. The tribunes got their power from the Assembly, which was a huge body designed to represent the regular people and working classes. Tribunes had the power to veto laws in the Senate.

In the Roman Republic, being free really meant something. The Romans had laws that people had to follow, including laws that protected people's basic rights to be free. They included things like a right to be present at one's own trial and the right to not be killed before being convicted. These laws came about because the patrician class (the wealthy) often tried to take advantage of the plebeian class (the poor). In 494 BC, the plebeians threatened to leave the empire, which would leave the empire with no servants or army. The patricians compromised and gave them the Twelve Tables of Law.

3. As many as 50,000 people would fill the Roman Colosseum for gladiator fights. At the end of a match, one person would survive, and the other would be dead in the sand. These were brutal, savage fights, all done for the amusement of the cheering Roman crowds. The fighters themselves were usually slaves who were forced to fight against their will. The Romans gave them swords, spears and all kinds of exotic weapons, and dressed them up like foreign soldiers. A lot of blood was spilled.

When people weren't at the Colosseum, Romans would go downtown to a square called the Forum to do their shopping, banking, and dining. Many of the major buildings of government were there, and it became known as a place where speeches were given.

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4. According to Rome's founding legend, while twins Romulus and Remus were building the city, Romulus killed Remus and named the city after himself. When one thinks of Rome though, these twins are not who come to mind.

Instead, people often think of Julius Caesar. Caesar, a general, was elected to the Senate and then became a consul. Fearing the Senate had an overpowering political stronghold, Caesar, along with Roman general Pompey, founded the First Triumvirate, a powerful military-political alliance. However, arguments between Caesar and Pompey in 60 BCE led to a Roman Civil War, and Pompey was defeated in 48 BCE.

Caesar wanted more and more power, and when he declared himself "dictator for life," many members of the Senate worried about Rome going from a democracy to a dictatorship.

Soon after, Caesar was assassinated and his adopted son Octavian emerged as the sole ruler of Rome. Until then, the Roman Republic usually had at least two consuls at the top. Now there was just Octavian. He changed his name to Augustus, and he was quick to consolidate power to eventually become the first Roman emperor, ending republican rule.

5. Mount Vesuvius was a volcano that showed little mercy. When it erupted on August 24, 79 AD, it shot ash and gas more than 12 miles up into the air, and in one day it buried the nearby town of Pompeii under almost 20 feet of ash and rock. The people of this city south of Rome had no warning and no time to escape. Many did get out in time, but the whole city was wiped out. It was a horrible tragedy, but it left an almost perfectly preserved Roman city for historians to study. Archaeologists learned much about early Roman history from digging through the ruins of Pompeii. Time simply stopped for the people of Pompeii that day.

6. The Romans understood the importance of moving water, just like the Egyptians and the Mesopotamians before them. They devised a clever system of troughs through which their water supply could flow. Many of these aqueducts started in the ground, but by the time they reached the city, they traveled up over arches built on big columns. These were huge stone gutters that carried water all across the city. They were truly large and most were wide enough for workers to walk through. The 11 major aqueducts were marvels of engineering; the longest brought water for more than 59 miles. Some were located in other countries, like France, which were occupied by the Romans. Many can still be seen around Rome today.

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7. Christianity owes a large debt to Constantine (c. 285-337 AD). He was the first emperor to believe in the faith. Previously, Christians had been persecuted by the Romans, who even fed them to the lions at sporting events. The emperor Constantine changed all that, adopting the Christian faith himself and spread it far and wide. He relocated his capital to what is now Turkey, and called it "New Rome," and named the city Constantinople.

Today, Rome is closely affiliated with the Catholic Church. But in ancient times, it was a place of many gods, similar to Greece. This group of Roman deities, called the pantheon, was pretty much the same in Greece and Rome; just with different names. Zeus, the Greek king of the gods, became Jupiter. Aries, the Greek god of war, became Mars. All of our planets are named after Roman gods.