



The Colosseum is one of the most impressive buildings of the Roman Empire. It was the largest building of its era. This enormous amphitheater was built in Rome on the site where a *colossal* statue of the emperor Nero used to stand; it is believed that this is how the Colosseum got its name. The emperor Vespasian started the construction of the Colosseum in 72 A.D. It was completed only eight years later. The building was constructed of marble held together by iron. The building is elliptical and measures 620 feet by 510 feet. It is 160 feet high. It had a special canvas roof which could be raised and lowered to provide as much shade as needed. Underneath the sand-covered arena (*arena* means *sand* in Latin), there were cells and cages for the 'performers'.

The Colosseum was used for bizarre and brutal entertainment. As many as 55,000 spectators could watch what some philosophers of the era labeled as 'mass murder'. Fighters called gladiators fought either each other or wild animals in the arena - almost always to the death. The gladiators were usually criminals or slaves who were forced to undergo special training and die for the entertainment of the Roman citizens. The wild beasts -- lions, tigers, elephants, leopards, etc.-- were brought from all over the world. Even after winning a duel, a gladiator's life was not often spared. The spectators would decide his fate, and the Roman spectators were people fascinated by blood and slaughter.

In the early days of the Colosseum, the arena was sometimes filled with water for mock naval battles or it could be turned into an artificial jungle where starved lions and trained hunters stalked each other. However, not all of the events were bloody: sometimes the Colosseum was used as a theater, sometimes for chariot racing.

The building was severely damaged by earthquakes in the sixth century. After that, it was used as a fortress, and as a source of building material for newer buildings, such as St. Peter's Basilica. Only a part of it stands today - a testimony to the greatness and cruelty of an empire.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Answer the following questions about **The Colosseum**

1. The Colosseum probably got its name .....
  - a. from emperor Nero's popular nickname 'Colossus'
  - b. because it was the largest building of the era in which it was built
  - c. from the colossal number of people who could
  - d. from the colossal statue of emperor Nero
  
2. Emperor ..... had the Colosseum built in the ..... century.
  - a. Nero; first
  - b. Vespasian; first
  - c. Nero; sixth
  - d. Vespasian; sixth
  
3. Gladiators were .....
  - a. always slaves who had undergone special training
  - b. specially trained wild animals such as lions or elephants
  - c. the 'performers' in the Colosseum
  - d. philosophers who disliked the entertainment in the Colosseum
  
4. Which of these facts concerning the building of the Colosseum is false?
  - a. It took eight years to build the amphitheater.
  - b. The building was constructed of marble and iron.
  - c. It was round.
  - d. It had a movable roof.
  
5. The Colosseum was never used as .....
  - a. a theater
  - b. a racecourse
  - c. a basilica
  - d. building material
  
6. .... severely damaged parts of the Colosseum.
  - a. Naval battles
  - b. Gladiators
  - c. Emperor Vespasian
  - d. Earthquakes
  
7. Which of these statements is *not* true?
  - a. Chariot racing was a bloody event.
  - b. Roman citizens enjoyed watching people die.
  - c. The fate of victorious gladiators was decided by the spectators.
  - d. The word *arena* comes from Latin.