

Gladiators

¹Back in the old days of Rome, people loved to see gladiators fight. Gladiators were professionally trained warriors. Their job was not to defend the nation, but to battle against each other in public. To the onlookers, such combats were fun and exciting. But to gladiators, they were not. Every time they marched to the center of an arena for a match, they put their lives on the line. If they made one false move, they could easily get injured or worse, face the most horrible outcome of defeat - death!

² While Ancient Rome was famous for this brutal form of sport, it did not invent it. The credit should really go to the Etruscans. The Etruscans believed that when an important man died, his spirit needed a human sacrifice to survive the afterlife. To honor the deceased, they would stage a battle at the man's funeral. As the loser lay dying on the ground, his body became a burial offering.

³ The Etruscans ruled Rome for about a century. Historical records show that the first gladiator fight in Rome occurred in 264 B.C., long after the Etruscans were gone. That display was for honoring a man named Brutus. At his funeral, his sons held a contest among three pairs of gladiators. The fight must have gotten a lot of buzz around the town. Slowly, it took root in Rome and became a popular sport. With more and more people watching the game, the scale of it grew bigger over time. It went from the initial three pairs to three hundred, and then to five thousand!

⁴ For the most part, gladiators were usually criminals, slaves, or prisoners of wars. They were sent to special schools called *ludi*. Once there, they had to learn how to use weapons. Upon "graduation," they each would be assigned to a specific class. The class would later dictate the type of weapon a gladiator could use. For example, in a gladiator game, the organizer would pit a fight between a "net man" and a "pursuer." The former had only a net in his right hand and a dagger in his left. The latter came fully armed. As the two warriors faced each other in the arena, the "net man" would try his best to cast the net over the "pursuer." If he managed to do that, he could then use his dagger to kill the opponent.

⁵ Of course, death was the most common outcome of a gladiator fight. But it was not the only one. When a gladiator was wounded, he could raise his forefinger to beg mercy from the audience or the high-ranking officials at the game. If they wanted to spare his life, they turned their thumbs up or waved their handkerchiefs. If they wanted to slay him, they turned their thumbs down or toward their chests. Usually, the audience's response was enough to determine the fate of the wounded gladiator. However, the final decision was always in the hands of the emperor (if he was there) or the game organizers.

⁶ Each time he entered a game, a gladiator knew very well that it could be his last. Each time he made the pledge "We who die to salute you!" at the onset of a game. If a gladiator was lucky enough to win enough combats, he could receive a discharge from further service. A successful gladiator enjoyed fame and fortune though Romans looked down on them for their shameful backgrounds. The Roman public followed the sport wholeheartedly. They cheered on their favorite contestants and even depicted them in poems and paintings.

⁷ Gladiator fights fell into disfavor during the fourth century. Emperor Constantine I issued an ***edict*** (ruling) in 325 A.D. and officially banned the sport but for the next several decades the Romans continued to hold gladiatorial games. They did not give up this

entertainment until Emperor Honorius came along and banned the sport again in 393 A.D. This time, he made sure that his order was taken seriously. The last known gladiator fight in Rome was on January 1, 404 A.D. After that, it faded into history and became a thing of the past!

1. Who were the least likely to become gladiators
 - a. Nobles
 - b. Criminals
 - c. Prisoners of war
 - d. Slaves

2. What was the original purpose of staging a gladiator fight?
 - a. To honor the dead
 - b. To celebrate a new year
 - c. To show off wealth
 - d. To please the gods

3. Based on paragraph 1, which of the following statements is false?
 - a. Gladiators were professionally trained warriors
 - b. Everyone thought Gladiator battles were fun and exciting
 - c. Injury or death could occur to a gladiator anytime they entered the arena
 - d. Gladiators were not trained to defend Rome.

4. According to the 4th paragraph, what does the word 'ludi' mean?
 - a. Gladiators were typically criminals or slaves
 - b. Special schools in which gladiators were trained
 - c. It's the graduation ceremony for gladiators
 - d. The organization of gladiators into groups

5. For how many years did Rome have gladiator fights?
 - a. 843 years
 - b. 140 years
 - c. 668 years
 - d. 385 years

6. Which of the following statements accurately depicts a gladiator's life?
 - a. Gladiators were all hailed as heroes and celebrities
 - b. Some Romans despised them, others admired them
 - c. Most Romans thought gladiators lived a fun and exciting life.
 - d. Emperors Constantine and Honorius celebrated the lives of gladiators

7. The main idea of the 3rd paragraph is: "The first gladiator fight in Rome was in honor of the death of Brutus."

Which of the following statements supports the main idea of the paragraph?

- a. The Etruscans ruled Rome for about a century.
- b. The Etruscans first held gladiator events as a sacrifice to honor their dead.

- c. At his funeral, his sons held a contest among three pairs of gladiators.
 - d. More and more people began watching the sport in Rome
8. What is the main idea of paragraph 6?
- a. Gladiators were well respected by nearly all Romans
 - b. Gladiators lived a life filled with turmoil and sacrifice
 - c. Gladiators were tough, but had families that loved them.
 - d. Gladiators lived a depressing life of death and shame.

