The Dog of Pompeii

Short Story by Louis Untermeyer

What would you RISK *for someone else?*



R3.6 Identify and analyze features of themes conveyed through characters, actions, and images.

Also included in this lesson: R1.3 (p. 326), **R3.3** (p. 325), **R3.8** (p. 325), **W1.1** (p. 327), **W2.1abc** (p. 327)

KEY IDEA Some people take **risks** for the excitement of it, whether they are trying a new skateboarding trick or auditioning for a play. Others, such as a student entering a spelling bee, take risks hoping to gain a reward. In "The Dog of Pompeii," one character risks his life simply to help someone else.

LIST IT Brainstorm a list of situations in which you would be willing to take a risk for another person. Compare your lists with those of your classmates. What differences and similarities do you see?



LITERARY ANALYSIS: THEME VERSUS TOPIC

Most stories center around a **theme,** or an overall message about life that the writer shares with readers. A story's theme is different from its **topic,** or what the story is about.

	Length	Example
Topic	can usually be stated in a word or two	love
Theme	more complex than a topic; usually described in a sentence	Love can help people solve their differences.

One topic of "The Dog of Pompeii" is friendship. As you read, look for the larger message the author wants to share. Remember that characters, actions, and images can all be clues to the author's message.

READING STRATEGY: READING HISTORICAL FICTION

Writers of **historical fiction** use a combination of real and made-up settings, events, and characters from the past. The story you are about to read uses a real place, the town of Pompeii, as its **setting.** It also describes a real event—a volcanic eruption. As you read, make a list of details that the author uses to make the story's setting and events come alive. Be sure to include information about food, clothing, transportation, houses, entertainment, and so on.

Review: **Monitor**

VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

Louis Untermeyer uses the following words to craft his tale of an ancient city. To see how many you know, try to complete each phrase with the appropriate word.

WORD LIST agonize, corrupt, dislodge, emerge, ponder

1. The shaking is able to _____ huge boulders.
2. The citizens _____ over what is happening in their town.
3. They wonder when they can _____ from hiding.
4. The lava begins to _____ the soil, making it unusable.
5. Modern archaeologists _____ the town's ruins.

Author Online

CALIFORNIA

Passion for Poetry Though as a young man he worked several jobs within his family's jewelry business, Louis Untermeyer was also constantly writing. He eventually retired from the jewelry business in order to devote more time to writing. Although Untermeyer wrote many stories, poetry was his true passion. During his lifetime, he published more than 100 books and developed friendships with famous poets such as Robert Frost and E. E. Cummings.



Louis Untermeyer
1885–1977

Background

Mount Vesuvius Erupts In the year A.D. 79, the volcanic mountain Vesuvius (vĭ-sōō'vē-əs) erupted in southern Italy. It poured burning lava and ashes over the countryside and buried the nearby cities of Pompeii (pŏm-pā') and Herculaneum (hûr'kyə-lā'nē-əm). Of Pompeii's estimated population of 20,000, at least 2,000 were killed. Pompeii lay undisturbed for almost 1,700 years, until its ruins were discovered in the late 1500s. The remains of the city, preserved by volcanic ash, present a picture of life in the Roman Empire, as if it had been frozen in time.

MORE ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND BACKGROUND
To learn more about Louis Untermeyer and Mount Vesuvius, visit the **Literature Center** at **ClassZone.com.**

The Dog of Pompeii

Louis Untermeyer

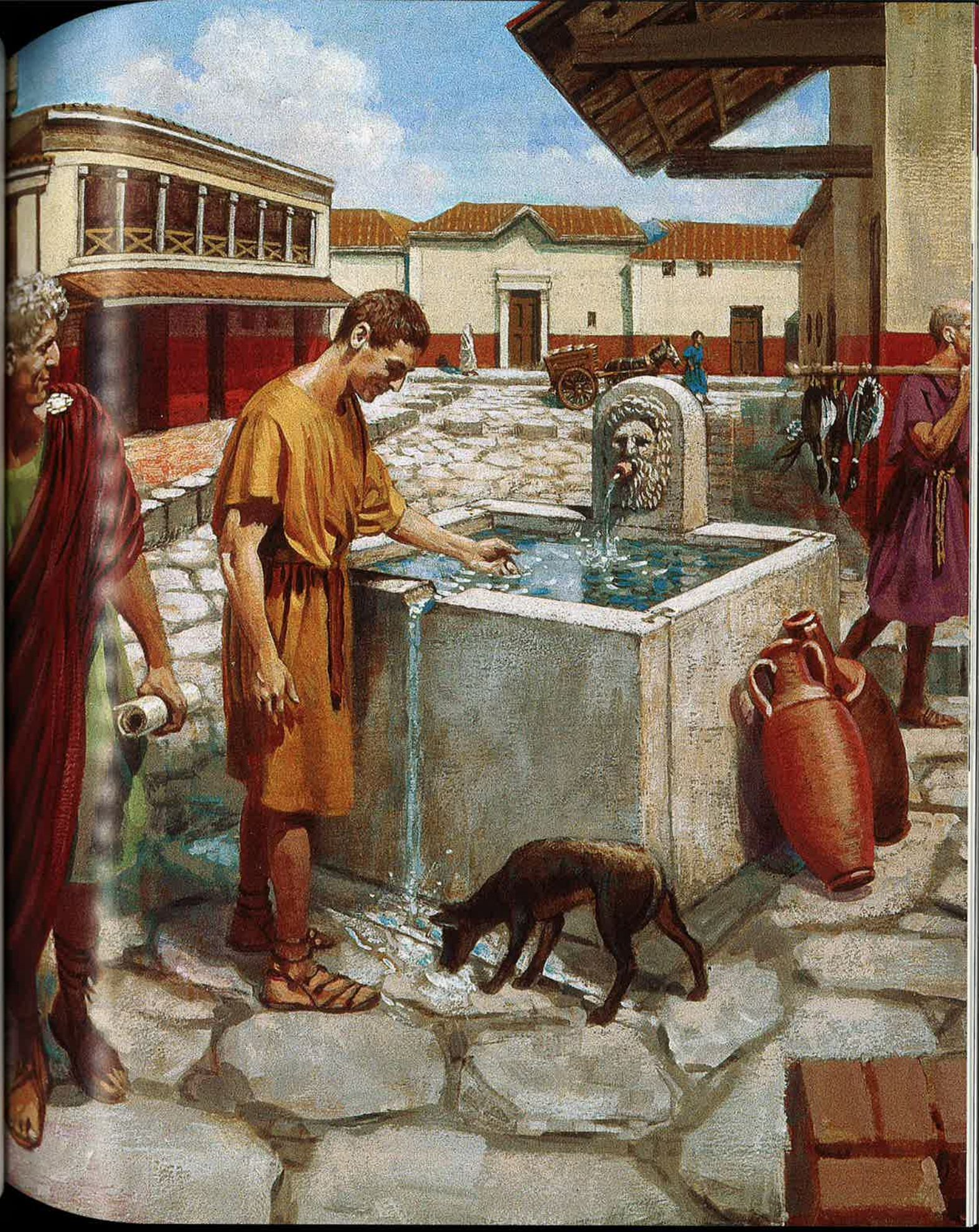
Tito and his dog Bimbo lived (if you could call it living) under the wall where it joined the inner gate. They really didn't live there; they just slept there. They lived anywhere. Pompeii was one of the gayest of the old Latin towns, but although Tito was never an unhappy boy, he was not exactly a merry one. The streets were always lively with shining chariots and bright red trappings;[1] the open-air theaters rocked with laughing crowds; sham battles and athletic sports were free for the asking in the great stadium. Once a year the Caesar[2] visited the pleasure city, and the fireworks lasted for days; the sacrifices in the forum[3] were better than a show. But Tito saw none of these things. He was blind—had been blind from birth. He was known to everyone in the poorer quarters. But no one could say how old he was, no one remembered his parents, no one could tell where he came from. Bimbo was another mystery. As long as people could remember seeing Tito—about twelve or thirteen years—they had seen Bimbo. Bimbo had never left his side. He was not only dog but nurse, pillow, playmate, mother, and father to Tito. A

ANALYZE VISUALS
Make inferences about life in Pompeii based on the details in this image.

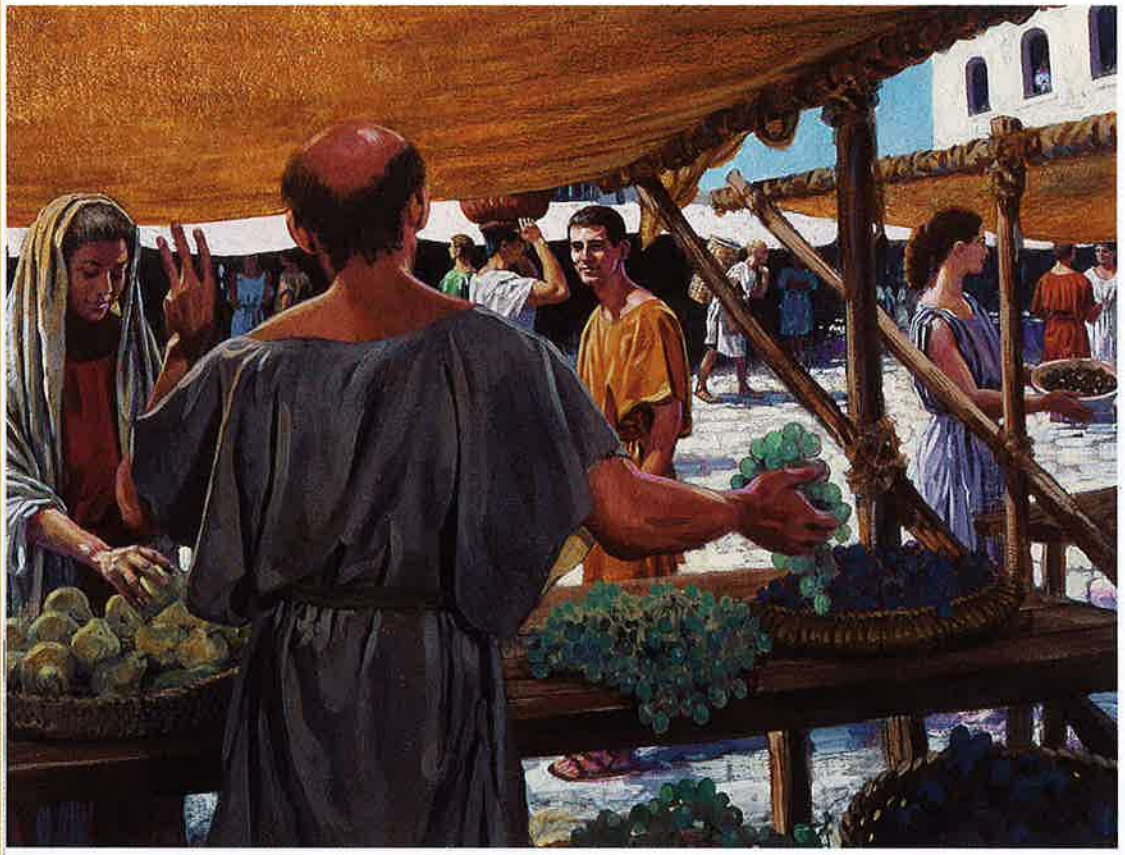
A **HISTORICAL FICTION**
Reread lines 3–10. Which **details** in this passage tell you that this story takes place in the past?

1. **trappings:** ornamental coverings or decorations.
2. **the Caesar:** the Roman emperor.
3. **forum:** the public square or marketplace of an ancient Roman city.

Illustrations © 1997 by Greg Ruhl.



Did I say Bimbo never left his master? (Perhaps I had better say comrade, for if anyone was the master, it was Bimbo.) I was wrong. Bimbo did trust Tito alone exactly three times a day. It was a fixed routine, a custom understood between boy and dog since the beginning of their friendship, and the way it worked was this: Early in the morning, shortly after dawn, while Tito was still dreaming, Bimbo would disappear. When Tito woke, Bimbo would be sitting quietly at his side, his ears cocked, his stump of a tail tapping the ground, and a fresh-baked bread—more like a large round roll—at his feet. Tito would stretch himself; Bimbo would yawn; then they would breakfast. At noon, no matter where they happened to be, Bimbo would put his paw on Tito's knee, and the two of them would return to the inner gate. Tito would curl up in the corner (almost like a dog) and go to sleep, while Bimbo, looking quite important (almost like a boy), would disappear again. In half an hour he'd be back with their lunch. Sometimes it would be a piece of fruit or a scrap of meat; often it was nothing but a dry crust. But sometimes there would be one of those flat, rich cakes, sprinkled with raisins and sugar, that Tito liked so much. At suppertime the same thing happened, although there was a little less of everything, for things were hard to snatch in the evening with the streets full of people. Besides, Bimbo didn't



ANALYZE VISUALS
Compare and contrast this image with your mental picture of the city of Pompeii.

approve of too much food before going to sleep. A heavy supper made boys too restless and dogs too stodgy—and it was the business of a dog to sleep lightly with one ear open and muscles ready for action. B

But whether there was much or little, hot or cold, fresh or dry, food was always there. Tito never asked where it came from and Bimbo never told him. There was plenty of rainwater in the hollows of soft stones; the old egg-woman at the corner sometimes gave him a cupful of strong goat's milk; in the grape season the fat winemaker let him have drippings of the mild juice. So there was no danger of going hungry or thirsty. There was plenty of everything in Pompeii if you knew where to find it—and if you had a dog like Bimbo.

As I said before, Tito was not the merriest boy in Pompeii. He could not romp with the other youngsters and play hare and hounds and I spy and follow-your-master and ball-against-the-building and jackstones and kings and robbers with them. But that did not make him sorry for himself. If he could not see the sights that delighted the lads of Pompeii, he could hear and smell things they never noticed. He could really see more with his ears and nose than they could with their eyes. When he and Bimbo went out walking, he knew just where they were going and exactly what was happening.

"Ah," he'd sniff and say as they passed a handsome villa, "Glaucus Pansa is giving a grand dinner tonight. They're going to have three kinds of bread, and roast pigling, and stuffed goose, and a great stew—I think bear stew—and a fig pie." And Bimbo would note that this would be a good place to visit tomorrow.

Or, "H'm," Tito would murmur, half through his lips, half through his nostrils. "The wife of Marcus Lucretius is expecting her mother. She's shaking out every piece of goods in the house; she's going to use the best clothes—the ones she's been keeping in pine needles and camphor[4]—and there's an extra girl in the kitchen. Come, Bimbo, let's get out of the dust!"

Or, as they passed a small but elegant dwelling opposite the public baths,[5] "Too bad! The tragic poet is ill again. It must be a bad fever this time, for they're trying smoke fumes instead of medicine. Whew! I'm glad I'm not a tragic poet!"

Or, as they neared the forum, "Mm-m! What good things they have in the macellum today!" (It really was a sort of butcher-grocer-marketplace, but Tito didn't know any better. He called it the macellum.) "Dates from

B THEME VERSUS TOPIC

How does Bimbo show his loyalty to Tito?

SOCIAL STUDIES CONNECTION



The city of Pompeii was located in what is now southern Italy. In the year A.D. 79, this region was part of the Roman Empire.

4. **camphor** (kăm'fər): a strong-smelling substance used to keep moths away.
5. **public baths:** large public complexes with locker rooms, steam rooms, and bathing pools kept at different temperatures. In many parts of the Roman Empire, a trip to the public baths was a daily ritual for many people.

Africa, and salt oysters from sea caves, and cuttlefish, and new honey, and sweet onions, and—ugh!—water-buffalo steaks. Come, let's see what's what in the forum." And Bimbo, just as curious as his comrade, hurried on. Being a dog, he trusted his ears and nose (like Tito) more than his eyes. And so the two of them entered the center of Pompeii. C

C **THEME VERSUS TOPIC**
What **details** help you **infer** that Bimbo is important to Tito?

The forum was the part of the town to which everybody came at least once during each day. It was the central square, and everything happened here. There were no private houses; all was public—the chief temples, the gold and red bazaars, the silk shops, the town hall, the booths belonging to the weavers and jewel merchants, the wealthy woolen market, the shrine of the household gods. Everything glittered here. The buildings looked as if they were new—which, in a sense, they were. The earthquake of twelve years ago had brought down all the old structures, and since the citizens of Pompeii were ambitious to rival Naples and even Rome, they had seized the opportunity to rebuild the whole town. And they had done it all within a dozen years. There was scarcely a building that was older than Tito.

Tito had heard a great deal about the earthquake, though being about a year old at the time, he could scarcely remember it. This particular quake had been a light one—as earthquakes go. The weaker houses had been shaken down; parts of the outworn wall had been wrecked; but there was little loss of life, and the brilliant new Pompeii had taken the place of the old. No one knew what caused these earthquakes. Records showed they had happened in the neighborhood since the beginning of time. Sailors said that it was to teach the lazy city folk a lesson and make them appreciate those who risked the dangers of the sea to bring them luxuries and protect their town from invaders. The priests said that the gods took this way of showing their anger to those who refused to worship properly and who failed to bring enough sacrifices to the altars and (though they didn't say it in so many words) presents to the priests. The tradesmen said that the foreign merchants had **corrupted** the ground and it was no longer safe to traffic in imported goods that came from strange places and carried a curse with them. Everyone had a different explanation—and everyone's explanation was louder and sillier than his neighbor's.

corrupt (kə-rŭpt') *v.* to cause something to change from good to bad

They were talking about it this afternoon as Tito and Bimbo came out of the side street into the public square. The forum was the favorite promenade[6] for rich and poor. What with the priests arguing with the politicians, servants doing the day's shopping, tradesmen crying their wares, women displaying the latest fashions from Greece and Egypt, children playing hide-and-seek among the marble columns, knots of

6. **promenade** (prŏm'ə-nād'): a public place for walking and socializing.

soldiers, sailors, peasants from the provinces—to say nothing of those who merely came to lounge and look on—the square was crowded to its last inch. His ears even more than his nose guided Tito to the place where the talk was loudest. It was in front of the shrine of the household gods that, naturally enough, the householders were arguing. D

"I tell you," rumbled a voice which Tito recognized as bath master Rufus's, "there won't be another earthquake in my lifetime or yours. There may be a tremble or two, but earthquakes, like lightnings, never strike twice in the same place."

"Do they not?" asked a thin voice Tito had never heard. It had a high, sharp ring to it, and Tito knew it as the accent of a stranger. "How about the two towns of Sicily that have been ruined three times within fifteen years by the eruptions of Mount Etna? And were they not warned? And does that column of smoke above Vesuvius mean nothing?"

"That?" Tito could hear the grunt with which one question answered another. "That's always there. We use it for our weather guide. When the smoke stands up straight, we know we'll have fair weather; when it flattens out, it's sure to be foggy; when it drifts to the east—"

"Yes, yes," cut in the edged voice. "I've heard about your mountain barometer.[7] But the column of smoke seems hundreds of feet higher than usual, and it's thickening and spreading like a shadowy tree. They say in Naples—"

"Oh, Naples!" Tito knew this voice by the little squeak that went with it. It was Attilio, the cameo[8] cutter. "*They* talk while we suffer. Little help we got from them last time. Naples commits the crimes, and Pompeii pays the price. It's become a proverb with us. Let them mind their own business."

"Yes," grumbled Rufus, "and others, too."

"Very well, my confident friends," responded the thin voice, which now sounded curiously flat. "We also have a proverb—and it is this: Those who will not listen to men must be taught by the gods. I say no more. But I leave a last warning. Remember the holy ones. Look to your temples. And when the smoke tree above Vesuvius grows to the shape of an umbrella pine, look to your lives."

Tito could hear the air whistle as the speaker drew his toga about him, and the quick shuffle of feet told him the stranger had gone.

"Now what," said the cameo cutter, "did he mean by that?"

"I wonder," grunted Rufus. "I wonder."

Tito wondered, too. And Bimbo, his head at a thoughtful angle, looked as if he had been doing a heavy piece of **pondering.** By nightfall the

D HISTORICAL FICTION
Reread lines 108–115. Note important details about the forum. What does the description tell you about life in Pompeii?

ponder (pŏn'dər) *v.* to think seriously about; reflect on

7. **mountain barometer:** A barometer is an instrument for measuring the pressure of air and predicting weather changes. The people of Pompeii used the smoke from the volcano as a sort of barometer.
8. **cameo:** a shell or gem with a picture carved on it.

argument had been forgotten. If the smoke had increased, no one saw it in the dark. Besides, it was Caesar's birthday, and the town was in holiday mood. Tito and Bimbo were among the merrymakers, dodging the charioteers who shouted at them. A dozen times they almost upset baskets of sweets and jars of Vesuvian wine, said to be as fiery as the streams inside the volcano, and a dozen times they were cursed and cuffed. But Tito never missed his footing. He was thankful for his keen ears and quick instinct—most thankful of all for Bimbo.

They visited the uncovered theater, and though Tito could not see the faces of the actors, he could follow the play better than most of the audience, for their attention wandered—they were distracted by the scenery, the costumes, the by-play, even by themselves—while Tito's whole attention was centered in what he heard. Then to the city walls, where the people of Pompeii watched a mock naval battle in which the city was attacked by the sea and saved after thousands of flaming arrows had been exchanged and countless colored torches had been burned. Though the thrill of flaring ships and lighted skies was lost to Tito, the shouts and cheers excited him as much as any, and he cried out with the loudest of them.

The next morning there were *two* of the beloved raisin and sugar cakes for his breakfast. Bimbo was unusually active and thumped his bit of a tail until Tito was afraid he would wear it out. The boy could not imagine whether Bimbo was urging him to some sort of game or was trying to tell him something. After a while, he ceased to notice Bimbo. He felt drowsy. Last night's late hours had tired him. Besides, there was a heavy mist in the air—no, a thick fog rather than a mist—a fog that got into his throat and scraped it and made him cough. He walked as far as the marine gate to get a breath of the sea. But the blanket of haze had spread all over the bay, and even the salt air seemed smoky. E

He went to bed before dusk and slept. But he did not sleep well. He had too many dreams—dreams of ships lurching in the forum, of losing his way in a screaming crowd, of armies marching across his chest, of being pulled over every rough pavement of Pompeii.

He woke early. Or, rather, he was pulled awake. Bimbo was doing the pulling. The dog had dragged Tito to his feet and was urging the boy along. Somewhere. Where, Tito did not know. His feet stumbled uncertainly; he was still half asleep. For a while he noticed nothing except the fact that it was hard to breathe. The air was hot. And heavy. So heavy that he could taste it. The air, it seemed, had turned to powder, a warm powder that stung his nostrils and burned his sightless eyes.

Then he began to hear sounds. Peculiar sounds. Like animals under the earth. Hissings and groanings and muffled cries that a dying creature might make **dislodging** the stones of his underground cave.

E THEME VERSUS TOPIC
Reread lines 170–174. Notice the way Tito reacts to Bimbo's behavior. In what way does his reaction suggest that something has changed?

dislodge (dĭs-lŏj') *v.* to move from a settled position



There was no doubt of it now. The noises came from underneath. He not only heard them—he could feel them. The earth twitched; the twitching changed to an uneven shrugging of the soil. Then, as Bimbo half pulled, half coaxed him across, the ground jerked away from his feet and he was thrown against a stone fountain.

The water—hot water—splashing in his face revived him. He got to his feet, Bimbo steadying him, helping him on again. The noises grew louder; they came closer. The cries were even more animal-like than before, but now they came from human throats. A few people, quicker of foot and more hurried by fear, began to rush by. A family or two—then a section—then, it seemed, an army broken out of bounds. Tito, bewildered though he was, could recognize Rufus as he bellowed past him, like a water buffalo gone mad. Time was lost in a nightmare. F

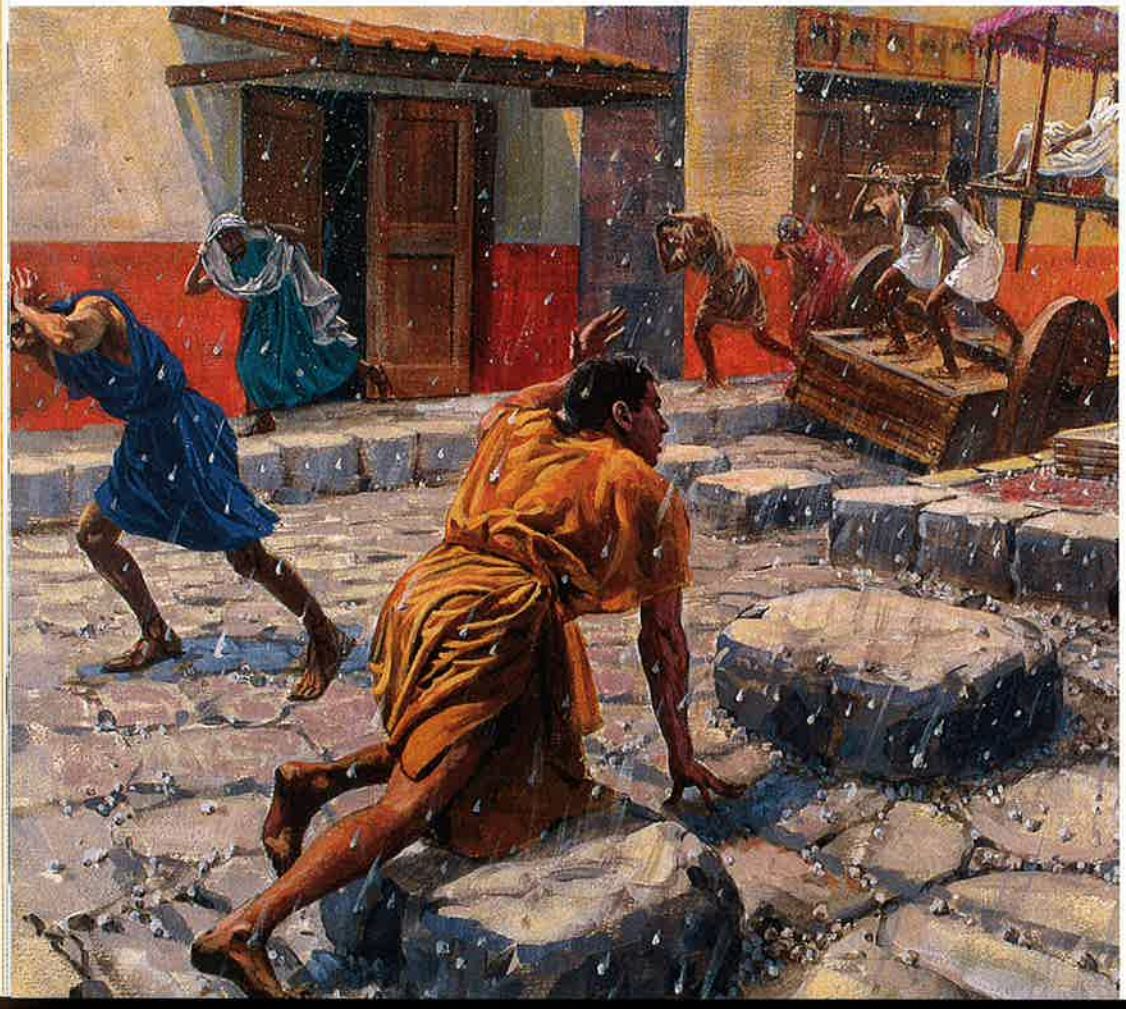
ANALYZE VISUALS
What kind of **mood,** or feeling, do the colors and facial expressions in this illustration create?

F MONITOR
Reread lines 196–199. **Clarify** why the water in the fountain is so hot.

It was then the crashing began. First a sharp crackling, like a monstrous snapping of twigs; then a roar like the fall of a whole forest of trees; then an explosion that tore earth and sky. The heavens, though Tito could not see them, were shot through with continual flickerings of fire. Lightnings above were answered by thunders beneath. A house fell. Then another. By a miracle the two companions had escaped the dangerous side streets and were in a more open space. It was the forum. They rested here awhile—how long he did not know.

Tito had no idea of the time of day. He could *feel* it was black—an unnatural blackness. Something inside—perhaps the lack of breakfast and lunch—told him it was past noon. But it didn't matter. Nothing seemed to matter. He was getting drowsy, too drowsy to walk. But walk he must. He knew it. And Bimbo knew it; the sharp tugs told him so. Nor was it a moment too soon. The sacred ground of the forum was safe no longer. It was beginning to rock, then to pitch, then to split. As they stumbled out of the square, the earth wriggled like a caught snake, and all the columns of the temple of Jupiter came down. It was the end of the world—or so it seemed. G

G HISTORICAL FICTION
Reread lines 207–224. Which **details** show you how the eruption has affected the forum and the town?



ANALYZE VISUALS
What do the actions of the people in this illustration suggest about the eruption?

To walk was not enough now. They must run. Tito was too frightened to know what to do or where to go. He had lost all sense of direction. He started to go back to the inner gate; but Bimbo, straining his back to the last inch, almost pulled his clothes from him. What did the creature want? Had the dog gone mad?

Then, suddenly, he understood. Bimbo was telling him the way out—urging him there. The sea gate,[9] of course. The sea gate—and then the sea. Far from falling buildings, heaving ground. He turned, Bimbo guiding him across open pits and dangerous pools of bubbling mud, away from buildings that had caught fire and were dropping their burning beams. Tito could no longer tell whether the noises were made by the shrieking sky or the **agonized** people. He and Bimbo ran on—the only silent beings in a howling world.

agonize (ăg'ə-nīz') *v.* to suffer extreme physical or mental pain

New dangers threatened. All Pompeii seemed to be thronging toward the marine gate; and, squeezing among the crowds, there was the chance of being trampled to death. But the chance had to be taken. It was growing harder and harder to breathe. What air there was choked him. It was all dust now—dust and pebbles, pebbles as large as beans. They fell on his head, his hands—pumice stones[10] from the black heart of Vesuvius. The mountain was turning itself inside out. Tito remembered a phrase that the stranger had said in the forum two days ago: "Those who will not listen to men must be taught by the gods." The people of Pompeii had refused to heed the warnings; they were being taught now—if it was not too late.

SCIENCE CONNECTION



Mount Vesuvius is a type of volcano called a composite volcano. When composite volcanoes erupt, they release not only pieces of rock but also clouds of hot ash and toxic gases.

Suddenly it seemed too late for Tito. The red hot ashes blistered his skin; the stinging vapors tore his throat. He could not go on. He staggered toward a small tree at the side of the road and fell. In a moment Bimbo was beside him. He coaxed. But there was no answer. He licked Tito's hands, his feet, his face. The boy did not stir. Then Bimbo did the last thing he could—the last thing he wanted to do. He bit his comrade, bit him deep in the arm. With a cry of pain, Tito jumped to his feet, Bimbo after him. Tito was in despair, but Bimbo was determined. He drove the boy on, snapping at his heels, worrying his way through the crowd; barking, baring his teeth, heedless of kicks or falling stones. Sick with hunger, half dead with fear and sulphur[11] fumes, Tito pounded on, pursued by Bimbo. How long he never knew. At last he staggered through the marine gate and felt soft sand under him. Then Tito fainted. . . . H

H MONITOR
Clarify why Bimbo bites Tito in line 255.

9. **sea gate:** a gate in the city wall, leading to the sea.
10. **pumice** (pŭm'ĭs) **stones:** lightweight rocks formed from lava.
11. **sulphur** (sŭl'fər): a pale yellow substance that produces a choking fume when burned.

Someone was dashing seawater over him. Someone was carrying him toward a boat.

"Bimbo," he called. And then louder, "Bimbo!" But Bimbo had disappeared.

Voices jarred against each other. "Hurry—hurry!" "To the boats!" "Can't you see the child's frightened and starving!" "He keeps calling for someone!" "Poor boy, he's out of his mind." "Here, child—take this!"

They tucked him in among them. The oarlocks creaked; the oars splashed; the boat rode over toppling waves. Tito was safe. But he wept continually.

"Bimbo!" he wailed. "Bimbo! Bimbo!"

He could not be comforted.

Eighteen hundred years passed. Scientists were restoring the ancient city; excavators were working their way through the stones and trash that had buried the entire town. Much had already been brought to light—statues, bronze instruments, bright mosaics,[12] household articles; even delicate paintings had been preserved by the fall of ashes that had taken over two thousand lives. Columns were dug up, and the forum was beginning to **emerge.**

emerge (ĭ-mûrj') *v.* to come into view

It was at a place where the ruins lay deepest that the director paused.

"Come here," he called to his assistant. "I think we've discovered the remains of a building in good shape. Here are four huge millstones that were most likely turned by slaves or mules—and here is a whole wall standing with shelves inside it. Why! It must have been a bakery. And here's a curious thing. What do you think I found under this heap where the ashes were thickest? The skeleton of a dog!"

"Amazing!" gasped his assistant. "You'd think a dog would have had sense enough to run away at the time. And what is that flat thing he's holding between his teeth? It can't be a stone."

"No. It must have come from this bakery. You know it looks to me like some sort of cake hardened with the years. And, bless me, if those little black pebbles aren't raisins. A raisin cake almost two thousand years old! I wonder what made him want it at such a moment." ❶

❶ THEME VERSUS TOPIC
Reread lines 288–294. What do Bimbo's last actions tell you about him?

"I wonder," murmured the assistant.

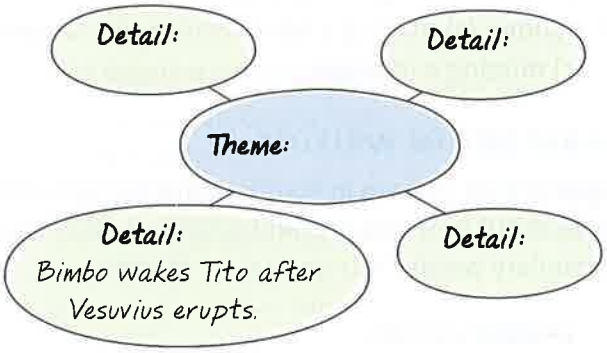
12. **mosaics** (mō-zā'ĭks): designs formed from inlaid pieces of stone or glass.

Comprehension

1. **Recall** When does Bimbo leave Tito alone?
2. **Recall** Why is the stranger in the forum worried about the column of smoke coming from Vesuvius?
3. **Clarify** What is the source of the fumes and ashes that hurt Tito?

Literary Analysis

4. **Make Inferences** Reread lines 288–290. Why didn't Bimbo have "sense enough to run away" when Mount Vesuvius erupted?
5. **Understand Historical Fiction** Look back at the list of details you recorded as you read the story. Explain why the **setting** is so important in the story. Be sure to tell how the setting contributes to the story's main conflict, or problem, and how it aids in the conflict's resolution.
6. **Identify Theme** Keeping the **topic** of friendship in mind, note important details about Tito and Bimbo's thoughts and actions and any lasting images from the story in a web like the one shown. Then, in the center, write a sentence expressing the story's theme.



7. **Analyze Foreshadowing** A clue or hint about something that will happen later on in a story is called foreshadowing. Reread the conversation between Rufus and the stranger in the forum in lines 118–134. What events are foreshadowed in this passage?
8. **Evaluate Historical Fiction** Although historical fiction can contain made-up details and characters, the characters and plot should seem realistic. Consider the use of fact and fantasy in this story. Is Bimbo's behavior, both before and after the volcano erupts, believable? Support your answer.

Extension and Challenge

9. **SCIENCE CONNECTION** There are many famous volcanoes in the world with long and vivid histories. Many are at **risk** of erupting again in the near or distant future. Research one of these volcanoes, and prepare a brief description of one eruption and its effects.

RESEARCH LINKS
For more on volcanoes, visit the **Research Center** at **ClassZone.com.**

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R3.3 Analyze the influence of setting on the problem and its resolution.

R3.6 Identify and analyze features of themes conveyed through characters, actions, and images.

R3.8 Critique the credibility of characterization and the degree to which a plot is contrived or realistic (e.g., compare use of fact and fantasy in historical fiction).