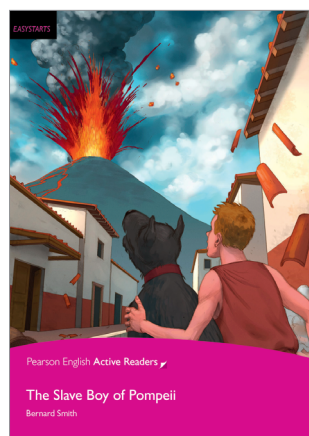


# The Slave Boy of Pompeii

Bernard Smith



## Summary

The story is set in the Roman town of Pompeii in the year 79. It begins in the house of Marcus Sextus, an important man, who has 15 slaves including a boy called Mico. There is also a house dog called Fortunatus. Behind the town there is a volcano, Vesuvius, which often makes loud noises. One day, when Marcus has visitors, the volcano begins to make a lot of noise and Fortunatus becomes very nervous and runs out into the street. Mico chases the dog and they end up in the country. From there they see black smoke, fire and stones fall on the town. Then hot stones and ash fall on them. The volcano has erupted. The next day, they meet four country slaves who are carrying sticks. The men know that Mico and Fortunatus are from Pompeii and they think they are bad people because the gods are angry with the people from that town. They hit Mico and the dog with their sticks. Suddenly a tall Roman man appears. He is Marcus's brother and his old dog is Fortunatus's father. He frightens the four slave men away and tells his own slave to take Mico and Fortunatus to his house for food and drink. The Roman man reflects on how strange it is that all the people of Pompeii are dead and that the only survivors are a clever dog and a poor slave boy.

## Background and themes

**History:** The story is based on historical fact. Vesuvius is a volcano near Naples, Italy and its most famous eruption took place in 79AD destroying the city of Pompeii, which was never rebuilt.

**Destiny and superstition:** Although Mico is a poor slave and Fortunatus is just a dog, they are the sole survivors. At this time, people believed that these kinds of disasters were the work of the gods and they would have decided the destiny of Mico and Fortunatus.

## Discussion activities

### Pages 1–5

#### Before reading

- Discuss:** Tell students the story takes place on a hot summer's day and put them in small groups to discuss the following questions: *Do you like summer? Why or why not? What do you usually do in summer? Where do you usually go? What do you eat?*

#### While reading (at the end of p. 2)

- Pair work:** Put students in pairs to answer the questions: *What names of animals do you know in English? What animals do you like? Have you got an animal in your house? Are some animals clever?*

#### After reading

- Write and ask:** Write *What is Vesuvius?* on the board and elicit the answer (A volcano). Ask students to write another question about something from pages 1–5. Check their work as they do this. Now have students walk around the classroom, asking and answering each other's questions.

### Pages 8–13

#### After reading

- Write and guess:** Write *The stones are cold.* on the board. Elicit from the students what is wrong with this sentence (hot not cold). In pairs, have students choose one sentence from pages 8–13 and write it again changing one of the words. Students then walk around the class, reading out their sentences to other students who must listen and spot the mistake.
- Pair work:** Write the following words on the board: *cloud, heavy, sleep, afraid, sticks.* In pairs, students make sentences including these words to reflect how they were important in pages 8–13, without looking back at the book. Get feedback.

### Pages 16–19

#### After reading

- Discuss:** Put students in small groups to discuss the following questions: *What is Fortunatus afraid of? Who is Fortunatus angry with? Who makes Fortunatus happy? Get feedback and then ask the students to talk about the following questions: When are you afraid, angry or happy?*
- Write and guess:** Ask the students to choose two pictures from the book and to write one or two sentences about each of the pictures. Now put them in pairs and tell them to read those sentences to their partner who has to look through the book and identify which picture the sentences are describing.