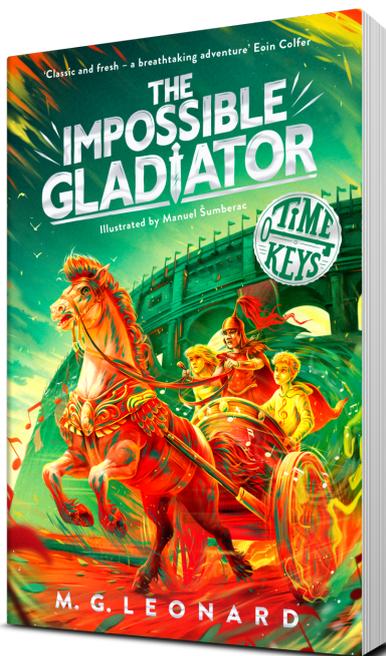# THE IMPOSSIBLE GLADIATOR

Illustrated by Manuel Šumberac

BY M. G. LEONARD

Time KEYS

NOTES FOR TEACHERS & LIBRARIANS

AGES 8+

About the Book

Sim, Jeopardy and Nelson are enjoying an amazing holiday in Rome, until they are swept up in the mysterious disappearance of world-famous illusionist Kinetic. He vanished during a live broadcast from the Colosseum, but he never reappeared. When Kinetic's sister finds a strange description in a history book of a gladiator who sounds uncannily like her brother, the friends are determined to help.

They travel through secret time doors to the spectacular - and deadly - Colosseum in Ancient Rome, but can the brave trio survive long enough to find Kinetic and bring him home?

This pack is packed with fun, hands-on activities for classroom or library use – reading, mapping, drawing, and imagining life in the Roman world using The Impossible Gladiator by M. G. Leonard.

The activities included here are suitable for the classroom or library sessions.

Explore themes of:

Ancient Rome
Roman Culture and Traditions
Time Travel

Subject Checklist:

History
Literacy
Art & Design
Geography

MACMILLAN
Children's Books

Pre-reading
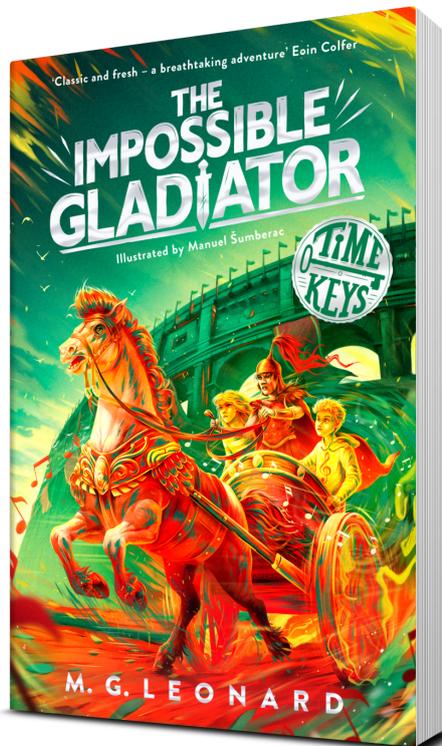
- Who do you think the characters on the cover are? What clues helped you decide?

- What do the costumes, weapons, or objects tell you about the time period or setting?

- What do you notice about the background? Can you guess what place or building it might be?

- How do the characters' expressions or poses make you feel about the story? Are they excited, scared, or ready for adventure?

- What do the title and subtitle tell you about what might happen in the story?

- If you could step into the cover and be part of the scene, what would you want to do first?

Pre-reading Activity 2
Roman Vocabulary Match-Up

Match each word to its correct definition.

Optional: Draw a mini-picture for each word to help you remember it.

Definition	Word
1. Big arena for games and shows	Arena
2. Fighter in the arena	Pantheon
3. Central space in the Colosseum	Gladiator
4. Token for entry or small mosaic tile	Tesserae
5. Leader of Rome	Chariot
6. Person with rights in Rome	Colosseum
7. Horse-drawn racing or battle vehicle	Emperor
8. Marketplace or meeting place	Forum
9. Long robe worn by citizens	Citizen
10. Temple to all gods	Toga

Colosseum—1, Gladiator—2, Arena—3, Tesserae—4, Emperor—5, Citizen—6, Chariot—7, Forum—8, Toga—9, Pantheon—10

Vocab Questions:

1. Which vocabulary words sound most exciting or mysterious?

2. What do these words tell you about life in Ancient Rome?

3. How might Nelson, Sim, and Jeopardy use these places or objects in their adventure?
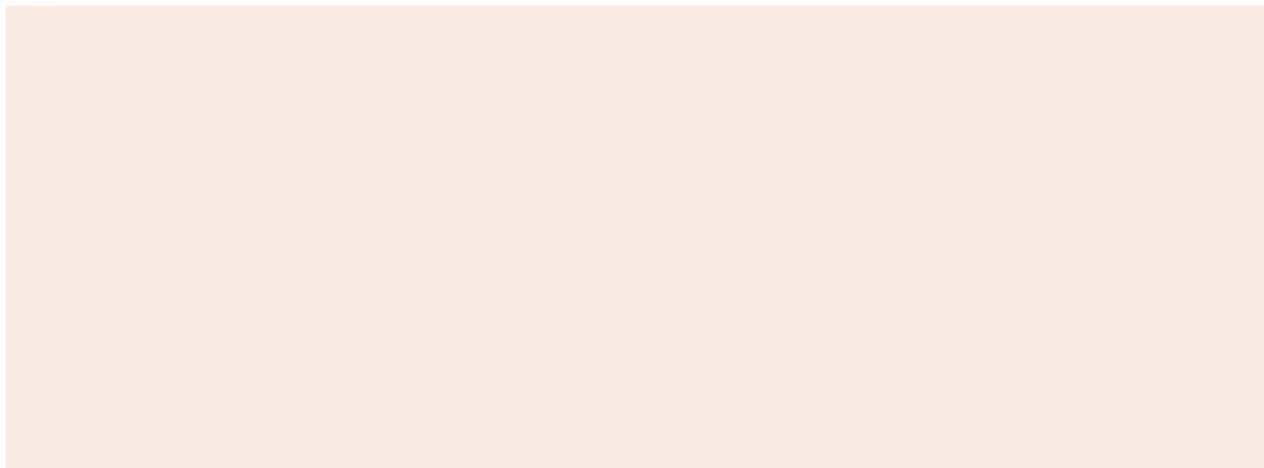
Pre-reading Activity 3
Time Travel Imagination

Instructions: Pick 3–5 vocabulary words and write or draw a short scenario imagining what you would see or do in Ancient Rome.
Example: "I would watch a gladiator fight in the Colosseum and use tesserae to get in."

Pre-reading Activity 4
Roman-Times Quiz

1. What was the Colosseum originally called?

   A) Forum B) Flavian Amphitheatre C) Pantheon

2. Who was Emperor Hadrian?

   A) Built the Colosseum B) Built Hadrian's Wall C) Destroyed Jerusalem

3. Who were gladiators?

   A) Roman senators B) Fighters in the arena C) Temple priests

4. What are tesserae used for?

   A) Tickets or tokens B) Sword C) Helmet

5. Who were Romulus and Remus?

   A) Founders of Rome raised by a wolf B) Roman senators
   C) Gladiators

Answers: 1-B, 2-B, 3-B, 4-A, 5-A
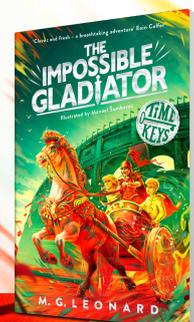
Extracts

Extract 1: Mapping Ancient Rome

Read Chapter 7: Carpe Cake!
In this chapter, the children travel back in time to Ancient Rome (121 CE).

'Are you ready?' Jeopardy asked Sim.

Sim nodded, slipping his tuning fork into his Roman pouch as he looked around. The Pantheon was unlike any religious building he'd ever been in. It was circular, with altars in curved nooks around the wall. The floor was a beautiful mosaic of giant pieces of marble. Above his head arched an enormous domed roof, decorated with a pattern of receding squares. There was a hole in the apex of the dome, through which streamed a shaft of sunlight. On the floor were some building materials and tools. Hadrian's restoration project wasn't yet finished, but Sim could feel the power of the sacred space. It was awe-inspiring.

'We should get out of here before the builders arrive for work,' Nelson said.

Jeopardy pulled at one of the huge bronze doors, opening it a crack. 'The coast is clear,' she said, opening it a little wider.
The three friends slipped out into the morning sunshine of Ancient Rome, 121 ce. The marble fountain that existed in their time had vanished. The square cobbles of the piazza were also gone. In their place were rougher, larger stones. They were met by the sounds of clattering wooden cartwheels, scuffling leather sandals, and merchants calling out to each other as they set up their stalls for a day of trading.

'I can't believe it,' Nelson whispered, grabbing Sim's arm as he stared at a man in gleaming armour marching past. He was carrying a helmet under his arm. His crimson cape fluttered in the breeze. 'We're in actual Ancient Rome.'

Sim knew how Nelson felt. It didn't matter how many times you travelled to a period that wasn't your own: it always felt like an impossible miracle to be there. He took in the stalls laden with fruit, vegetables, wooden dishes of olives, bolts of cloth, tall earthenware jugs – and grinned. 'It's brilliant!'

'The same and yet completely different,' Jeopardy murmured to herself, gathering her long red hair in her two hands and plaiting it into a braid.

'We're going to need a plan,' Nelson said.

'We can't stay long,' Sim said, running a hand over the glowing bronze of the new, untarnished door. 'We should go back to our own time before dark. Cities are dangerous at night, and we have nowhere to stay.'

'Let's go to the Colosseum,' Jeopardy said, tying off the end of her braid and throwing it over her shoulder so it snaked down her back. 'That's the place to begin our investigation.'
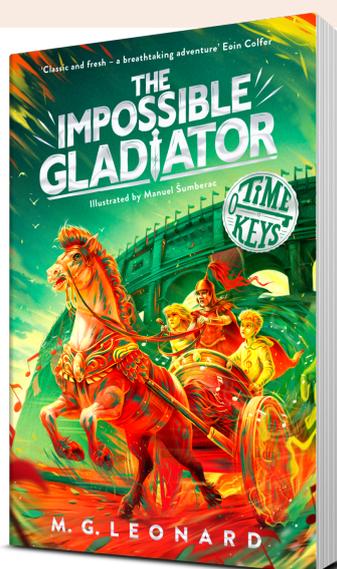
Extract Discussion Questions

1. How does the author describe the Pantheon? Which words help you picture the building?

2. What differences does Nelson notice between Ancient Rome and today? Give examples.

3. How do the sights, sounds, and smells of the market help you imagine the city? Which details stand out most?

4. Why do Sim, Jeopardy, and Nelson feel they need a plan? What dangers are they thinking about?

5. If you could step into this scene, what would you explore first and why?

Activity:
Create a Map of Ancient Rome

Explore Ancient Rome by creating a visual map and adding descriptive details.

1. Read the extract carefully (taken from pages 64–65) and imagine walking through Ancient Rome with Sim, Jeopardy, and Nelson.

2. Draw a map of Ancient Rome and add the following places and objects mentioned in the extract:

   - The Pantheon
   - Marble fountains or piazzas
   - Market stalls with fruit, vegetables, cloth, and earthenware jugs
   - Roads or cobbled streets
   - Any soldiers or people in the streets
   - Bronze doors or time doors

3. Use symbols, drawings, or labels to mark each feature.

4. Add descriptive notes from the text around your map, including sights, sounds, and smells. For example:

   - "Clattering wooden cartwheels"
   - "Scuffling leather sandals"
   - "Merchants calling out to each other"

5. Highlight any places the characters plan to visit next, like the Colosseum.

Optional extension:

Write a short paragraph imagining what it would feel like to walk through this map in Ancient Rome.
What would you see, hear, and smell?

Extracts

Extract 2: Inside The Colosseum

Read Chapter 8: The Romulus and Remus Spectacle
In this extract, the children enter the busy Colosseum in Ancient Rome
for the first time.

Rome in 121 ce was more smelly, more noisy, more crowded than Sim could have imagined. Without the modern buildings of Rome clamouring around it, the Colosseum seemed enormous. The apex building dominated Rome, its beating heart powered by violence and hungry for blood. The streets around it were a seething river of men and women in tunics, togas, sandals and cloaks. Erected around the arena were stalls covered with brightly coloured fabrics, shading the goods sold beneath – honeyed dates and fresh bread. Two little children were playing with toy swords made of sticks, pretending to be gladiators. A young woman was calling out, selling garlands of laurel. Sim heard a braying donkey protesting at having to pull a cart of crates. A middle-aged woman shoved past him carrying a jar under her arm. Everyone seemed to be heading to the amphitheatre.

Jeopardy yanked Sim aside as eight men marched past, carrying a day bed on poles, with a roof and curtains. Inside were two wealthy-looking men in white togas edged with purple, reclining and chatting.

The arches of the Colosseum gaped like hungry mouths, swallowing spectators as they poured through the numbered entrances. Sim, Nelson and Jeopardy let the movement of the crowd carry them forward towards gate twenty-one.

'Who's that?' Sim pointed at a huge bronze statue of a semi-naked man as tall as the Colosseum.

'Who's that?' Sim pointed at a huge bronze statue of a semi-naked man as tall as the Colosseum.

'That's the Colossus of Nero,' Nelson said. 'He was emperor about eighty years ago.'

'It's gone by the time we're born,' Jeopardy said. 'I'd remember a shiny butt that big.'

A roar from the crowd inside the amphitheatre silenced their laughter. It was an animal sound. A blend of cheering, shouting and jeering.

Sim's pulse quickened and the three friends exchanged nervous glances. None of them had admitted it, but they were all scared about what they might see inside.

Extract Discussion Questions

1. What is your first impression of the Colosseum? Does it remind you of anywhere you've been to?

2. How do Sim's thoughts and feelings show that the Colosseum is exciting or dangerous?

3. How can you tell there are different kinds of people (rich and poor) in the streets? Give examples.

4. How is the Colosseum "powered by violence and hungry for blood"? What does this tell you about its purpose?

5. If you were in the crowd, how would you feel about the events as they unfold?

Activity:
Roman Spectacle Report

Explore the different types of events held in the Colosseum and think about why Romans held them.

1. Think About the Events: List the different events the story shows happening in the Colosseum. For example, the re-enactment of the Romulus and Remus story described in the chapter.

2. Choose an Event: Pick one of these events from the story that interests you.

3. Create a Report or Poster:
   • Title your report with the event's name.
   • Describe what happens, who takes part, and how the audience reacts.
   • Include small drawings or labels to show the action or important details if you like.

Optional Extension:
Write a short paragraph imagining you are a Roman spectator. How did it feel to watch?
Or, write from the perspective of a performer or actor in the re-enactment. How would it feel to perform for the crowd?

Illustrations © Manuel Šumberac

Further Activity Ideas:

Sketch a Roman Building – Choose a Roman building featured in the story (for example, the Pantheon). Re-read the description carefully and list the details the characters notice (light, space, materials, sound, movement). Create a detailed sketch in the style of Manuel Šumberac using graphite or charcoal, showing how light and shadow shape the space. Challenge extension: Draw the building in two time periods: Ancient Rome and today. Annotate the changes and explain why some features survived while others didn't.

Design Roman Clothing – Using clues from the story and additional research, design an outfit for a Roman citizen, soldier, enslaved person, or performer. Include at least five items of clothing or accessories, label it with correct Roman terms and explain what the clothing shows about the person's status, job, or wealth. Challenge extension: Write a short paragraph explaining how clothing controlled power and identity in Roman society.

Create a Roman Market Stall – Design and build a Roman market stall inspired by the one in the story. Decide: Who owns the stall; What they sell; and Who their customers are. Include labels, prices, and short descriptions explaining where goods came from and who could afford them. Use Latin words where possible (with a glossary). Challenge extension:
Add a short, written explanation answering: How did markets help Rome grow into an empire?

Romulus and Remus Research (Myth vs History) – Create a fact sheet or mini-poster exploring the key events of the Romulus and Remus myth, the role of the she-wolf, and how the story explains Rome's values (power, violence, leadership). Include illustrations and a short section titled: "Why do you think the Romans wanted this story to be told?"

Further Activity Ideas:

Re-enact a Roman Scene – In groups, re-enact the Romulus and Remus scene from Chapters 8 and 9. Your performance can include a narrator, spoken dialogue, and clear actions and character movement. Before performing, write a director's note explaining what themes you want the audience to notice and why you staged the scene this way. Challenge extension: Perform the scene twice – once as a myth, once as a historical retelling. What changes?

A Roman Time Door – In Chapter 10, Jeopardy realises that the Porta Libitinaria is a time door. Design your own time door set in Ancient Rome. Describe where it is hidden, why it is connected to time, and what or who passes through it. Include a labelled illustration and a short paragraph explaining what the door symbolises (death, memory, power, change).

Gladiator Life: Training and the Arena – In Chapter 12, Sim finds himself at the Ludus – 'Gladiator Training School'. Explore how gladiators trained before fighting in the Flavian Amphitheatre (the Colosseum). Create a two-part drawing or short written comparison showing life in a gladiator training school and life in the arena during a fight. Include key details such as training routines, weapons, crowds, and danger. Challenge extension: Write one sentence explaining which you think was more difficult – training or fighting – and why.