The book follows the story of a native Gaul from the province of Gallia in modern-day northern France. He is captured by the Roman army during a battle, and is marched hundreds of miles to the capital of the Roman Empire, Rome itself. Sold into slavery, the Gaul is sent to a *ludus gladiatorius* (or gladiator school) where he is trained to fight. After enduring weeks of hard and gruelling training, and a diet of porridge and ash – which is supposed to help build up body mass and muscles – the new gladiator is taken to the arena to fight to the death for the entertainment of wealthy Romans, including the emperor himself. Life as a Roman gladiator is tough. It is a very violent and often short life. It’s clear that *You Wouldn’t Want to be a Roman Gladiator!*

**About the Roman Empire and gladiators**

The predecessor of the Roman Empire was the Roman Republic, which dated from 509 BC – 27 BC. The end of this period is often regarded as the assassination of Julius Caesar (which actually took place in 44 BC). Caesar’s death marked the start of the transition from the Roman Republic to the Roman Empire. The first ruler of the Roman Empire was Octavian, the adopted son of Julius Caesar. After a period of civil war between 31–27 BC, Octavian became the first emperor. He adopted the name *Augustus* which means ‘sacred’ and has connotations of majesty and grandness in the Roman language of Latin.

The Roman Empire dates from 27 BC to AD 476. It was a hugely successful military machine, which at its height under the Emperor Trajan (AD 98–117) covered an estimated 5 million km² including all of Mediterranean Europe, parts of northern Africa and the Middle East, and large parts of Britain. Roman soldiers were stationed around the Empire to ensure it was well-managed and protected, and that regular taxes were sent to Rome. Roman soldiers sometimes captured slaves from ‘barbarian’ tribes that tried to hold out against Roman rule; it was these men that often became gladiators. ‘Gladiator’ means swordsman in Latin, and comes from the Latin word for sword, *gladius*.

Gladiatorial games were originally *munera* (singular: *a munus*), which means ‘duty’ or ‘obligation’ in Latin. The first gladiatorial contests were fought to honour the dead at funeral games. According to Roman historian Titus Livius (64 or 59 BC – AD 17) the earliest Roman gladiator games took place in 264 BC. They were put on by a man called Brutus Scaeva to honour his dead father, Brutus Pera. Later, gladiatorial contests formed part of the *ludi*; these were games put on by the state and overseen by the emperor, rather than being organised, paid for and hosted by private individuals.
About gladiators (continued)

The most famous gladiatorial arena is the Colosseum in Rome, which can still be seen today. Construction of the Colosseum began in AD 72, and it hosted its first games in AD 80. The Colosseum seated 50,000 people and was the largest amphitheatre in the Empire. Like other arenas, the Colosseum was oval shaped, with high tiers of seating rising above the gladiatorial stage, which was at ground level.

As well as fights between gladiators, gladiatorial games also included fights between men and wild beasts imported from Africa and other Roman provinces (such as tigers, lions and elephants). Sometimes the Colosseum would be flooded to provide a stage for a battle at sea, featuring war ships and gladiators dressed up as Greeks and Persians (an historical entertainment for Roman people!).

Most gladiators were slaves or condemned criminals. They were considered apart from the Roman population and were marginalised, even in death. An unusual Roman cemetery that may confirm this marginalisation was uncovered in 2004 by archaeologists in York (which was called Eboracum by the Romans). The archaeologists from the York Archaeological Trust found the bodies of around 80 well-built young men, the majority of whom had violent wounds that were probably caused by close combat. Lots of the skeletons had head and neck injuries (some of which had healed, suggesting that they may have survived one or more bouts in the arena before being fatally wounded). Some had cuts to the hands probably caused during hand-to-hand combat. Another had a bite wound that was made by a carnivore, identified as probably a tiger, providing possible evidence of wild beast fights! A further body was still wearing a pair of heavy leg irons – a condemned criminal perhaps? The majority of the bodies had had their heads removed, either at or shortly after death, possibly in a ritual fashion. One likely explanation for the bodies in this Roman cemetery is that they were gladiators; unfortunately for this analysis, to date no Roman gladiatorial arena has been uncovered in York, although most archaeologists believe there must have been one, somewhere! The arena or amphitheatre of the legionary city of Chester (which was known as Deva Victrix, or just Deva, to the Romans) has been discovered and is now cared for by English Heritage and Chester City Council. It is the largest amphitheatre yet uncovered in Britain.

Activity 1: Gladiator who’s who?

Gladiators did not all fight with the same weapons and equipment. Some gladiators fought with swords, others had spears, lassos, nets and daggers. One type of specialised gladiator, called an essedarius, fought from a horse-drawn chariot.

Your pupils can familiarise themselves with the different types of gladiators using the ‘Gladiator who’s who?’ activity sheet. Can they match the gladiator pictures with the correct name and description?
Talking point: which gladiator has the best combination of weapons? Ask each pupil to choose their favourite gladiator, and create a bar graph or pie chart showing the results of your class survey.

Extension activity: challenge your pupils to pick two of the gladiators from the line-up. Who would win a fight between the two gladiators, and why? Can your pupils write an account of the fight?

Activity 2: Gladiator training

New gladiators were thrown into a harsh regime of training and body-building at the ludus gladiatorius (or gladiator school). Use the activity sheet to create an itinerary for a new recruit. What exercises will they have to do? Will they practise fighting with fake swords? What will they eat? Will they need to visit the gladiator school’s doctor, and if so, why?

Why not try... training your own gladiators? Fighting with swords (whether real or wooden) is not easy to risk assess and should not be attempted at school. You may want to try a spot of forced marching (use the Latin words sinister and dexter for left and right) or running instead. Quick footwork is very important for a gladiator. You could try getting a pupil to run on the spot (as the trainee gladiator) whilst surrounded just out of arm’s length by four classmates. When you shout one of the classmates’ names, the trainee gladiator needs to step forwards (or turn and step) and reach out with his/her sword arm to touch their classmate’s hand. They should then return to running on the spot. Call out the classmates’ names with increasing speed!

Why not try... creating a ‘man of straw’ (see Activity 8: Arty challenges) and allow your pupils to attack it with a sword made of cardboard?

Activity 3: The Games

The gladiatorial games are a fantastic spectacle (if you’re not one of the gladiators!). Challenge your pupils to create either a poster to promote the games, or a programme outlining the entertainment that a spectator can expect to see. Will the games be attended by a Roman emperor? What fights will take place? Is there going to be a sea battle? Will there be a wild beast hunt?

Talking point: what do your pupils think about the concept of gladiatorial games? Is it right that people fighting to the death was seen as entertainment, even in Roman times? Whilst the games waned in popularity during the early 5th century AD (after the Romans adopted Christianity), wild beast hunts did continue. Fox hunting in the UK only became illegal in 2005. Should hunting animals for sport – or as a means to manage wild animal populations – be allowed?
Activity 4: Final thoughts

Challenge your pupils to imagine that they are the Roman gladiator in *You Wouldn’t Want to be a Roman Gladiator!* They have been given the opportunity to write a letter to their family back at home in Gallia on the night before they are due to fight in the arena. What are their final thoughts? What do they most miss about Gallia and their life as a Gaul? Do they think that they are ready for the gladiatorial games? Do they expect to win?

*Why not try...* writing the letter in Roman ink? This method for making Roman ink is reproduced with the permission of the Young Archaeologists’ Club (www.yac-uk.org). You will need 5 teaspoons of fine soot (try asking a local chimney sweep!), 4 teaspoons of vinegar and 2 teaspoons of gum (gum arabic can be bought in art shops or sourced online). Mix the soot, vinegar and gum together to make the ink, and then write with it using a feather quill (or a drinking straw with one end cut to make a point).

Activity 5: Prepare to fight!

Before the fight in the arena begins, the gladiators have a warm-up duel using wooden swords. Then there is time for spectators to bet on their favourite gladiators. Next, the draw is made, and the gladiators are paired up for their fights. It is at this stage that the gladiator is provided with his real weapon, and accompanied by music, he takes to the arena. The crowd is noisy, shouting and cheering on their favourites. The contest begins: a fight to the death. Challenge your pupils to pick two (or more) of the images from the book that illustrated this sequence of events on the activity sheet, and describe how they would be feeling if they were the gladiator. Are they excited, scared, hopeful, dejected, frightened, angry?

*Talking point:* can your pupils create a list of adjectives that describe how the gladiators might be feeling?

Activity 6: The Colosseum

The most famous gladiatorial arena is the Colosseum in Rome, which can still be seen today. It seated 50,000 people, and was oval shaped.

Challenge your pupils to research the Colosseum using the internet or other resources. Can they create a leaflet, brochure or PowerPoint presentation to encourage today’s tourists to visit the Colosseum?

*Extension activity:* using the information that they have discovered about the Colosseum, can your pupils design their own gladiatorial arena?

*Talking point:* can your pupils think of any other modern-day sporting arenas? What are the similarities between a modern sport facility such as a football stadium and the Colosseum? What is different?
Activity 7: Roman numeral maths

Romans didn’t use the same numbers that we use today. Roman numerals used seven letters from the Latin alphabet I, V, X, L, C, D and M:

\[
\begin{align*}
I &= 1 & V &= 5 & X &= 10 & L &= 50 \\
C &= 100 & D &= 500 & M &= 1000
\end{align*}
\]

When used in combination, these seven symbols can be used to express every number. For example, III is three (the equivalent of three ones) and XII is twelve (one ten and two ones). Larger numbers can include many of these elements. For example, CCCXXXVII is 327 (or three hundreds, two tens, one five and two ones) and MMDCXVI is 2616 (or two thousands, one 500 and one 100 (i.e. 600) one ten, one five and a one). The symbols are written from left to right in value order, starting with the largest.

To avoid four identical characters being repeated in a row (such as IIII for 4 or XXXX for 40), a system was developed where I before V or X equals one less (so IV = 4 and IX = 9). This was mirrored with the other symbols too: X before L or C is ten less (so XL = 40 and XC = 90); and C before D or M is a hundred less (so CD = 400 and CM = 900).

There are some maths challenges using Roman numerals on the activity sheets.

Extension activity: challenge your more able pupils to create their own maths challenges using Roman numerals in place of numbers. Can they design some number sentences using Roman numerals for their classmates? The answers could be given in Roman numerals or numbers.

Activity 8: Arty challenges

The Roman word for a shield was a *scutum* (plural: *scuta*). Roman gladiators were equipped with rectangular or circular shields. Challenge your pupils to design their own shields. Many were plain whilst others were decorated with interlocking geometric patterns. Once your pupils have designed their shields on the activity sheet, they could try making them out of cardboard – like these examples from the Young Archaeologists’ Club (www.yac-uk.org).

The shields are made of strong cardboard from a packing box, covered in papier-mâché and then painted red and gold, before the detailed decoration was added with a black permanent marker pen. The central boss is an upturned yoghurt pot mounted on a square of cardboard and then painted silver (although you could wrap a yoghurt pot in tin foil for a similar effect).
To make a ‘man of straw’ that a gladiator would have used in training, loosely fill an old pillow case with scrunched up balls of newspaper (or use straw, such as small animal bedding from a pet shop). Use a short length of rope or thick twine to tie the pillow case shut. To create the ‘head’, loop a longer piece of rope around the pillow case about a third of the way down from the top knot and tighten it to create a separate head and body. You can then use the end of this length of rope to hang up your man of straw ready for a spot of gladiatorial training.

Pupils’ pack contents

- ‘Gladiator who’s who?’ activity sheet
- ‘A new recruit’s day’ activity sheet
- ‘Prepare to fight’ activity sheets (3)
- ‘Roman numeral maths’ activity sheets (4)
- Design a gladiator shield
- Roman wordsearch
- Blank sheet with the border top and bottom for your pupils’ own artwork and writing

Roman numeral maths (1) Answers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roman numerals</th>
<th>Write these Roman numerals in numbers:</th>
<th>Write these numbers in Roman numerals:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) II = 2</td>
<td>i) 8 = VIII</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) V = 5</td>
<td>j) 13 = XIII</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) VII = 7</td>
<td>k) 22 = XXII</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) XI = 11</td>
<td>l) 51 = LI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) LV = 55</td>
<td>m) 106 = CVI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) XVI = 16</td>
<td>n) 170 = CLXX</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g) CL = 150</td>
<td>o) 2000 = MM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h) CXV = 115</td>
<td>p) 366 = CCCLXVI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Roman numeral maths (2) Answers**

Write these Roman numerals in numbers:  
Write these numbers in Roman numerals:

a) IV = 4  
   i) 34 = XXXIV

b) IX = 9  
   j) 59 = LIX

c) XXIX = 29  
   k) 190 = CXC

d) XLV = 45  
   l) 94 = XCIV

e) XCIV = 94  
   m) 411 = CDXI

f) CDXV = 415  
   n) 475 = CDLXXV

g) CMXL = 940  
   o) 2900 = MMCM

h) MCM = 1900  
   p) 1914 = MCMXIV

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**Roman numeral maths (3) Answers**

Put these Roman numerals in order, starting with the smallest:

a) I  IV  VII  IX  X  XIII  XX  
   1  4  7  9  10  13  20

b) XXX  LXXVII  XC  XCVI  CV  CXII  CM  
   30  77  90  96  105  112  900

c) DXCV  DCCC  MCII  MDV  MDX  MCMX  MM  
   595  800  1102  1505  1510  1910  2000

Put these Roman numerals in order, starting with the largest:

d) CV  XCV  LXIV  L  XLI  XXXVIII  X  
   105  95  64  50  41  38  10

e) MMXXV  MM  MDCLX  MCL  DCCVI  DLV  LVII  
   2025  2000  1660  1150  706  555  57

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You Wouldn’t Want to Be a Roman Gladiator!
Roman numeral maths (4)  Answers

Write these Roman numerals in numbers:

a)  MMMDCCCLX  =  3760
b)  MMCMLXXV  =  2975
c)  MMMDXLVII  =  3547
d)  MDCCCLXXXII  =  1882

Write these numbers in Roman numerals:

e)  3965  =  MMMCMLXV
f)  2594  =  MMDXCIV
g)  1877  =  MDCCCLXXVII
h)  2782  =  MMDCCLXXXII

Roman wordsearch answer

The hidden gladiator is the Retiarius
Roman gladiator who’s who?  

Answer sheet

1  **Velitus**; his only weapon is a spear
2  **Dimachaerius**; wears very little armour and fights with two swords
3  **Myrmillo**; fights with a dagger and carries a shield
4  **Woman**; although not a common sight, some women were gladiators too
5  **Andabatus**; charges on horseback whilst wearing a helmet with no eye holes!
6  **Thracian**; has a very small shield and a curved dagger
7  **Retiarius**; carries a three-pronged trident and uses a net to try to capture his opponent and has his left arm and shoulder protected by armour
8  **Laquearius**; has a heavily armoured left arm and shoulder, and carries a lasso and trident
9  **Secutor**; chases his opponent whilst wearing a helmet with small eye holes and fighting with a dagger and large shield
10 **Essedarius**; fights from a horse-drawn chariot with a spear
11 **Samnite**; carries a large shield and sword and wears a helmet with a crest

Match the gladiator descriptions with the pictures. Write the correct description number into each of the boxes.