



## Pompeii

Small pebbles rattled across the cobblestones. Birds took to the sky and shrieked a warning to the people bustling below. A little boy sat with his back against the wall of his house and watched the dust dance. Something big was happening underneath the street.

He tentatively placed his hand on the stones. They felt warm in the midday sun. He felt tremors in his fingertips. He thought to call for his mother, but she was out in the back, scrubbing their linen. Instead, he wandered along the street until it reached the city walls. His fingers idly traced the outline of the mortar as he slowly followed its curve towards the gate. Even the wall was shaking.

When he reached the open gate, the boy stopped and stared. To the north, he could make out the familiar sight of Mount Vesuvius. A vivid blue sky hung peacefully above it. Ever since he'd been little, he'd talked to his friends about climbing to the top. His mother had caught him talking about it once and scalded him. It was too dangerous, she'd said.

As he watched, the volcano seemed more prominent than before: more imposing. Suddenly, the world was filled with an almighty thunder. The boy clapped his hands to his ears and fell to his knees. When he looked up, the sky had disappeared. In its place, a thick grey blanket was being rolled out across the horizon.

The boy watched with his mouth agape as thousands of small black dots were tossed from the volcano's peak, like leaves in the wind. The grey blanket seemed unstoppable in the sky; the sun blinked out in its wake.

Terrified, the boy raced back to his house and grabbed his mother. In babbled words, he tried to explain what he'd seen, but she dismissed him. "Your head is stuck in the volcano," she moaned and returned to her washing.

Panicking, the boy raced back out into the street. It seemed as though night had fallen already. There was barely any light to see by, and the boy tripped and landed on his back. As he stared up at

the sky, a lump of rock the size of his fist ripped through the black cloud. Somebody screamed as it smashed through the roof of the house opposite.

Snowflakes started to fall from the sky. The boy stuck out his tongue instinctively, but these flakes were hot and dry and bitter. They fell faster than any snow he'd seen before. Even as he lay on the street, his hands were buried beneath a burning layer.

He screamed and stood up. Now more rocks were crashing into the streets. People were yelling incoherent words to each other, all of them blending into one barrage of noise. Most tried to run away, but the bitter snow was falling too quickly. Some were struck by falling debris and didn't get back up. Within seconds they were buried.

Somebody grabbed the boy from behind and embraced him. It was his mother. They raced back into the house. The beams in the roof were groaning under the weight of the ash. It didn't matter, it was better than being outside.

The boy silently sobbed into his mother's arms as they waited for whatever was going to happen, to happen.

## VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. What has the author used the word "tentatively" in the second paragraph?
2. Find a synonym for the word "idly".
3. What do the phrases "vivid blue" and "hung peacefully" tell you about the sky?
4. If the volcano is more imposing, what impression does that give you?
5. What is debris in this context?

## VIPERS QUESTIONS

**S**

What clues were there that something was about to happen?

**I**

What were the snowflakes that the boy tried to taste?

**R**

What time of day is it? Copy a quote that supports this.

**I**

When it says "It seemed as though night had fallen already", what had happened?

**P**

Why did somebody scream when the first rock smashed into the house opposite?

Answers:

1. It tells the reader that the boy was nervous/cautious when he touched the stones
2. Slowly/leisurely (any others from the dictionary if used)
3. There were no clouds and the sky was still/no wind
4. It seemed bigger/to tower above him
5. Rocks and ash falling from the sky

S: The pebbles were rattling/the dust danced/tremors in the cobblestones/birds flying off/the wall shaking/the volcano looked more imposing

I: Falling ash/pumice

R: Midday - They [the stones] felt warm in the midday sun (do not accept night time as this shows a misunderstanding later on)

I: The ash cloud had blocked out the sun and was covering the town

P: Somebody inside had been hit/killed/disturbed by it