

Teacher's notes

Gladiator

by Dewey Gram

Screenplay by David Franzoni, John Logan and William Nicholson



SUMMARY

The year is AD 180 and the Roman Empire rules most of the known world, from North Africa to the north of England, from Spain to the Middle East. Caesar Marcus Aurelius has spent most of his life fighting to bring peace to the Empire and to expand it, but he knows that Rome is corrupt and now he knows that he is dying. General Maximus is the Commander of the Roman Army in the North and fights and wins his last battle against the tribes of Germania. Marcus Aurelius tells Maximus that he wants him to become Protector of Rome before handing power to the Senate. Caesar does not want his son, Commodus, to become Caesar after his death because he knows that Commodus is a corrupt man. When Marcus Aurelius tells his son what he is planning, Commodus kills his father, orders Maximus arrested and killed, and Maximus's family murdered. Maximus fights and kills his captors and sets off back to his home and family in Spain. When he arrives, his wife and son have been brutally murdered and his house and property destroyed on Commodus's orders.

Maximus is taken captive and sold into slavery in Morocco. He is taken to the slave market, where he is sold, with Juba, an African slave who has befriended him, and a number of wild tigers, to Proximo, the gladiator trainer. The slaves know their fate: They will fight and die, either against each other or against the wild animals, and all simply to entertain the people.

Maximus refuses to fight Haken, the trainer and he is branded a coward. In their first contest, Maximus and Juba are chained together as a team and somehow manage to defeat and kill the other gladiators.

Meanwhile, Commodus has arrived back in Rome as the new Caesar, but realizes that he is not popular. He knows that he needs to give the citizens of Rome something to believe in and so he organizes one hundred and fifty days of games in the Colosseum, games involving the gladiators, but paid for with the city's future food supplies. He is also planning to close the Senate, or worse, have all the senators killed, so that he can rule Rome alone. Many of the senators know this but need to wait until the people turn against Commodus to destroy him.

In Morocco, Maximus wins another fight in the arena and learns from Proximo that he is going to fight in the Colosseum in Rome. In Rome, it is decided that the gladiators will re-enact the battle of Carthage. The gladiators are faced by many men in chariots, but Maximus told the men to work together or they would die. The gladiators defeat their enemies and are victorious but Maximus is forced to reveal his identity to Commodus and he tells Caesar that he will have his revenge.

As punishment, he has to face Tigris, the greatest gladiator in history, in the arena. In spite of Commodus's attempt to use four tigers to defeat Maximus, Maximus defeats Tigris but refuses to kill him because he has fought honourably. Commodus challenges Maximus to kill him, but Maximus refuses and the crowd begin to laugh at Commodus.

Commodus's sister and Senator Gracchus agree to help Maximus escape and rejoin his army. But their plans are foiled when Commodus learns of them.

Caesar sends his troops to kill Maximus but he escapes, only to be recaptured and Commodus has many senators murdered.

Maximus is forced to fight Commodus in the arena, but before the fight Commodus wounds him badly with a knife. In spite of the wound, Maximus kills the Emperor but is mortally wounded himself.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The book, *Gladiator*, was written by Dewey Gram. The screenplay for the movie was written by David Franzoni, John Logan and William Nicholson. The movie was a huge success, winning a large number of Oscars. The movie starred Russell Crowe as Maximus and Joaquin Phoenix as Commodus. The part of Proximo was played by Oliver Reed, who died before the movie was finished.

BACKGROUND AND THEMES

The story is set in the Roman Empire in the 2nd century AD. The Empire is said to have been founded in 753 BC by Romulus and was initially ruled by kings, but with the overthrow of Tarquinius Superbus in 510 BC, a republic was established led by elected representatives. There followed a period of military expansion of the Empire and a series of wars. The Empire covered an area from Spain to Syria.

In the 1st century BC the rise to power of Julius Caesar brought to an end the republic. He was commander of the armies in Gaul and in 45 BC he was created dictator for life, and the era of the Caesars had begun. The period in which *Gladiator* is set is the end of the age of the "five good emperors" – Marcus Cocceius Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius. The northern boundaries of the Empire were established in Britain and Germany and within those boundaries, peace reigned and learning flourished. However, Marcus Aurelius was followed by his son, Commodus who became known as the most bloodthirsty tyrant in history.

The Empire became increasingly corrupt and weak and invasions began on its borders from warring tribes. The Empire finally collapsed in 476 AD.

The story of *Gladiator* is one of good against evil. Good represented by Maximus, Marcus Aurelius, Senator Gracchus and Lucilla; bad represented by Commodus, Quintus and Falco. Marcus Aurelius has absolute power in Rome but knows that the Empire is corrupt, that his son is unfit to take power, and that authority must be restored to the Senate. Maximus is a loyal and brave soldier, betrayed by Commodus, his life destroyed, but determined to have revenge on the man responsible for the death of his family. Gracchus realizes that Commodus is corrupt and plans to give the people "bread and circuses" so that they will not see what he is doing. Lucilla also knows that her brother is corrupt and joins with the others to defeat him.

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INTERMEDIATE

GLADIATOR



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Commodus resents his father telling him that he will not be emperor and kills him. He then orders Maximus's family to be killed and takes control of the Empire. Quintus orders Maximus killed and his family. Falco supports the emperor, although he knows that he is evil.

The second theme of the book is the fight of the underdog against overwhelming odds. As a gladiator, Maximus has to fight other men until he is killed himself, but he uses his skill as a soldier and fighter to defeat all his enemies in the arena, but also to take on the might of the Empire of Rome.

Finally, there is the horror of the arena, where men are forced to fight and die simply for the entertainment of the crowds. The camaraderie of some enables them to stay alive, but in the end it is a futile existence with only one inevitable result.

Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the Reader and supplement those exercises. For supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book, see the photocopiable Student's Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are primarily for use with class readers but, with the exception of the discussion and pair/groupwork activities, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access center.

ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

- 1 Ask students what they know about the Roman Empire – when did it exist, how long did it last, which countries did it rule? Ask students to find out what they can about the Empire and report back to the class. Build up a profile on the board of dates, emperors, etc.
- 2 Write the chapter titles from the book on the board but not in the right order. Put students into pairs, and ask them to try to put the chapter titles into the correct order.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

Chapters 1–3

Before the class, write about ten sentences to summarize the story so far. Write each sentence on a separate card. Photocopy them as many times as necessary. In class, put students into small groups and give each group a set of sentences. Ask students to put the events on the cards in the right order. Note down the order on the board.

Each group then prepares a short dialogue around one part of the story. Groups read or act their dialogues in turn.

Chapters 4–6

Put students into pairs. Ask them to agree on four words to describe each of these people.

- (a) Maximus
- (b) Commodus
- (c) Proximo
- (d) Haken

Chapters 7–9

Divide the class into small groups. Ask them to discuss the following question. Then have a whole class discussion.

Do you think Maximus will win his freedom?
Why/Why not?

Chapters 10–12

Put students into small groups. If necessary, teach the word *deserve*. Then ask them the following questions.

Did Commodus deserve to die in the arena?
Why/Why not?

Did Maximus deserve to die?
Why/Why not?

Did Gaius and his family deserve to be killed?
Why/Why not?

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

Put students into small groups. Ask them to discuss the following: *Gladiator* is a story about power and honor. In what ways are these shown in the story? Which characters show the good and bad sides of these?

Glossary

It will be useful for your students to know the following new words. They are practiced in the 'Before You Read' sections of exercises at the back of the book. (Definitions are based on those in the Longman Active Study Dictionary.)

Chapters 1–3

armor (n) metal or leather clothing that protects your body, worn by soldiers in former times

arrow (n) a weapon like a thin stick with a point at one end that you shoot from a bow

battle (n) a fight between armies

carriage (n) a vehicle with wheels that is pulled by a horse

cheer (v) a shout of happiness, praise or approval

emperor (n) the ruler of an empire

general (n) an officer of very high rank in the army

gladiator (n) a soldier who fought against other men or wild animals in a public place in Roman times to entertain people

glory (n) the importance, honour or praise that people show to someone they admire

honor (n) the respect that a person receives from other people or a country for what they have done

raise (v) to move something to a higher position

republic (n) a country governed by elected representatives of the people and led by a president

salute (v) the act of raising your right hand to your head as a sign of respect to an officer

senate (n) the highest level of government in ancient Rome

shield (n) a broad piece of metal or leather that soldiers used to protect themselves

slave (n) a person who is owned by another and works for them for no money

swing (v) to move backwards and forwards hanging from a fixed point

sword (n) a weapon with a long pointed blade and a handle

train (v) to teach someone the skills of a new job

trap (v) to prevent someone from escaping from a dangerous place

wheat (n) the grain that bread is made from

wound (v) to injure someone

Chapters 4–6

arena (n) a building with a large flat central area surrounded by seats where sports or entertainment take place

cage (n) a structure of wires or bars in which an animal is kept

chain (n) a series of rings joined together in a line

spear (n) a pole with a sharp pointed blade at one end, used as a weapon

tiger (n) a large strong member of the cat family, with yellow and black lines on its body

Chapters 7–9

chariot (n) a vehicle with two wheels pulled by a horse used in ancient times

helmet (n) a strong hard hat used for protection by soldiers



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Student's activities

Gladiator

Photocopiable

Students can do these exercises alone or with one or more other students. Pair/group-only activities are marked.

Activities before reading the book

- 1 Work with a partner. What do you think life would be like for a gladiator. Write down some ideas and then compare your ideas with other pairs.
- 2 Read the Introduction on page iv of the book and answer these questions.
 - (a) Who is General Maximus?
 - (b) Who is the Emperor?
 - (c) What three things happen to Maximus?
 - (d) Who does Maximus hate?

Activities while reading the book

CHAPTERS 1 & 2

- 1 Who says these things? Who are they talking to? What are they talking about?
 - (a) "They say no."
 - (b) "He will name me as Emperor."
 - (c) "You've missed the war."
 - (d) "Will you be with me when the time comes?"
 - (e) "And while I have fought, Rome has grown fat and diseased."
 - (f) "That is why I want you to become the Protector of Rome."
 - (g) "You are more of a son to me than he is."
 - (h) "I will always be loyal to Rome."
 - (i) "You didn't love me enough."
 - (j) "Your family will greet you in the next world."
- 2 Put these events in the correct order.
 - (a) The Roman army won the battle.
 - (b) Marcus met his daughter, Lucilla.
 - (c) Commodus and Lucilla arrived at the battle field.
 - (d) Commodus killed Marcus.
 - (e) Senators Falco and Gaius arrive at the army camp.
 - (f) Maximus led the army into battle.
 - (g) Marcus tells Commodus that his power will pass to Maximus.
 - (h) Maximus told Cicero that they might not go home.
 - (i) Marcus told Maximus that he had to become Protector of Rome.
 - (j) Maximus went to the Emperor's tent.
 - (k) Commodus was angry that Marcus, his father, had not put his arms around him.

- (l) Maximus killed the guards and escaped.
- (m) The guards took Maximus to the forest.
- (n) Quintus ordered the guards to kill Maximus.

CHAPTERS 4-6

- 1 Match the beginnings and endings of these sentences
 - (a) Maximus rode his horse as hard as he could,
 - (b) Something was not right
 - (c) They'll feed you to the tigers.
 - (d) Don't feed them for a day and a half.
 - (e) There was no doubt
 - (f) Push this into another man
 - (g) The new men had only one small sword and no armor
 - (h) He had lost a lot of money
 - (i) He is entering Rome like a hero
 - (j) Please leave your list with me.
 - (k) He and the Senate did not agree about anything
 - (l) and they'll eat their own mothers.
 - (m) Caesar will do everything that Rome needs.
 - (n) he knew how to fight.
 - (o) he had to get home before it was too late.
 - (p) They're more expensive than we are.
 - (q) the experienced gladiators had much better equipment.
 - (r) and the crowd will cheer and love you.
 - (s) but what has he ever done?
 - (t) but he had found a new fighter.
 - (u) and suddenly she felt anxious.
 - (v) and he could not be certain of their support.
- 2 Are these sentences true or false? Correct the ones that are false.
 - (a) Maximus's family welcomed him home to Spain.
 - (b) Maximus was alone in the slave carriage.
 - (c) Juba helped make Maximus's arm better.
 - (d) The Greek man was a fighter.
 - (e) Maximus lifted the sword and fought with Haken.
 - (f) The crowd realized that Maximus and Juba were a good pair of fighters.
 - (g) The crowd in Rome loved Commodus.
 - (h) Commodus organized 200 days of games.

ELEMENTARY

GLADIATOR



Student's activities

CHAPTERS 7-9

Chapter 7

Complete these sentences.

- Maximus had removed the letters from his arm before the fight.
- fighters were waiting for Maximus in the arena.
- Maximus asked the crowd if they were
- Maximus told Juba that his family was
- Proximo tells Maximus that he could be
- Maximus tells Proximo that he wants to stand in front of
- Commodus told Lucilla that his dreams would bring
- Lucilla told Gracchus that anyone who spoke against the Emperor
- Gracchus said that the Emperor had more than
- Cassius told Proximo that they were going to act out
- In the arena, Maximus realized that the young boy was

Chapter 8

Answer these questions.

- What does Proximo tell the gladiators to do when they enter the arena?
- What did Commodus do to pay for the games?
- What did Maximus tell the other gladiators to do?
- Who saved Haken in the arena?
- Who did Maximus say that he was loyal to?
- What did Maximus tell Lucilla to do in the prison?

Chapter 9

Answer these questions.

- What surprise did Cassius introduce in the arena?
- What did Maximus do instead of saluting the Emperor?
- What surprised Maximus while he was fighting Tigris?
- Did Maximus kill Tigris?
- How did Maximus insult Commodus?
- What did Maximus have in his pocket in the prison?

CHAPTERS 10-12

1 In Chapter 10, who said these things? Who were they talking to?

- Rome is beginning to move against you.
- No Roman army has entered the city in 100 years.
- I will kill Commodus and leave Rome to you.
- He killed the man who freed you.
- felt alone all my life – except with you.
- He trusted the people closest to him, but they didn't deserve his trust.

2 Who ...

- ... ran between Maximus and the guards?
- ... died at the bottom of the stairs?
- ... was left hanging from a tree?
- ... were murdered by the guards?
- ... chained Maximus to the elevator?
- ... cut Maximus with a knife?
- ... refused to give Commodus a sword?
- ... carried Maximus's body from the arena?

Activities after reading the book

- Write a quiz! Look at the book again and write 15 questions. Give your questions to your partner. Answer the questions on your partner's quiz. Who got the most questions right?
- Do you think *Gladiator* is a happy or a sad story? Explain why.

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