

## GRADE 8 SOCIAL STUDIES: The Eruption of Mt. Vesuvius— Examining Primary and Secondary Sources

### Summary of Learning Opportunity

In this introduction to Social Studies inquiry processes, students learn the differences between primary and secondary sources. We discuss the challenges faced with primary sources such as the author's assumptions, readers' bias, misinterpretation of the times and lack of supporting evidence, and how to corroborate accounts using evidence from secondary sources.

For this task we examined secondary sources such as articles on the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius and videos and articles about volcanoes. For primary sources, I showed images of artifacts from Pompeii and a journal entry from Pliny the Elder to the Younger. Students are then tasked to verify the authenticity of the letter sent to Pliny and his response (primary sources) by using a variety of sources (secondary sources) including maps, newspaper articles and scholar response. Students plot Pliny's route and determine whether or not he was actually a witness to the eruption.

Social  
Studies  
8

Learning  
Standards

- Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions
- Identify what the creators of accounts, narratives, maps or texts have determined is significant (significance)
- Assess the credibility of multiple sources and the adequacy of evidence used to justify conclusions (evidence)

| Literacy Connections                          | Instruction and Assessment                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Competencies Developed, Practiced and/or Assessed                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| LITERACY: Comprehends texts—Makes connections | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We read and discussed primary and secondary sources to learn about a historical event. I chose to centre learning on the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius and the destruction of Pompeii. We address that secondary sources are usually based on multiple sources, however, there is a strong element of bias and the author's perspective of what to include and what to exclude. We then read several secondary source articles on the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius and discuss which information was included and what facts we can ascertain from the articles.</li> </ol> | <p>Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions</p> <p>Identify what the creators of accounts, narratives, maps or texts have determined is significant (significance)</p> |

LITERACY: Applies understanding – Extracts ideas and information, Synthesizes ideas and information

2. I then introduced the journal entry from Pliny the Elder to the Younger as a primary source. We reflected on questions such as:
  - Why does Pliny the Elder at first want to head to Mount Vesuvius?
  - How does his attitude change?
  - What makes him change his attitude?
  - Would you describe Pliny the Younger as brave or not?
  - Who would you say is braver: Pliny the Elder or Pliny the Younger? Why? Explain with evidence.
  - Are the letters legitimate? Could Pliny the Younger have survived? How? Could Pliny the Elder have survived? How? Explain with evidence.

Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to ask questions; gather, interpret and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions

Identify what the creators of accounts, narratives, maps or texts have determined is significant (significance)

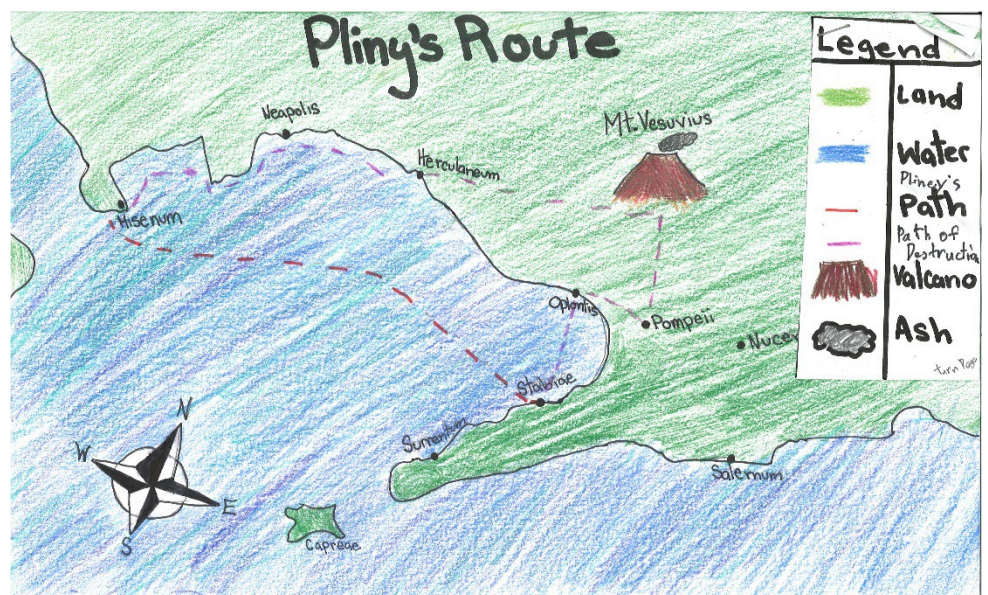
LITERACY: Communicates— Presents ideas and information

3. Students are then tasked to verify the authenticity of the letter sent to Pliny and his response by using a variety of sources including maps, newspaper articles and scholar responses. They create a map of Pliny's route and determine whether or not he was actually a witness to the eruption. Students present their findings in a brief reflection justifying whether or not they believe that Pliny would have survived the eruption.

Assess the credibility of multiple sources and the adequacy of evidence used to justify conclusions (evidence)

## Demonstration of Student Learning, Teacher Assessment, and Reflection

We chose the purple path as the most dangerous route because we traveled in shallow waters, where many large waves occur, it passes through the two cities that were most affected by Vesuvius, and traveled near the volcano, where pumice will frequently fall.



Student A's map of Pliny's route and justification using evidence from other sources. Teacher's assessment on next page.

## Teacher's Observations and Assessment

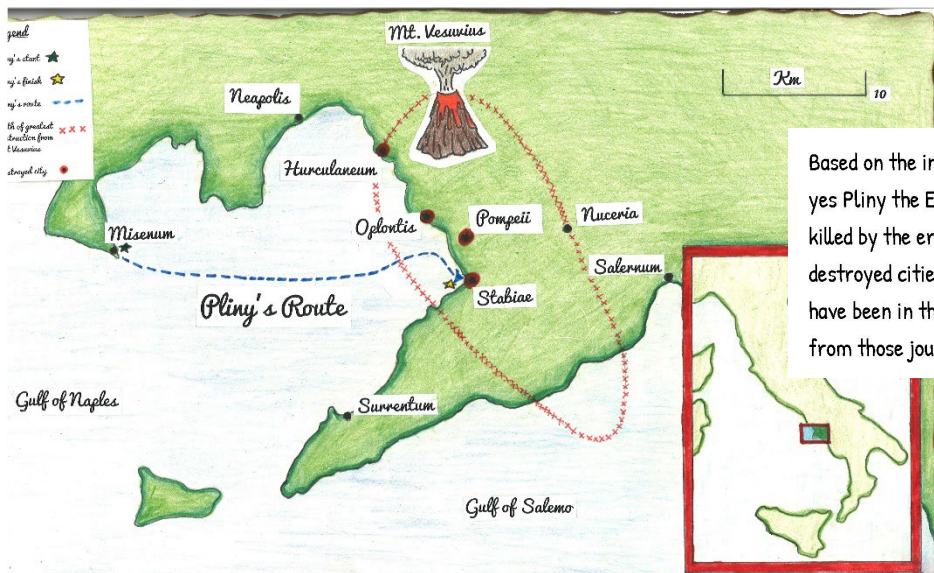
### Student A (previous page): Proficient

The student was able to take information collected from both primary and secondary sources and create a map with the inferences and connections that they made and based on what they had learned. Their map considered the destruction of the volcano and the path in which the ash and lava would have taken—they considered the type of volcano and applying what they had learned to infer a possible path of destruction. Their reflection demonstrated their understanding of how by taking the route along the water would have ultimately put Pliny in the path of destruction.

## Teacher's Observations and Assessment

### Student B (below): Proficient

The student demonstrated their ability to extract ideas and information from a variety of primary and secondary source documents and then make inferences based on the information they collected. They also were able to assess the credibility of the journals by mapping Pliny's route to see if it was logical. Their reflection considered the evidence they were able to infer from the documents and made a judgement based on their ability to create a map.



Based on the information from Pliny's letters and the path of destruction, I think that yes Pliny the Elder was there. He was very heroic in what he did and eventually got killed by the eruption. You can see on the map that he would have landed at one of the destroyed cities and because of that he most likely died from all the ash that would have been in the air. Yes, I think the journals are real and we can use the information from those journals to understand what happened in the city of Pompeii.

## Teacher's Reflection

The Learning Pathways allowed me to consider a different approach in teaching how to assess the significance of events and assessing the credibility of documents. By having students analyze a variety of primary and secondary source documents, they were engaged in critical thinking tasks to complete the map and defend their interpretation of the sources. They also had to demonstrate their knowledge and competency in Social Studies processes like interpreting and making maps and legends, assessing bias and corroborating historical evidence.

I observed a lot of rich learning and gained a lot of insight into my students' thinking through discussing their processes while they worked on this project. For next time, I will consider an alternative approach to recording conversations and doing more formative assessment, since there was a lot of learning in those discussions.