

Gladiators: An Introduction Through Graffiti

by Nicole Wellington

I. Advertisement : [CIL IV 10579](#)

VIII K(alendas) Martias

Numisii Genialis

gladiatorum paria X

Herculani

- This graffito is an advertisement for upcoming gladiatorial games in Herculaneum.
- This graffito was scratched onto a column in an atrium in Herculaneum.
- Most advertisements for upcoming gladiatorial games were dipinti (painted). Why do you think advertisements for games were painted rather than scratched?
- Discuss the different types of events held in an amphitheater- here there is mention of pairs of gladiators
- You can also extend the unit on gladiators by discussing cultural facts about gladiators.
 - gladiators were most often slaves, sometimes men volunteered to be gladiators in hopes that they would earn money to pay off debt
 - gladiators were trained in schools
 - though someone owned the school, there was also a “lanista,” gladiator trainer
 - what would be the importance of mentioning Numisius Genialis?

Extension Activities

a. You can discuss Roman numerals.

b. You can take the opportunity to discuss the Roman system of writing dates. Download information about dates and common abbreviations in gladiatorial advertisements here.

II. Drawing : CIL IV 10238a

- This graffito is a drawing of the debut of the gladiator Marcus Attilius fighting another gladiator, named Hilarus, with text about the record for the day
- Text:
 - M. Attilius, t(iro), v(icit)*
 - Hilarus Ner(onianus), (pugnarum XIV, (victoriarum) XII*
 - m(issus)*
- On the day that you show this graffito in class, you can hand cards to students as they walk in with the name of a different type of gladiator (choose a manageable number, perhaps four different types: Samnites, Retiarii, Thracian, Murmillo). Students will sit

with their group where there is a picture of their group's type of gladiator. Students should make observations about the armor and weapons used by their gladiator.

- The graffito gives the opportunity for students to make further observations about weapons and armor for the types of gladiators, and gives teachers the chance to talk about different types of gladiators.
- The text gives the opportunity to discuss abbreviations, Roman numerals, the perfect tense with *vicit*, the genitive case with *pugnarum* and *victoriarum*, as well as the perfect passive participle with *missus* (also a great talking point about what it means to be reprieved/*missus*- being defeated in a fight, but being sent away, could lead to a discussion of the thumbs up/thumbs down signals from the one providing the games).

III. A gladiator heartthrob : CIL IV 4342

Suspirium / puellarum / T(h)r(aex) / Celadus • Oct(avii) III) III

Translation from A. Cooley, *Pompeii and Herculaneum: A Sourcebook*: "Girls' heartthrob, Thracian gladiator Celadus, belonging to Octavus(?), fought 3."

- This graffito affords the opportunity to discuss the celebrity status of gladiators. Also, it reminds us that gladiators are still slaves (despite this celebrity status).
- What connections can students make to modern day celebrity crushes/status?
- There are several other graffiti written about Celadus (CIL IV 4341, CIL IV 4297, CIL IV 4345, CIL IV 4299)

N.B. Further Resources to extend your unit on gladiators:

- Read the novella *Rufus et Arma Atra* by Lance Piantaggini. This is for beginning readers or a fun, quick read for more advanced students.
- This is an excellent and fun [game](#) that my students love from Teachers Pay Teachers. It does require a bit of prep time and a bit of editing.
- Watch the movie *Colosseum: A Gladiator's Story* from the BBC, it brings to life the account of Martial of the greatest gladiator fight in the Colosseum. If your students are advanced enough, you can read Martial's epigram ([liber de spectaculis XXIX](#)).