

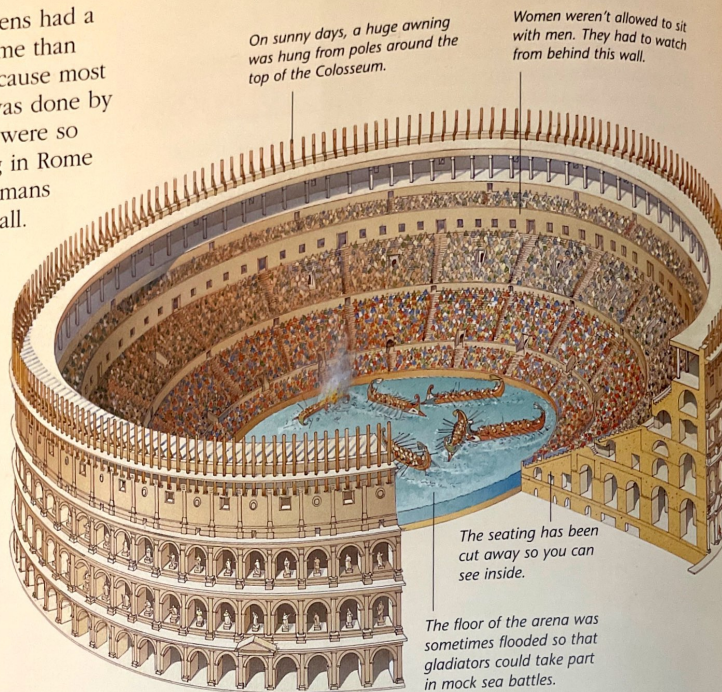
AT THE GAMES

Most Roman citizens had a lot more free time than people do today, because most of the heavy work was done by slaves. In fact, there were so many slaves working in Rome that many poorer Romans couldn't find jobs at all. To keep people entertained - and leave them less time for stirring up trouble - the emperor put on bloodthirsty shows known as 'the Games', where people could watch fights between armed gladiators and wild-beast hunts.

THE GROWTH OF THE GAMES

Gladiator fights were originally held as part of ancient funeral ceremonies. But during the Republic, politicians realized they could win votes by putting on lavish shows, and the number of days given over to games grew. By imperial times, there were 93 days of games in the year, and more were added by emperors eager to make themselves popular.

The Games took place in a huge stone stadium with an oval arena in the middle. The largest stadium in the empire was the Flavian Amphitheatre in Rome - now known as the Colosseum - which could hold up to 50,000 people at a time. It had a maze of tunnels underneath the floor, where wild animals were kept before a show.



On sunny days, a huge awning was hung from poles around the top of the Colosseum.

Women weren't allowed to sit with men. They had to watch from behind this wall.

The seating has been cut away so you can see inside.

The floor of the arena was sometimes flooded so that gladiators could take part in mock sea battles.

A BEASTLY PASTIME

A day at the arena began with a grand parade of gladiators, musicians, dancers, jugglers and priests. Then, the wild beasts were brought out. Rare animals were put on display or were made to perform circus tricks. According to the Roman historian Suetonius, one emperor introduced the amazing spectacle of tightrope-walking elephants.

Most animals were forced to fight each other or were hunted down with spears, daggers, bows and arrows. Sometimes, unarmed criminals were dragged into the arena to be torn to pieces by lions, tigers or bears.