**Meeting Terror with Love Name:**

**Date: Block:**

**Directions:**

1. **READ the introduction and the story.**
2. **ANNOTATE while you read the introduction AND the story (circle unknown words, underline important phrases, “talk back” by writing your thoughts)**
3. **ANSWER the questions at the end of the reading.**

Talk Back Below!

By 60 B.C.E., the land of Israel was under Roman control. The Jewish kings and Roman governors who ruled the province were unpopular with the people. Many Jews hope that, miraculously, a king would descend from heave to replace their Roman rulers. Thousands of Jews eagerly awaited the arrival of their king. They called this future king the Messiah (the anointed, or enthroned, one). Jesus, a Jew, was born in the city of Bethlehem around 3 B.C.E. He preached that people should love God and other men and women. Jesus was part of a movement within the Jewish community that preached holiness (freedom from sin). He said that people must confess their sins, and he baptized as a way to atone (seek forgiveness) for their wrongdoing. Whatever stood in the way of holiness and purity would have to be overcome.

  Jesus emphasized the spirit, not the letter, of the law. He said that God cared more for people than for laws. He embraced the uneducated and the poor, and he encouraged charitable acts. Material goods were unimportant, he said, because good people would be rewarded with eternal (never-ending) life in heaven. Since many of his followers believed that Jesus was the Messiah, he was called the Christ (the Greek word for Messiah is Christos). His followers were called Christians. Many Jews denied that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God. The Roman rulers looked up Jesus as a revolutionary and a threat to their government. He was executed by order of the Roman governor in 30 C.E.

 In our story, Gaius, a young Roman, recalls the first time he encountered a group of Christians.

**My friend Sulla called up me one day and said, "Come, Gaius, let us go to the Coliseum today. I want you to see how Rome deals with its most dangerous enemies."**

**"Who are these enemies of Rome?" I asked.**

**Sulla told me that he would explain everything once we were seated inside the Coliseum. We entered the great arena, where tens of thousands of people were already gathered, and found seats.**

**"All right, we're here. Now, who are these enemies of Rome?" I asked once again.**

**"They call themselves Christians," Sulla answered.**

**"Go on," I said.**

**"The Christians teach that all men and women are brothers and sisters, and that we should strive for goodness rather than wealth and pleasure. They also believe that there is eternal life after death, and true followers of their religion go to a place called heaven after they die."**

**"Why then are the Christians our enemies?" I asked.**

**Sulla answered, "The Christians mock us. They do not accept our Roman gods, and they refuse to take part in our religious festivals. They speak out against war. The men even refuse to serve in the army. And worst of all, they are disloyal to Rome. They deny that our emperor is a god, and they refuse to worship him."**

**"Do they worship any gods?" I asked.**

**Sulla said, "They believe in just one God, whose name is Jesus. They say that he took human form during the reign of Augustus. He preached and worked miracles, such as healing the sick and providing food for the poor. The Roman leaders thought that Jesus was a troublemaker. They arrested him, put him on trial, and executed him by crucifixion."**

**"When did this trial happen?" I asked.**

**"About fifty years ago."**

**"Didn't his death prove to his followers that Jesus was just a human being?" I asked.**

**Sulla frowned. "His followers believe that he rose from the dead and went back to heaven. They say he died on the cross to atone for all the evil things that people do. They believe that his death has made it possible for all who believe in him to find eternal life in heaven after they have passed from life."**

**At this moment, the mob gave a mighty roar. Men, women, and children were led into the arena. They were all dressed in the skins of wild animals. The guards left the arena, and a sudden hush descended over the crowd. Suddenly, gates were raised and wild dogs driven mad by hunger rushed into the arena. The dogs hesitated for a moment as they spied the waiting throng of Christians. In that moment, the Christians joined hands and began to sing. The dogs now began to attack the people and tear them apart with their mighty jaws and sharp teeth.**

**The mob was on its feet screaming. I turned my head away from the mad spectacle before me. Even if these people were enemies of Rome, they did not deserve to die this way. I kept thinking of the courage they had shown as they faced this most horrible of deaths, and I found myself filled with admiration for them. Where did they get their courage? Did they get it by believing that the god who had died for them was a god worth dying for?**

**Somehow, I knew that I had not seen the last these people called Christians.**

The Christians of Rome stubbornly continued to practice their religion. After they died, they were buried secretly in underground vaults called catacombs. Eventually, the Christians won the admiration of a great number of Romans, many of whom decided to join their ranks. In 260 C.E., Christianity became an accepted religion in the Roman Empire. By the end of the 3rd century, there were over 100,000 Christians in Rome. Early in the 4th century, the Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in 313, Constantine granted freedom of religion to all people throughout the empire. Finally, in 380 the Emperor Theodosius declared that Christianity, the once despised and persecuted religion, was to be the official religion of the Roman Empire.

**Understanding the Story: Write T for each true statement, F for each false statement, and N for a statement not mentioned in the reading.**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ The Greek word for Messiah is Christos.

2. \_\_\_\_\_ The early Christians were often buried in catacombs.

3. \_\_\_\_\_ Jesus did not believe that people should confess their sins.

4. \_\_\_\_\_ In Jesus' time, most Romans were ready to accept Christianity.

5. \_\_\_\_\_ Sulla said that the Christians were enemies of Rome.

6. \_\_\_\_\_ The Christians did not accept the Roman gods.

7. \_\_\_\_\_ Most people in the Coliseum refused to watch the wild dogs attack the Christians.

**Questions for Review: Answer on a separate sheet of paper.**

1. Why did the Roman rulers consider Jesus to be a revolutionary?

2. Why did Sulla feel that the Christians were the enemies of the Romans?

3. Why were the Christians exposed to the attacks of the wild dogs in the Coliseum?

4. How did the Romans change their attitude toward the Christians in the 3rd and 4th centuries?

**Activities: Choose one of the following two to answer:**

1. Imagine that you are able to speak with the Roman emperor in the year 81 CE. What might he say about Christianity?

2. Try to convince Sulla that the Christians are not a threat to the Roman government.

**Activities: Choose one of the following two to answer:**

1. Assume that you are an editor of a Roman newspaper and are sympathetic to the Christians. You witness the massacre in the Coliseum. Write the headline and one paragraph of the article you would write.

2. You are a Roman newscaster. Describe your meeting and interview with a group of Christians.