**Activity: Overview of Roman Housing**

Roman houses fall into three main types: the **insula**, the **domus** and the**villa.**  
  
The **insulae (apartment buildings)** were found in main cities such as Rome where there was a dense population. Apartment blocks were not a significant feature of Pompeii or Herculaneum, but when discussing the architecture in these towns, the term insula is used in its more accurate sense to refer to a block of land bounded by streets. Examples of the **domus (single family accommodation)** are plentiful in Pompeii and allow us to examine their history, design, function and structure. The decoration of the houses is dealt with in the painting and mosaic section of this unit of work.   
The**villa (country house)** was generally found on the outskirts of the towns and on large estates. Some villae were designed for the master and his household, the others for the farm workers and farm equipment

**2 The Insulae** Throughout Rome and other large cities, there were several lower-class areas whose houses had a distinctive design and structure. These were the insulae, tenement buildings which took up complete blocks in the city. The word insula means 'island' and is therefore also used to describe a block ofland surrounded on all sides by streets. In the apartment buildings, the individual apartments in each block were called cenacula; an individual family would occupy one **cenaculum**. It is known that by the fourth century AD, there were about 46,600 insulae in Rome and only about 1800 private houses.   
  
Areas in Rome such as the Subura were noted for this style of housing. The insulae were constructed to fulfil a housing need and their appearance reflects the function for which they were designed. As you read the descriptions of the insulae, you should be able to understand why they were built in this way.   
  
The essential features of the insulae were as follows:

* each insula was bounded by roads on all sides
* the insulae were several storeys high - height restrictions were imposed by various emperors (Augustus limited the height to 20 metres)
* they were very large in size
* each insula had a central courtyard, shared by all the tenants
* the insulae often had balconies, which looked outward (in contrast to [a typical domus](http://educo.vln.school.nz/mod/resource/view.php?id=29), which faced inwards)
* each **cenaculum** was very small
* individual apartments had no facilities - water and toilet amenities were on the ground floor or outside the building
* individual **cenacula** had no private gardens
* materials used to build the insulae were substandard. They were generally constructed of **opus craticum**, timber framing filled in with hurdles covered with plaster or less stable material. This was very light and therefore popular for vertical construction.
* techniques used to build the insulae were substandard, the term 'jerry-built' is often used to describe the buildings, especially the upper floors
* thin walls prevented any real privacy
* the risk of the buildings collapsing was great and this happened frequently
* the risk of fire was great and destruction by fire was very common
* the ground floors of the insulae were usually occupied by shops
* stairways to the upper floors were very narrow

**3 The Activity**

Use what you have read in 5.1  to complete the following activity  
  
Read the following extract written by the satirist Juvenal around the end of the first century AD:

"*We're living in a city that's propped up with little more than matchsticks: and they're the only way the rent-man can keep his tenants from falling out, as he plasters over the gaps in the cracks and tells them not to worry when they go to bed (even if the place is just about to fall around them!). It's wrong for people to have to live in fear of house-fires and buildings collapsing all the time. Right now your next-door-neighbour is calling for the fire-brigade and moving his bits and pieces while your own wee garret is smoking and you nothing about it. If the folk at the bottom of the stairs panic, the chap who's trapped and the last to burn is the one in the top attic just under the roof that keeps the rain off himself and the pigeon's nest.. ..... Poor old Cordus didn't have a bean, but he lost everything he had - and the worst of it is that nobody will give him a meal or a roof over his head when he's in rags and begging for a crust of bread. But if the mansion of one of your millionaires collapses, the whole city thinks it's a catastrophe - the man's wife gets hysterical, the bigwigs are terribly upset and the magistrates adjourn court-cases. Everyone gets really het up about the fire, but nobody calls the fire-brigade ..... !'*  
Juvenal, Satires i. 3. 193ff

**Activity**  
Write at least THREE paragraphs describing one day of your life in an insula. Make sure you include important aspects and terms.