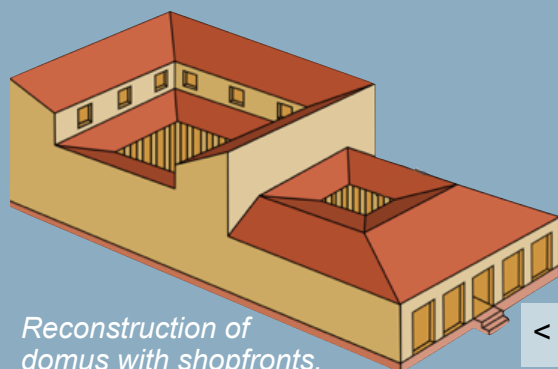# insulae: how the masses lived
The proximity of rich & poor

The people living in *insulae* in the city of Rome were not just the very poorest, but also the middle class, and on some occasions even some senatorial young men would spend time in living in an *insula* in their youth ("roughing it up", like students eating beans on toast?). In Rome, the rich and the poor rubbed up against each other - their houses were built adjacent to one another, and *insulae* and greater *domus* houses were found next to one each other in the same neighbourhoods.
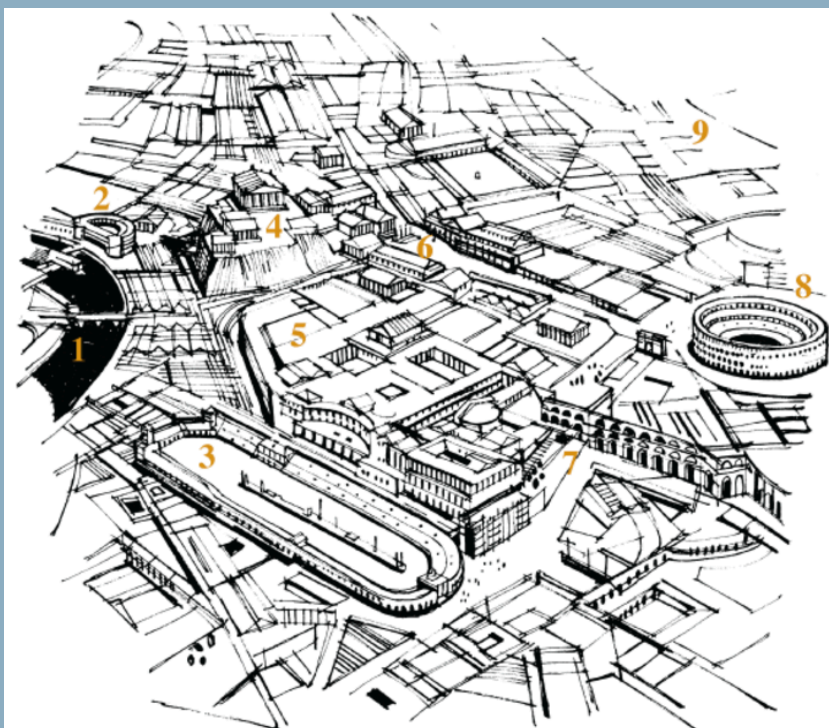
Source 1: Roman domus

Reconstruction of domus with shopfronts.

< shop fronts

At the front of this imagined *domus,* the home of a wealthier Roman family, are shops that open up onto the street. These are likely to be owned and rented out by the patron owning the entire property, perhaps to his freedmen or clients.

Source 2: Neighbourhoods of Rome

Although there were some areas characterised as richer or poorer; the Palatine and Esquiline were predominantly inhabited by the rich, as opposed to the rougher Subura, and the hills were generally considered 'posher'). But there were plenty of exceptions: Caesar's house was in the Subura; Martial lived near the emperor Vespasian's nephew on the Quirinal. One of our few surviving *insulae* is built into the slope of the Capitoline itself, right near the Forum (the political and business centre of the city).

1. River Tiber
2. Theatre of Marcellus
3. Circus Maximus, used for chariot racing
4. The Capitol with the temple of Jupiter the Best and Greatest
5. Palatine Hill with the emperor's palace on it
6. Forum Romanum
7. An aqueduct
8. Colosseum
9. The Subura

View of Rome, 4th century.

Source 3: Brazilian slums

This is one of the largest shantytowns in South America with over 200,000 inhabitants, in Rocinha (Brazil). Inhabitants of these slums might appreciate their prime location next to the city centre, as they can earn a living being more easily living close to the commercial centre of the city.

Rocinha slum, Brazil (2008).

In modern cities, towns and villages, how segmented are neighbourhoods by class?

Are some areas near you particularly considered rough or posh?

What do you think the reasons might be for the proximity of rich and poor in the Roman empire?

Further reading:
- Visualising the layout of the city of Rome: https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/world-history/ancient-medieval/roman-empire-survey/v/a-tour-through-ancient-rome-in-320-c-e
- Images of the reconstructed Subura used in HBO's Rome series: https://www.behance.net/gallery/34767933/Scenografia-per-la-serie-tv-Rome
- On Brazilian slums (favelas): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Favela