CLEOPATRA

Her name is so entrenched in lore that it can be hard to imagine Cleopatra as a real person. So if you know the name but not the woman, the answers to these seven questions reveal the real Cleopatra.

Who was Cleopatra before she became Queen of Egypt?
Cleopatra's road to power started with her family. After Alexander the Great's death, his generals split his empire. Cleopatra's ancestor Ptolemy, the first Soter, took control of Egypt. The Ptolemaic Kingdom, a dynasty of Macedonian Greeks, ruled for 10 generations, ending with Cleopatra.

How did she become Queen of Egypt?

Cleopatra's coronation was in 51 BCE, but her rise was brutal. She fought a civil war with her brother and co-ruler. After he died, Cleopatra selected another brother to co-rule.She later killed him to claim the crown for herself and engineered the execution of her sister to remove the last remaining threat, a move right out of the Egyptian playbook.

What was Egypt like at the time?

Cleopatra's reign is closer to today than to the time when the Great Pyramid of Giza was built.
She's more modern than you might think.During her tenure, the Roman Republic was in full swing, and Egypt was its ally. Cleopatra ruled Egypt through plague and famine, leading both the army and navy and regulating the economy. Egyptians respected Cleopatra, considering her a pharaoh and a divine being.The Roman leader Julius Caesar even helped Cleopatra regain the throne. In an act of diplomacy, or likely something more. Cleopatra and Caesar had a son together.

Who were Cleopatra's subjects?

Though Cleopatra was of Greek ancestry, she ruled over five million people, mostly Egyptians. She even learned Egyptian, the only one in her family dynasty to bother doing so. Surviving sources paint her as beloved by her people.

Who did she love?

Cleopatra's most famous relationship was with Roman General Mark Antony. They were a literal power couple, consolidating power across the Mediterranean.

How did Cleopatra die?

When Cleopatra and Mark Antony's power collapsed under pressure from Caesar's successor, Octavian, Antony fell on his sword and she poisoned herself probably, despite the long-standing myth of a snake bite. Cleopatra was only 39.

And finally, why is she still so iconic?

Cleopatra captivated audiences long after her reign ended. She was a savvy politician, diplomat, and military strategist, and has inspired 2,000 years of storytelling from plays to film to books. She wanted to become legendary, and she succeeded.