



CSCP Support Materials for Eduqas GCSE Latin

Component 2: Latin Literature and Sources (Themes)

Theme A: Romans in the Countryside

Pliny: The burdens of an estate owner

For examination in 2024-2026

Teachers should not feel that they need to pass on to their students all the information from these notes; they should choose whatever they think is appropriate.

The examination requires knowledge outside the text only when it is needed in order to understand the text.

The Teacher's Notes contain the follow:

- An **Introduction** to the author and the text, although students will only be asked questions on the content of the source itself.
- **Notes** on the text to assist the teacher.
- **Suggested Questions for Comprehension, Content and Style** to be used with students.
- **Discussion** suggestions and questions for students, and overarching **Themes** which appear across more than one source.
- **Further Information and Reading** for teachers who wish to explore the topic and texts further.
- **Acknowledgements** of works used in preparing these notes.

Pliny: Letters 9.15 - The burdens of an estate-owner

Pliny describes his unsuccessful retreat to country life

Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus, better known to us as Pliny the Younger (c. AD 61- c. AD 113) was a Roman politician from Comum. Most of his life was spent in Rome, as an orator in the courts, senator, and friend of the emperor Trajan. His wealth came from the country estates, mostly inherited, that he owned all over northern Italy, worked by a large number of tenant farmers. From this letter it is evident that, despite the irksome responsibilities this sometimes entailed, he tried to visit his estates regularly and thought of himself as a model landowner.

Pliny fastidiously composed his letters, editing and rewriting them. This letter, written to his friend and correspondent Pompeius Falco, describes how Pliny had fled to the country but, instead of doing what he wants, he is faced with the complaints and petitions of country folk. These are even more bothersome than revising his speeches and also stop him from doing his account-books. However, he does on occasion manage to ride round some parts of his estate. He finishes this letter by commanding Pompeius Falco to keep him abreast of news from the city.

Text

C. PLINIUS POMPEIO FALCONI SUO S.

refugeram in Tuscos, ut omnia ad arbitrium meum facerem. at
hoc ne in Tuscis quidem: tam multis undique rusticorum libellis
et tam querulis inquietor, quos aliquanto magis invitus quam
meos lego – nam et meos invitus. retracto enim actiunculas 5
quasdam – quod, post intercapedinem temporis, et frigidum et
acerbum est. rationes quasi absente me negleguntur. interdum
tamen equum conscendo et patrem familiae hactenus ago,
quod aliquam partem praediorum, sed pro gestatione percurro.
tu consuetudinem serva, nobisque sic rusticis urbana acta 10
perscribe. vale.

Notes

- 1 The letter is written to Pompeius Falco, a provincial commander and then consul in AD 108.
- 2 **refugeram**: the verb at the beginning of the sentence is emphatic. He did not just leave but he fled - presumably from the hustle and bustle of the city.

in Tuscos: the farm he is referring to was not quite in present-day Tuscany. This is almost a pet name of Pliny's for his residence near *Tifernum Tiberinum* (Tifernum on the Tiber) in the upper Tiber valley.

refugeram ... ut ... facerem: a purpose clause using *ut* and the subjunctive. The *omnia* (with *arbitrium*) emphasises how he wanted to go to his country estate to indulge in leisure.

2-3 at ... quidem: easier to understand by supplying *est* and inserting the word 'possible'. *at* (but) *quidem hoc* (even this) [*est* (is)] *ne* (not) [possible] *in Tuscis* (in Tuscany).

3-5 Pliny tells us that, at his country residence, he is unable to do what he wants because the country folk are making requests of him. These are most likely concerns from tenant farmers who rent his land, though it could include giving advice as judge and arbiter (Pliny *Epistles* 7.30.). Pliny seems unsympathetic to them, though tenant farmers were usually not well off and the landowners usually wealthy.

tam multis ... invitus: note the number of words here indicating magnitude. The first four (*tam, multis, undique, tam*) show how many petitions he receives and the next couple (*aliquanto, magis*) show his sense of dread at receiving them that surpasses even the dread of revising his own work. Note too the repetition of *invitus* (unwilling) emphasising his reluctance. *multis* agrees grammatically both with *libellis* and *querulis* - 'many petitions and grumbles.' Apparently the tenants both submit their grievances formally in writing and speak to Pliny as he tours the estate. The complaints from *rusticorum* 'people of the countryside' stand in contrast with the news from the city in line 10.

5 meos: in both cases *meos* means 'my own' [cases]. *Lego* is also the main verb in the final clause 'for I read my own unwillingly.' Pliny appears self-effacing and even adds an extra clause to be clear on this matter. The exaggeration of the number of complaints combined with his speaking dismissively of his own work makes this part feel less than serious.

5-7 actiunculas ... est: *actiunculas* is diminutive, from *actio*, meaning speech. The repetitious '*et frigidum et acerbum*' emphasises his displeasure at having to check these again – perhaps for publication.

7 quasi absente me: literally 'as though with me absent' meaning 'as if I wasn't here to do the account-books'. He, as a large estate owner, cannot even manage his own affairs due to the overwhelming concerns of his tenant farmers. Again, he ignores the impact of the hardships on the tenant farmers themselves.

7-9 interdum ... percurro: here Pliny is concerned that he should act as a *paterfamilias*. The term *paterfamilias* has come to mean the male head of a family but is also translated as proprietor and sometimes landowner. This perhaps indicates that riding round the estate is part of these duties. Although, *pro gestatione* 'for the sake of riding' suggests it was simply for the pleasure and exercise of riding.

10-11 tu ... perscribe: here Pliny turns to the person to whom he is addressing the letter (i.e. Pompeius Falco). *tu* is vocative with the imperatives *serva* and *perscribe*. Pliny commands his friend to keep him informed of city matters, while referring to himself as *rusticis* - 'countryfied'. This maintains the derogatory tone established earlier when dealing with quibbles from rustic folk. The contrast of city vs country life is emphasised by the juxtaposition of *rusticis urbana*. It seems Pliny sees city matters as more important than rustic complaints.

Suggested Questions for Comprehension

Read the entire text aloud, emphasising phrasing and word groups. Then reread each line or couplet, asking questions so that the class is led to comprehend the meaning of the Latin text. It may be desirable to produce a written translation once the students have understood the Latin.

refugeram in Tuscos, ut omnia ad arbitrium meum facerem (line 2)

- Where has Pliny fled to and what does he want to do there?

at hoc ne in Tuscis quidem: tam multis undique rusticorum libellis et tam querulis inquietor (lines 2-4)

- Is Pliny able to do what he wants in 'Tuscany'?
- What is Pliny harassed by?

quos aliquanto magis invitus quam meos lego – nam et meos invitus. (lines 4-5)

- What is Pliny also particularly unwilling to read?

retracto enim actiunculas quasdam – quod, post intercapedinem temporis, et frigidum et acerbum est. (lines 5-7)

- What is Pliny revising?
- How does Pliny describe what he is revising?

rationes quasi absente me negleguntur. (line 7)

- What has Pliny been neglecting?

interdum tamen equum conscendo et patrem familiae hactenus ago, quod aliquam partem praediorum, sed pro gestatione percurro. (lines 7-9)

- What is Pliny able to do sometimes as *pater familias*?
- What does he say he does this for?

tu consuetudinem serva, nobisque sic rusticis urbana acta perscribe. vale. (lines 10-11)

- What orders does Pliny give Pompeius Falco?

Questions on Content and Style

1. (lines 2-7) Does Pliny find going to the country relaxing? Use quotes to explain your point of view.
 2. (lines 7-9) How does Pliny show his wealth as a landowner?
 3. (lines 10-11) Does Pliny suggest that country or city life is more important?
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Discussion

Themes: landowners / tenant farmers / country life / city affairs

This letter from Pliny shows a different perspective from most of the other texts on the examination. It is not an idealised account of the humble, self-sufficient, pious farmer living according to the *mos maiores* (the ways of his ancestors) but rather focuses on the complaints of a wealthy landowner who grumbles about the demands of his own tenant farmers..

We know from other letters that Pliny enjoyed luxurious Roman villas as retreats to the countryside. However, here Pliny is showing the reality of someone overseeing extensive lands and many tenant farmers. He frequently has to deal with the ongoing issues of failing crops and tenants not meeting rent.

It is interesting to see that Pliny does not seem to have any sympathy for his tenants, seeing their complaints as trivial and time consuming, and as a frustrating obstacle to him overseeing his own affairs. Does this suggest that Pliny identifies being rusticated as being of a lower social status than those engaged in city life? Do rustic matters appear to him to be of less consequence than the affairs of the city?

Students may also notice that Pliny mentions some rustic pursuits which are enjoyable, for example horse riding and taking in the estate.

Questions on the whole passage

1. Does Pliny find visiting the country relaxing or stressful? Use examples from the text to explain your point of view.
2. What views does Pliny have on rusticity as compared to urban matters?
3. Do you think Pliny's account gives a realistic portrayal of the lives of tenant farmers and landowners? What might be exaggerated or omitted?
4. From reading the other 'Romans in the Countryside' texts, do you think other Romans would empathise with Pliny's experience of country living?

Further Information and Reading

The Cambridge Latin Course, Book V, Stage 35 on Roman Country Villas contains a detailed discussion of life in a country villa in English. A digital version of this section can be found [here](#).

Acknowledgement of Resources used:

Champlin, E (2016) 'Pliny's Other Country' in *The Epistles of Pliny* (Gibson, R.K and Whitton, C. eds). Oxford: Oxford University Press

Gibson, Roy K., 'Umbria and the Laurentine Shore', *Man of High Empire: The Life of Pliny the Younger* (New York, 2020; online edn, Oxford Academic, 18 June 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199948192.003.0006>, accessed 30 Nov. 2022.

Gibson, R. K., & Whitton, C. (Eds.). (2016). *The Epistles of Pliny*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Radice B. (2015). *Pliny Letters Books 8-10. Panegyricus*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Sherwin-White, A., & Price, S. (2012). Pliny (2) the Younger. In *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* : Oxford University Press.

Thibodeau, P (2011) *Playing the Farmer Representations of Rural Life in Vergil's Georgics* Berkeley: University of California Press