

Eduqas Latin GCSE

Prescribed text for Component 3A: Latin Literature (Narratives)

Pliny, *The eruption of Vesuvius*

N. B. The passages in italics are summaries of events to support understanding of the narrative. They are not part of the prescription.

This is the official examination text
for the Eduqas Latin GCSE (2020-2021)

The Death of Pliny the Elder (from Pliny the Younger, *Letters* VI.16)

On 24th August AD 79 Gaius Plinius Secundus (Pliny the Younger) was staying with his uncle and his mother at a villa on Cape Misenum, in southern Italy. His uncle, known to us as Pliny the Elder, was in charge of the Roman fleet stationed at Misenum. He was also a notable scientist, whose Natural History can still be read today.

Many years later, the historian Tacitus asked the younger Pliny to write an account of the eruption of Vesuvius, in which his uncle died.

A

petis ut tibi avunculi mei exitum scribam, quo verius tradere posteris possis. gratias ago; nam video morti eius si celebretur a te immortalem gloriam esse propositam.

B

erat Miseni classemque imperio praesens regebat. nonum kal. Septembres hora fere septima mater mea indicat ei adparere nubem inusitata et magnitudine et specie. usus ille sole, mox frigida, gustaverat iacens studebatque; poscit soleas, ascendit locum ex quo maxime miraculum illud conspici poterat. nubes – incertum procul intuentibus ex quo monte (Vesuvium fuisse postea cognitum est) – oriebatur, cuius similitudinem et formam non alia magis arbor quam pinus expresserit. nam longissimo velut trunco elata in altum quibusdam ramis diffundebatur, credo quia recenti spiritu evecata, dein senescente eo destituta aut etiam pondere suo victa in latitudinem vanescebat, candida interdum, interdum sordida et maculosa prout terram cineremve sustulerat.

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C

magnum propiusque noscendum ut eruditissimo viro visum. iubet liburnicam aptari; mihi si venire una vellem facit copiam; respondi studere me malle, et forte ipse quod scriberem dederat. egrediebatur domo; accipit codicillos Rectinae Tasci imminente periculo exterritae (nam villa eius subiacebat, nec ulla nisi navibus fuga): ut se tanto discrimini eriperet orabat. vertit ille consilium et quod studioso animo incohaverat obit maximo. deducit quadriremes, ascendit ipse non Rectinae modo sed multis (erat enim frequens amoenitas orae) laturus auxilium. properat illuc unde alii fugiunt, rectumque cursum recta gubernacula in periculum tenet adeo solutus metu, ut omnes illius mali motus omnes figuras ut deprenderat oculis dictaret enotaretque.

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D

iam navibus cinis incidebat, quo propius accederent, calidior et densior; iam pumices etiam nigrique et ambusti et fracti igne lapides; iam vadum subitum ruinaque montis litora obstantia. cunctatus paulum an retro flecteret, mox gubernatori ut ita faceret monenti 'fortes' inquit 'fortuna iuvat: Pomponianum pete.' Stabiis erat diremptus sinu medio (nam sensim circumactis curvatisque litoribus mare infunditur); ibi quamquam nondum periculo appropinquante, conspicuo tamen et cum cresceret proximo, sarcinas contulerat in naves, certus fugae si contrarius ventus resedisset.

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E

quo tunc avunculus meus secundissimo invectus, complectitur trepidantem consolatur hortatur, utque timorem eius sua securitate leniret, deferri in balineum iubet; lotus accubat cenat, aut hilaris aut (quod aequum magnum) similis hilari. interim e Vesuvio monte pluribus locis latissimae flammae altaque incendia relucebant, quorum fulgor et claritas tenebris noctis excitabatur. ille agrestium trepidatione ignes relictos desertasque villas per solitudinem ardere in remedium formidinis dictitabat. tum se quieti dedit et quievit verissimo quidem somno; nam meatus animae, qui illi propter amplitudinem corporis gravior et sonantior erat, ab iis qui limini obversabantur audiebatur.

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F

sed area ex qua diaeta adibatur ita iam cinere mixtisque pumicibus oppleta surrexerat, ut si longior in cubiculo mora, exitus negaretur. excitatus procedit, seque Pomponiano ceterisque qui pervigilaverant reddit. in commune consultant, intra tecta subsistant an in aperto vagentur. nam crebris vastisque tremoribus tecta nutabant, et quasi emota sedibus suis nunc huc nunc illuc abire aut referri videbantur. sub dio rursus quamquam levium exesorumque pumicum casus metuebatur, quod tamen periculorum collatio elegit; et apud illum quidem ratio rationem, apud alios timorem timor vicit. cervicalia capitibus imposita linteis constringunt; id munimentum adversus incidentia fuit.

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G

iam dies alibi, illic nox omnibus noctibus nigrior densiorque; quam tamen faces multae variaque lumina solvebant. placuit egredi in litus, et ex proximo adspicere, ecquid iam maremitteret; quod adhuc vastum et adversum permanebat. ibi super abiectum linteum recubans semel atque iterum frigidam aquam poposcit hausitque. deinde flammae flammarumque praenuntius odor sulphuris alios in fugam vertunt, excitant illum. innitens servolis duobus adsurrexit et statim concidit, ut ego colligo, crassiore caligine spiritu obstructo, clausoque stomacho qui illi natura invalidus et angustus et frequenter aestuans erat. ubi dies redditus (is ab eo quem novissime viderat tertius), corpus inventum integrum inlaesum opertumque ut fuerat indutus: habitus corporis quiescenti quam defuncto similior.

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H

interim Miseni ego et mater – sed nihil ad historiam, nec tu aliud quam de exitu eius scire voluisti. finem ergo faciam. unum adiciam, omnia me quibus interfueram quaeque statim, cum maxime vera memorantur, audieram, persecutum. tu potissima excerpes; aliud est enim epistulam aliud historiam, aliud amico aliud omnibus scribere. vale.

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The Eruption of Vesuvius, AD 79 – continued (from Pliny the Younger, *Letters* VI.20)

Pliny the Younger's account of the death of his uncle prompted Tacitus to ask for more information about the eruption of Vesuvius. This second letter describes the younger Pliny's own reactions on that day and his first-hand observations of how other people behaved.

I

You say that the letters which I wrote to you about my uncle's death have encouraged you to want to know not only about the fears but also the dangers I endured while I was left at Misenum – for I broke off when I had begun this part. 'Although my mind shudders at the memory, I shall begin...'

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J

After my uncle set out I passed the rest of the time with my studies - I had remained behind for this reason. Then I had a bath, dinner and a brief, restless nap. For many days there had been earth tremors, they were not particularly frightening because they are common in Campania; however on that night they were so strong that everything seemed not just to be moved but to be overturned. My mother burst into my bedroom just as I was rising to wake her, if she had still been asleep. We sat in the courtyard of the house which was placed between the sea and the buildings. I do not know whether I ought to call this bravery or stupidity – I was seventeen. I requested a book of Titus Livy, and I read as though I were at leisure and even carried on with the extracts which I had begun. Then a friend of my uncle who had recently joined him from Spain, when he saw my mother and I sitting, and me actually reading, complained of her patience and my lack of concern. Nevertheless I remained intent on the book.

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K

It was now the first hour of the day, and there was as yet a doubtful and weak light. The buildings around about were still shaking and although we were in an open space, it was however narrow and there our fear of the house's imminent ruin was great. Then at last it seemed sensible to leave the town; a terrified crowd followed us, in a state of fear which was like good judgement, and they preferred the decision of someone else rather than their own; they were going in such a huge group that they crowded around us and carried us away. When we had left the houses, we stopped. There we saw many strange things, many terrors. For the carriages which we had ordered to be brought out, began to move in opposite directions, although they were on the flattest of land, and would not stay still in the same place even when propped up with stones. We also saw the sea being sucked back on itself as if pushed by the earth tremor. Certainly the shore became larger and left many sea creatures high and dry on the sand. From behind us a terrifying black cloud was ripped apart by twisted and quivering bursts of fire and gaped open into long tongues of flame: they were similar to lightning forks and bigger.

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L

Not much later that cloud descended onto the ground and covered the sea; it encircled Capreae and concealed it; it rushed upon the promontory of Misenum and stole it away from our sight. Then my mother begged, encouraged and ordered me to flee in whatever way I could; for a young man could do it, and that she being old and slow of body would die happy if she had not been the cause of my death. I, on the contrary, would not save myself unless we were together; and then grasping her hand I compelled her to speed up. She obeyed unwillingly and accused herself of delaying me.

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M

Now ash was falling although not thickly at this point. I looked back: pressing on us was a thick fog which spread across the land like a burning flood. 'Let us turn off the road,' I said, 'while we can see, in case we are left sprawled in the road and crushed by the crowd following us in the dark.' We had scarcely sat down, when night fell – not that of a moonless and cloudy night, but as if a light had been extinguished in a closed room. You could hear the shrieking of the women, the wailing of infants, the shouts of the men; some were calling for parents, some for children, some for wives, they were trying to recognise them by their voices; these were lamenting their own fate, those the fate of their relatives; there were those who were praying for death in their very terror of death. Many raised their hands to the gods, more concluded that there were no longer any gods and that this was a new and eternal night for the world. Nor was there a lack of those who increased the real dangers with made-up lies and terrors. There were those who reported that part of Misenum had collapsed and part was on fire, these were false reports but they found people to believe them.

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N

At last it grew light again, this seemed to us not to be day but the sign of an approaching fire. However, the fire halted some way off, the darkness returned and there was ash again, a lot of it and heavy. Every now and then we got up and shook it off otherwise we should have been covered and even crushed by its weight. I can boast that no groan, no sound less than brave escaped me in these great dangers, except that I believed the end was nigh for me alongside everyone else and that, alongside poor me, the whole world was ending – which nevertheless was a great comfort in death. At last the darkness thinned as though it disappeared into smoke and cloud; soon real daylight returned, even the sun shone, however it was yellowish as it is in an eclipse. Everything which our frightened eyes encountered was changed and buried deep in ash like in snow.

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O

We returned to Misenum, having attended to our bodies in whatever way we could, and spent a night hanging uncertainly between hope and fear. Fear was uppermost; for the earth tremors continued and very many people, distracted by terrifying predictions, were making fun of their own and other people's misfortunes. However, not even then, though we had been through danger and were expecting it, did we have any intention of leaving until we had news of my uncle. These things, which are certainly not worthy of history, you will read without any wish to write about them and will, no doubt, blame yourself for asking about them if they do not seem worthy even of a letter. Farewell.

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