

Letters of Pliny

Study Questions

Letter 1.9

Question 1: How does Pliny use different perspectives and forms of expression to make this letter seem varied?

Letter 3.16

Question 2: Does Pliny make a convincing case that Arria should be remembered for her actions and not just a few words? Remember that Pliny was an advocate (lawyer) by profession, so he should be able to make a convincing case – do not be afraid to put him ‘on trial’!

Letter 4.2

Question 3: Pliny clearly did not like Regulus, one of his rival orators. In this letter is Pliny being fair? What are Pliny’s main issues with Regulus’ behaviour?

Letter 4.19

Question 4: ‘Members of the Roman elite only married for political purposes, not for love.’ How does this letter from Pliny to his wife’s aunt, Calpurnia Hispulla, fit with this view?

Letter 8.8

Question 5: Would you want to visit the spring at Clitumnus in the region of Umbria? Which particular elements of the landscape described by Pliny might entice you or put you off from visiting?

Letter 8.16

Question 6: ‘Regardless of the topic or content of a letter, Pliny is more interested in talking about himself.’ Does this letter confirm such an opinion of Pliny or counteract it?

Letter 8.17



Question 7: What different aspects of the destruction caused by the Tiber does Pliny focus on? How does the last section (8.17.6) fit in with the rest of this letter?

Letter 9.6

Question 8: How genuine do you think Pliny's feelings are in this letter – are his criticisms valid or does this letter appear to be more about style and word-play? Remember that there is no right answer– all opinions are valid!

Letters to be read in English (7 in total)

Question 9: Reading letters *1.12*, *3.14* and *5.8* in particular, how much of a 'thinker' do you believe Pliny to be?

Question 10: From letters *2.6*, *2.20*, *7.5* and *9.12*, what impression do you get of Pliny's outlook on life and his moral viewpoints?

General Questions

Question 11: 'Pliny focuses each letter on just a single topic and avoids discussing more than one issue at a time.' From the selection of letters you have read – in both Latin and English – have you found that this statement rings true?

Question 12: Letters *8.8* and *8.17* are both descriptive letters discussing landscapes and nature. What points of similarity and difference do you find between these letters?

Question 13: Do Pliny's letters seem to you to be very personal or do some letters seem more focused on formality and formula? How much of 'Pliny' do you think you can find in his letters?

Question 14: 'Pliny is very good at drawing up literary portraits of individuals.' How true have you found this statement to be in the selection of letters you have read? In particular make reference to *1.12*, *2.20*, *3.16*, *4.2* and *4.19*.



B L O O M S B U R Y

Question 15: Do you find that for the most part you feel you agree with many of the opinions and expressed by Pliny in his letters, or generally are you in disagreement with him?