

Ambush!



The low sun was peeking through the trees, casting long flickering shadows in our path as we trudged doggedly towards our settlement. Our horse whinnied and huffed. He was thirsty and tired, but so were we. The cart that he pulled was packed full of supplies – heavy crates of armour, barrels of materials, boxes of weapons – but our bags weren't exactly light either.

“Not long now, boy,” Maximus said, his voice as soft as the breeze whispering through the trees. Maximus always spoke in a much more friendly manner to his steed than to me.

I wiped a bead of sweat from my brow, raising a hand to shade my eyes from the sun. The path wound ahead of us, leading us through the woods and out into the hills. The settlement surely wasn't too far now. I squinted, trying to guess how far we had to go, but I should have been keeping an eye on the ground below my feet. I tripped over a protruding root and hit the ground, my armour clattering as my hands and knees scuffed the dirt path.

Maximus huffed out a disappointed sound and I felt his hand on the back of my cloak, pulling me roughly to my feet. “Get a move on,” he snarled, “there's no time for resting, Miles! They're counting on us.”

I opened my mouth to protest that I obviously hadn't been lying down on purpose, but thought better of it and pressed my lips closed. Dusting off my maroon tunic, I winced as my palms stung. I'd broken the skin on both of them: small specks of blood like tiny scarlet bugs rose to the surface of my skin. I looked away quickly – the sight of blood always made me feel lightheaded. Not ideal for a Roman soldier.

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Fortunately, Maximus had already marched ahead so he didn't see my wobble. Not that he would have asked if I was alright – he had a heart of stone. I jogged to catch up, my sword swinging against my thigh and making it tricky to balance.

“DESINO!” came a shout from my right. I froze, as did Maximus. The horse gave an indignant snort as Maximus pulled on his rein to halt him.

“Lay down your weapons!” came a shout from my left.

My eyes darted to both sides, searching for the owner of the voices, but all I could see was the tangled web of trees, bushes and overgrown grasses. I looked to Maximus for guidance, but he was frozen still and all I could see was the back of his shiny helmet.

“Drop them!” Another shout. This time it sounded like it was directly above us.

Maximus obediently unclipped his sword from his belt and dropped it on the dirt track. I copied him. The leaves rustled as three figures dropped from the branches above us – I heard them more than saw them: their boots crunching as they landed, the zip of their knives as they drew them. I watched as Maximus turned slowly, his hands up, then fell to his knees.

Was he...weeping?

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Questions

1

Complete the table with information from the text.

characters	
setting	
time of day	

“...They’re counting on us.”

2

Who are **they** and what are they counting on the characters for?

I tripped over a protruding root and hit the ground...

3

What does **protruding** mean?

poisonous

flowering

sticking up

thorny

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4

Describe the relationship between the two characters, using evidence from the text.

5

Find and copy an example of these writing techniques within the text.

simile	
metaphor	
onomatopoeia	

The horse gave an indignant snort as Maximus pulled on his rein to halt him.

6

How was the horse feeling in this sentence?

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“DESINO!” came a shout from my right.

7

a) **Desino** is a latin word. What do you think it means?

b) Why has the writer written this word in capital letters?

8

Order the events of the text by numbering the statements. The first one has been done for you.

1	Everyone was feeling thirsty and tired.
	Miles tripped over.
	Miles felt lightheaded.
	Maximus was unkind to Miles.
	Maximus was kind to the horse.

9

What do you think the three newcomers wanted from Maximus and Miles?

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10

Predict what happens next in the story.

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Answers

1 Complete the table with information from the text.

characters	Maximus and Miles (the Roman soldiers) and their horse
setting	a winding dirt path in the woods
time of day	sunset

“...They’re counting on us.”

2 Who are **they** and what are they counting on the characters for?
They are the people at the settlement and they are counting on the characters to deliver supplies.

I tripped over a protruding root and hit the ground...

3 What does **protruding** mean?

poisonous

flowering

sticking up

thorny

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4

Describe the relationship between the two characters, using evidence from the text.

Maximus is not very kind to Miles: it says in the text that 'Maximus always spoke in a much more friendly manner to his steed than to me' and when Miles fell over, Maximus didn't ask if he was OK. Miles wants to impress Maximus. He doesn't want him to see him feeling wobbly about the blood and he looks to him for guidance.

5

Find and copy an example of these writing techniques within the text.

simile	...his voice as soft as the breeze whispering through the trees.
metaphor	...he had a heart of stone.
onomatopoeia	zip

The horse gave an indignant snort as Maximus pulled on his rein to halt him.

6

How was the horse feeling in this sentence?

The horse was feeling annoyed and frustrated that he had to stop.

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“DESINO!” came a shout from my right.

7

a) **Desino** is a latin word. What do you think it means?

Child’s own answer using contextual clues, such as:

I think it means stop/ freeze/enemy.

(it means stop)

b) Why has the writer written this word in capital letters?

The writer has written this in capital letters to emphasise that it has been shouted loudly.

8

Order the events of the text by numbering the statements. The first one has been done for you.

1	Everyone was feeling thirsty and tired.
3	Miles tripped over.
5	Miles felt lightheaded.
4	Maximus was unkind to Miles.
2	Maximus was kind to the horse.

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9

What do you think the three newcomers wanted from Maximus and Miles?

Child's own answer, such as:

- I think the newcomers wanted to rob Maximus and Miles.
- I think the newcomers wanted to find out where Maximus and Miles were going.
- I think the newcomers wanted to help Maximus and Miles, as they didn't attack straight away.

10

Predict what happens next in the story.

Child's own prediction

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