

Lucius and the Roman Tablet

"Lucius, sit down. I have something for you."

Lucius did as he was told and pulled out a small chair. He looked up at his mother and waited for her to speak.

"This came today," his mother said. She picked up what looked like a small wooden rectangle and sat down next to him.

"What is it?" Lucius asked.

There were tears in his mother's eyes. "Lucius, has it been so long that you have forgotten?"

The small boy stared at the rectangle. It looked like the wax tablet he was learning to read and write on, only this one was wooden and broken around the edges. He gently peered over, pulling his mother's hand down to get a better view. Engraved into the wood were words written in scratchy blue ink. He recognised his name at the top. "Is it a letter?" he said. "From Father?"

"Yes," his mother replied, breathing deeply. "It has travelled from the farthest reaches of the Roman Empire, just for you."

Lucius stared at the wooden tablet. His mind was racing. It had been years since he'd heard from his father. Every night, Mother would tell stories of Father's bravery fighting against barbarians in far-off lands; how he was the strongest and fittest of his legion. She told Lucius how proud he was to have him as a son and how important it was for him to live away from his family. The Empire was growing. It had to support its citizens by conquering other nations and Lucius's father was doing his part. It was all for the good of Rome. One day, after 25 years in the army, he would be rewarded with his own land and they would all be together again. Yet Lucius was already nine... he would be a grown man when that happened.

"Shall I read it to you?" Lucius's mother said.

Lucius nodded gently.

"Lucius," his mother read, "my dear son, forgive me for not writing sooner. I trust you receive this in good health and that Rome is as glorious as ever.

"Right now, I am stationed in the fort of Vindolanda. It is across the seas in the northern reaches of Britannia, where we face barbarians every day. They fight with passion and fury but they are no match for the Roman army. Where they rely on anger and brute strength, we are organised and disciplined and fight with our minds as much as our swords.

"Many seasons have passed since I marched from Rome into the northern territories. In that time, we have fought many battles and every battle has ended in Roman triumph. It is only a matter of time before we conquer all of Britannia too.

"I pray to Jupiter that one day we will be together again. Until that time, be proud to be Roman. Hail Hadrian. Hail Rome. Your father, Marcus Antonius Maximus."

As Lucius's mother reached over, he tried to picture his father in his mind but there was nothing there.

"Hail Hadrian," Lucius whispered as he buried his head into his mother's arms. "Hail Rome."

1. Which two of these describes what came today?

- ☐ a tablet with writing on
- ☐ a small chair
- ☐ bad news
- ☐ a wooden rectangle

2. **"Lucius, has it been so long that you have forgotten?"**

What did Lucius's mother think Lucius had forgotten?

3. Why were there tears in Lucius's mother's eyes?

4. **Engraved into the wood were words written in scratchy blue ink.**

From this evidence, explain how you think Lucius's father wrote the letter.

5. What was going to happen once Lucius was a grown man?

6. Why weren't the barbarians a match for the Roman army?

7. Join the boxes to correctly describe the people:

<div>organised and disciplined •</div>	<div>• barbarians</div>
<div>strong and angry •</div>	<div>• Marcus Antonius Maximus</div>
<div>brave and fit •</div>	<div>• Roman army</div>

8. **He had forgotten what his father looked like.**

Why do you think Lucius had forgotten what his father looked like and how do you think that made him feel?
