

Opening and First Chapter

'The rider's shadow flitted like a cloud in a storm gust.' (Page 1)

Read the first page.

Discuss: What draws you in? Which questions does it make you ask and why does the author keep the characters anonymous to begin with?

Activity: Make a list of the adjectives on the first page. What impression do they collectively give?

Activity: What do you think might be happening in this scene? Write on from 'longer to wait.' Remember to include the rider, the man in the valley and the groom, and the setting.

First chapter

Read the first chapter.

Activity: Pull together everything you can find out about horse breeding from the novel. Now supplement your knowledge with some research and create a leaflet explaining how race horses are bred.

Discuss: What do you learn about Dido in the first chapter?

Activity: Create a page with two columns, one including what is said *about* her in the text, and one to include what you learn from her behaviour in the text. Remember to explain your evidence.

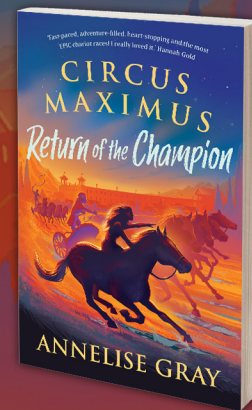
'This is the one, Abibaal. I can feel it.' (Page 10)

Discuss: Why is Dido talking to the dead?

'As for our friend from the Greens...he won't know what's hit him. I'm going to make him suffer a thousand cuts of humiliation before I'm done with him.' (Page 10)

'He says none of it will bring you back...Nothing seems to matter any more except this.' (Page 10)

Discuss: What does Dido mean by 'a thousand cuts of humiliation'? Why might this be important in the novel?



Activity: Can you think of other narratives you have read that are motivated by revenge, or avenging the dead? Make a mind map to show the different narratives you come up with collectively. Why might authors use revenge for character motivation?

Setting: Time and Place

'Utica, North Africa' (Page 1)
'Rome. The year 49.' (Page 11),

Activity: Find Utica on a modern map of the world. Does it still exist? Which country is it in now? What does the word Utica mean?

Activity: Create a map of the Roman Empire. Can you mark the dates and borders of its expansion? How large was it in AD 49?

Activity: Research and create a timeline of ancient history around the year AD 49. What was happening in the Roman Empire? Can you find out what was happening at the same time in other parts of the world?

'Damon cursed and stopped battling the tide of people.' (Page 11)

Discuss: How does Gray create a sense of the crowd in Chapter II? What specific details can you quote from the text to give a sense of what Rome was like in that time?

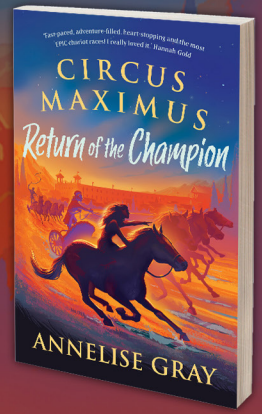
Activity: Put your findings in a Venn diagram, comparing Ancient Rome to a busy city today.

'He had never been anywhere in his life other than Rome, and this rolling green landscape with its pine forests and purple mountains was unlike anything he had ever seen or imagined. In fields on either side of the dusty road, labourers planting seedlings touched their striped hats in response to a greeting from Parmenion. Licking his dry lips, Damon could taste the tang of the sea they had just left behind.' (Page 97)

Re-read Chapter I and the opening of Chapter XV on page 118-119.

'The vast green landscape, with its buzzing stillness' (Page 170)
'the imperial family had retreated to their residence outside Rome's walls, away from the stench and heat of the city.' (Page 52)
'Rome was like a furnace in the heat.' (Page 59)

Discuss: Would you have preferred to live in Rome or in a rural area, such as Utica?



Activity: Use your discussion to create an essay arguing whether it would have been better for a Roman citizen to live in the town or countryside.

Writing Style

'Glarus and the groom waited by a crackling brazier, watching the chestnut mare guzzle from a water trough.' (Page 3)

Discuss: How does Gray use specific details to bring the ancient world to life?

Activity: From the first three chapters, make a list of vocabulary that you don't know – and create a word wheel to find synonyms and meanings. Highlight the words particular to Roman times.

'Eyes darting like silverfish among the swarm of faces' (Page 11)

Activity: Find five similes or metaphors in the first three chapters. Do they work for the time in which they are set?

Activity: Take the five similes or metaphors and rewrite them so that they are anachronistic.

Discuss: Now think about the pacing of the novel. Why does Gray start in one place, and then take up the story in Chapter II somewhere else, and not revisit Utica until page 97?

Read Chapter XL on page 312.

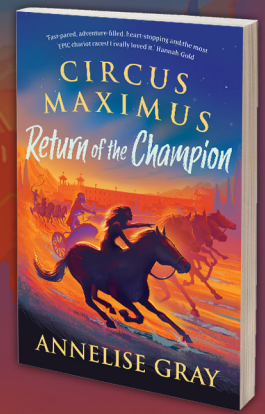
Discuss: Why does Gray keep switching the action from what's happening at the Circus Maximus to the palace? What effect does it have?

Activity: Write this chapter as a screenplay. Where would the cameras be at which point? What music would you have as a background score? What would you change from Gray's text?

Characters

Revisit the cast of characters at the start of the novel.

Discuss: Why has Gray laid it out like this, as if in a play? Should all novels do this? Did you flick back to the cast list while you were reading the book? Why are horses included in the character list?



Turn to the drawing of a charioteer at the start of the novel. Although ‘no racing chariot remains have survived...this sketch is based on research.’

Research: find a relief of chariot racing on an ancient Roman artefact, or a description in an Ancient Roman text. Can you make a collage of the images and texts you have found? Are the details similar to this sketch? You may wish to research at the British Museum, such as this relief: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1805-0703-337

‘Among them was Orion, alone in his paddock. He was quieter than he had been when he arrived and was plucking at the grass in a dejected way.’ (Page 162)

Read the rest of pages 162-163.

Discuss: Why does Gray compare Orion to Damon?

Activity: Pick out five incidences in the book in which Gray anthropomorphises horses. Are your examples the behaviour of the horses, or their description, or their involvement in the plot? What effect does this have on the reader?

‘Stranger still, as far as Damon was concerned, was the way the horses in this stable were treated.’ (Page 171)

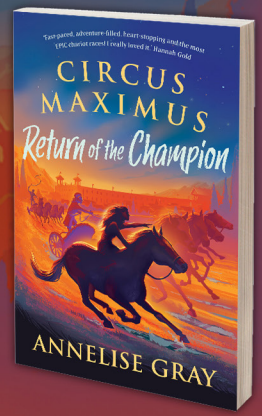
Read the rest of page 171-172.

‘And the horses even seemed to have friendships, like people.’ (Page 171)

Discuss: Does Gray make the reader care about the horses as well as the people? Is your understanding and sympathy for the characters influenced by the way they treat horses?

Activity: Compare this book with an extract from another book about horses, such as *Black Beauty*, or as Gray writes in her Author Note on page 340, *National Velvet*. Does the author make their feelings about treatment of horses very clear? What effect does this have on the reader?

Activity: Think of other children’s books you have read that are also about animals or the relationship between animals and humans. Create a mind map to show your results. Why do you think so many children’s books are about animals?



Damon

'Damon cursed and stopped battling the tide of people.' (Page 11)

Discuss: What information do you learn about Damon in Chapter II? How does it compare with the introduction to Dido in Chapter I?

'The horse tried to dodge him, but he was quick and grabbed a trailing rein. He could feel the young stallion's strength but he managed to stay on his feet as he was dragged across the yard.'
(Page 17-18)

'Damon's instinct for danger was awoken.' (Page 18)

Activity: Using the information from Chapters II and III, create a character poster for Damon, drawing an outline of a person and using words inside the person to describe personality, and outside the outline to describe appearance.

'Something happened to him when he watched a chariot-race. It was as if he wasn't aware of his own body, as if he had left it behind and joined the charioteers on the track, in the thick of the action.' (Page 24)

'Sometimes, he imagined he was his father, seeing through his eyes, feeling the spit of sand in his face, the chafing of the reins on his palms.' (Page 24)

'It's everything I dream of.' (Page 48)

'I want to make enough money so that I can buy my mother's freedom.' (Page 113)

Discuss: What motivates Damon to become a charioteer? Does this change over the course of the novel? Why? Use evidence from the text to back up your answer.

Activity: Create a poster to explore what motivates you. Do you have clear goals that you are aiming to achieve? Write your motivating factors. You may wish to source a motivational quote from a role model too.

'Yet Centaur had a gentle nature and warm brown eyes that blinked at Damon in a way that made him wonder if the horse felt as sad and caged as he did sometimes.' (Page 40)

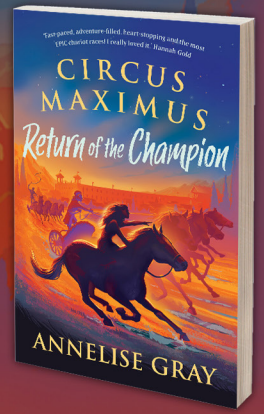
'But like the bruises his master sometimes left on his back, he knew it would hurt his mother too much to speak of such things.' (Page 49)

'Damon was prepared to risk everything to win.' (Page 55)

'Parmenion smiled. Not quite as surly as you look, he thought to himself.' (Page 61)

Discuss: Is Damon an emotional character?

'He was too furious to respond. When the calls stopped, he felt even more aggrieved. A wave of loneliness overtook him.' (Page 122)



Activity: Create a simple line graph to track Damon's emotions during the course of the novel. What do you notice about the line?

'...although he insisted on stopping at the stables first, so that he could see his horses.' (Page 301)

Discuss: In which ways does Damon change over the course of the novel?

'He patted his teammate on the shoulder, turned and gestured wildly at the physicians running towards him.' (Page 247)

Re-read Chapter XXXI, starting on page 240.

Discuss: How does Damon save his teammate? Is this the right thing to do? What does this tell you about Damon?

'a part of him that was bitter.' (Page 249)

Discuss: Look at the scene in the following chapter of the fight with Cyrus. Does this reinforce your impression of Damon or change it?

Discuss: Taking all the work you have done above, think about which qualities Damon possess that make him a good charioteer?

Activity: Imagine you are Damon applying for a position as a charioteer in the Blues team. Write a resume accordingly – which experience and strengths would you highlight?

Dido

'Siren's not for sale. She's part of Dido's great scheme.' (Page 104)

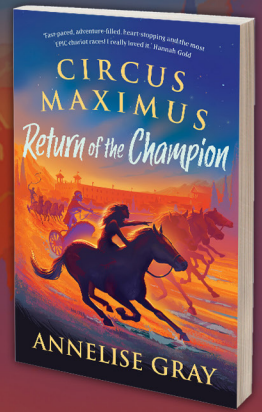
Discuss: Judging by the first chapter and Chapter XIII, what is Dido's great scheme?

'Scorpus would tell you himself – there are things Dido knows about horses that he doesn't.' (Page 133)

'You're the only trainer I know who worries about something like that,' remarked Glarus. 'Mind, you're unusual in a lot of ways.' (Page 160)

'Horses trust her. Almost as if she can talk to them.' (Page 162)

Discuss: Why does Dido care about horses as much as she does? Does it make her a better charioteer? Does it make her a better person?



Activity: Hold a debate to argue the following: Dido's relationship with horses is at the heart of her personality. Make sure you use evidence from the text to back up your answer.

'She held out a spoon, making it clear she wouldn't tolerate refusal' (Page 136)

'Don't give me that look, Dido. You're a fairer judge than that.' (Page 136)

'Parmenion was right. It has to be you. Of all of us, it's you who has the most chance of understanding him.' (Page 140)

Discuss: Re-read the scene with Dido and Scopus on pages 135-140. What do you learn about Dido's character from this scene? What do you learn about the history of these characters?

'He was melancholy tonight. It was when we started talking about Utica. While you were gone, he almost said Dido's name.' (Page 33)

'He's stubborn,' she grumbled. 'Like Dido.' (Page 36)

'You're stubborn though. Like Dido.' (Page 93)

'I can't be the person you want me to be. I can't be somebody I'm not.'

'I never asked you to,' he said over his shoulder.' (Page 145)

Discuss: What do you make of the relationship between Dido and Parmenion?

Activity: Re-read the conversation between Parmenion and Dido on pages 141-145. Take the text and insert thought bubbles for them in between their speech. Are they thinking lots of things they aren't saying?

'It's not easy for Dido, living the life she does.' (Page 149)

Discuss: Why does Anna say this about Dido?

Activity: Using all the answers you have provided so far about Dido, create a sketch of what you think she looks like, and how her personality is shown in the way she presents herself in your picture.

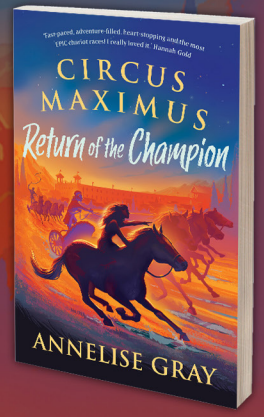
Discuss: Most of what the reader learns about Dido is from observations by other people. Do you agree?

Activity: What do you learn about Dido from her training of Damon? Read Chapter XIX and use quotes to illustrate your points and create a character profile of Dido from the evidence.

'Dido nodded to them as she passed. Damon noticed that most didn't greet her in return. There were some wary faces, almost as if they were afraid of her, he thought.' (Page 164)

'Dido's agility, her strength, her precision in pointing her horses – nobody could fake that. There was a look in her eyes too, when she raced, the hunger of a natural born competitor. Whatever magic flowed from her fingers when she wielded the reins came from somewhere real, inside her.' (Page 173)

Discuss: Why do people in the novel refer to Dido as some kind of sorceress?



Activity: Find vocabulary used in the novel about Dido that fits into your idea of a 'sorceress.' Which words or phrases are used?

'Horses never deserve it,' she said, answering his half-smile with her own. 'People, on the other hand...' (Page 255)

Discuss: Is Dido making a joke?

Read from page 252 to 254.

Discuss: What do Dido's actions in this passage tell you about her character? Is it consistent with her character throughout the rest of the novel?

'When I think about Damon going up against those thugs, my stomach gets knotted.' (Page 262)

Activity: Draw a line graph of emotions for Dido across the course of the novel. How does it compare with the one you drew for Damon?

'I'm not always the best example to follow, Damon.' (Page 289)

Discuss: Dido says this to Damon before he goes to race again with his arm strapped. Why does she think this?

Activity: Create columns of 'for' and 'against' as to why Dido might make a good role model. Which column is more heavily populated with evidence from the text?

'A goddess came to save me.' (Page 311)

Discuss: Why does Dido take Alexio's place?

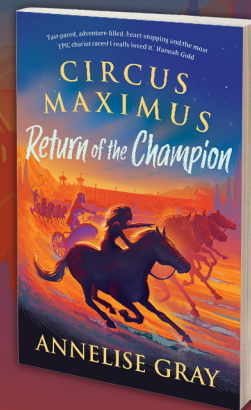
Activity: Write a diary entry for Dido after the end of race day. Explore her emotions and the actions she took.

Agrippina

'There was something about the empress, for all that she was so softly spoken.' (Page 39)

Discuss: What does Gray mean by 'something about her'?

'She wasn't a tall woman, but she carried herself with the poise of a peacock' (Page 45)
'her limpid stare.' (Page 46)



Teaching Resources

'Her words sounded like coins clinking gently.' (Page 48)

'Damon felt as if an eagle's claw had scraped the top of his head.' (Page 47)

'her face inscrutable.' (Page 73)

'The hem of Agrippina's gown hissed softly as it swept over the palace floor.' (Page 85)

Discuss: How does Gray make Agrippina seem threatening? Do you view her as a villain in the text?

Activity: Create a decision wheel for Agrippina. Pick four decisions she could make during the novel, such as sending Damon away or prioritising Lucius over Britannicus. Which possible outcomes happen from the decisions? Are these positive or negative? Fill in the consequences on your decision wheel.

'It's my duty to keep her secrets.' (Page 50)

'As far as she knew, she was the only person on the imperial staff who knew the empress kept a private journal. It never left this room and was kept in a special leather case inside a cabinet where Clara now placed it. She locked the cabinet and gave the key back to the empress.' (Page 72)

Discuss: Why does Agrippina keep her journal secret?

Activity: Write a one-page entry of the journal.

'Is my love not enough for you?' (Page 86)

'To think that a powerful woman could be so jealous of a little boy.' (Page 92)

Discuss: Is the relationship between Agrippina and Lucius healthy?

Activity: Using scenes between Agrippina and Lucius, create a series of freeze frames. What are the expressions on the faces of the characters?

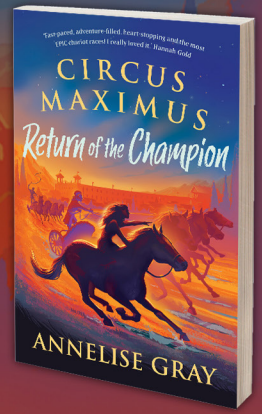
'Ancient historians claim that through the influence of Agrippina – a woman they describe as being 'like a man' in terms of her ambition and strategy – Lucius was promoted to first in line.'
(Author's Note, page 343)

Discuss: Does Gray also portray Agrippina as being 'like a man'?

Activity: Research Agrippina the Younger, as she is known. What did happen to her in the end? Write a short biography of her life from what you have learned. Do you find her likeable? Admirable? Do you have any sympathy for her?

Lucius

'He sensed the invisible line he had crossed, almost as the words left his lips. Lucius seemed to stand taller. His blue eyes were cold.' (Page 70)



'You should have seen him blubbing and begging me not to.' (Page 79)

'Finish him!' yelled Lucius, and he began slamming his closed fist into the palm of his other hand. (Page 259-260)

Activity: Make a word map to explore your thoughts on Lucius's personality.

Discuss: Once you have read the Author's Note on page 340, in which Gray reveals that Lucius is Emperor Nero, research a few facts about Nero. Do you think Gray has fictionalised his childhood well? Explain, giving evidence.

'A tiny sound, like a wounded animal, escaped him. He nodded, and slunk away.' (Page 277)

Discuss: When his mother hits him, which emotions does Lucius experience?

Activity: Write a diary entry as if you are Lucius that evening after the argument with his mother. How does he feel about her? About his life and future? And what might he add about Damon?

'For an instant, his blue eyes seemed to thaw and Damon glimpsed the old Lucius, the boy he had climbed trees with, raced and wrestled, that long, perfect summer.' (Page 317)

Discuss: Why does Gray revisit the idea of Lucius's eyes? Why do you think Lucius lets Damon and Clara go?

Activity: Do you feel any sympathy for Lucius at the end of the novel? Hold a class debate on whether Lucius is a likeable or an unlikeable character.

Revisit the cast of characters at the start of the novel. Pick a periphery character and write a couple of paragraphs as to why you chose that character. Explore whether you like them, how much they influence the plot or the main characters, and if you think they have a fitting ending to their story.

Themes

Details of Ancient Rome: Superstition/Religion

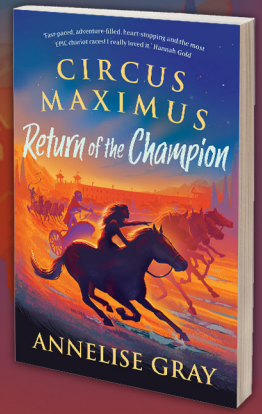
'if I'm headed for Hades, maybe I'll see if I can bring some others along with me for company.' (Page 19)

'Neptune be with you.' (Page 19)

'I know a curse. My mother's soothsayer taught me.' (Page 44)

Discuss: What is a 'Hades'? What is a 'soothsayer'? And who was 'Neptune'?

Activity: Research and create a Powerpoint to highlight what the ancient Romans thought about gods and religion and superstition and how they put this into practice.



Teaching Resources

Discuss: Would you have expected more or less superstition and religion to be in the novel?

'A pinprick of light suddenly slanted across the sky.' (Page 219)

'Mama used to tell me they were omens, said Damon. 'Good or bad, though – you can't be sure.' (Page 219)

Discuss: Do you think this shooting star is a good or bad omen for Damon? Why do you think the Ancient Romans believed they were omens and not just shooting stars?

Activity: Research other cultures' beliefs about shooting stars. How are shooting stars referred to scientifically?

'He could see her fist wrapped around something and realised it was the wooden model of Scopus's old horse Tigris, which she used to carry for luck in her own races.' (Page 203)

'Wait,' he said to Parmenion, and he kneeled to remove his father's coin from the lining of his shoe. 'Watch over me, Papa,' he said, kissing the coin. For extra luck, he touched the model of Issa, which he wore on a chain around his neck.' (Page 242)

'He understood the significance of being offered another charioteer's talisman.' (Page 265)

Discuss: What is a talisman? What does Damon carry for good luck? Give as much detail as you can.

Activity: Has Gray based these objects on real artefacts from Ancient Rome? Do some research to discover if such things existed?

Activity: Do you have a talisman or lucky charm? What is it and why is it lucky? Draw a sketch of it and annotate accordingly.

Food

'the boys had eaten six sausage pies, four pickled eggs and a date-stuffed pastry'. (Page 21)

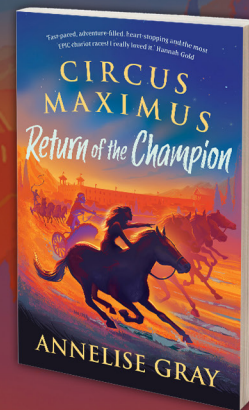
Discuss: Would you eat what the boys ate? What sort of vendor food is offered at concert and sporting venues today?

Read pages 28-30 of Chapter IV and pages 54-55 of Chapter VII

Discuss: What are your impressions of the Roman cookshop, and also lunch at the Emperor's palace? Which would you prefer?

Activity: Create a 321 graph of three things you know about food from the text, two things you aren't sure about, and one question you have.

Research: Go online to research the answer to your food question.



Activity: Find a Roman recipe online and try to recreate it. Which ingredients does it use?

Discuss: What are the main differences between food then and food today? Why is this?

Hierarchy of society

'There was no way Darius could refuse, but Damon knew his master would punish him later.'
(Page 39)

'This is what you were born to. Stable dung.' (Page 42)

'Besides the wooden chest where her comb and a set of mending needles lay, it was the only furniture in the room.' (Page 48)

'He wants to keep me down in the dirt, like him.' (Page 48)

'The red welts on Damon's neck and shoulders stung for days.' (Page 59)

Activity: Damon and his mother are slaves in Ancient Rome. Choose one of them, and write a day in the life of that slave.

Activity: Create a flowchart showing the flow and positions of power in Ancient Rome.

'I could buy freedom, for you and for me.' (Page 49)

'Slaves who run away get caught. Their punishment is terrible.' (Page 50)

'It isn't my permission you need though. It depends on the empress. We belong to her, you and I.'
(Page 71)

'Agrippina's slave-woman had done her work well – she knew it was more than her life's worth not to' (Page 193)

Research and Discuss: How did a slave end their life of slavery? Was being a slave dangerous?

'Slaves have a good life, so long as they're well treated.' (Page 234)

Discuss: Why do you think Lucius might say that?

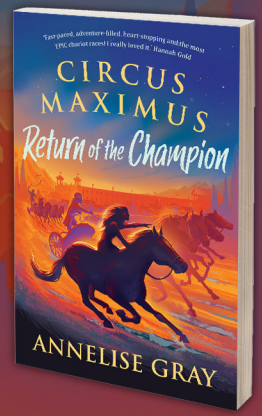
Discuss: Do you think Damon and Clara are well treated?

Activity: Create a list of rules that Damon and Clara have to live by in the emperor's palace.

'it was a grand building, full of marble and mosaics.' (Page 40)

'aware that his dirty sandals were marking the polished floor.' (Page 42)

Discuss: What is a mosaic? What did a Roman palace look like? Write a description, based on the text and further research.



Teaching Resources

Activity: Create a model of the palace using a shoe box or waste materials, or create a mosaic with a Roman design using squares of coloured paper.

'He's handsome, charismatic, a good sportsman. Everything, in short, that Britannicus isn't. But Britannicus is the natural heir.' (Page 195)

Discuss: How did the Roman emperors pass on their empire? Was it through genetic inheritance?

Activity: Draw Emperor Caligula's family tree. You will need to do some further research for this.

'There was a strict hierarchy at the clubhouse' (Page 220)

Discuss: Where in your life do you have to obey a hierarchy? What is the political hierarchy in your country? Is it by inheritance? Is it fair?

Chariot-racing

'The seven gilded dolphins whose noses would be dipped to signal the completion of each lap had been hoisted and the officials were coming out for the start of the race.' (Page 22)

Activity: Using the first few chapters of the book, create a flow chart to show via infographics the steps involved in a chariot race. How does it start and proceed? Include actions such as the raking of the track, dipping dolphins, stretcher carriers etc.

'Good conditioning,' he said knowledgeably.

'They're well matched too, same build, same size. Makes for a balanced stride.' (Page 14)

'Almost, Parmenion,' came the reply as the engineer adjusted the axle. 'Don't rush me if you want it to work.' (Page 16)

'Manes flying, the battling teams thundered down the track, driven by twelve charioteers, whose arm muscles bulged from the effort of controlling them.' (Page 23)

'They're a good four but they don't have a leader...You need that in a great team.' (Page 29)

Activity: From the first three chapters, pull together a leaflet to show the requirements for a winning charioteer and horses. What is needed?

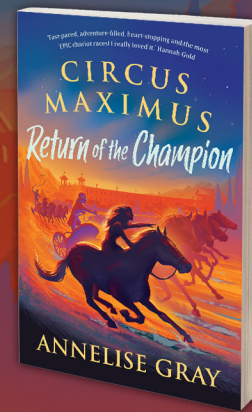
Discuss: Does this compare to a modern sport such as Formula 1?

Activity: Create a poster advertising the Chariot Racing for the September Games (mentioned on page 268) From the text, work out approximately how many days it lasts, how many races there are, what the entertainment is. Think about what food might be sold. And what would please the emperor to have on the poster?

ANNELISE GRAY

CIRCUS
MAXIMUS

Return of the Champion



Teaching Resources

'The Circus stables were divided into four areas, one for each racing faction – Reds, Whites, Blues and Greens.' (Page 13)

Discuss: How do we use colour in sports today?

'Damon pulled on his new uniform – suppressing the faint longing he still felt for it to be green instead of blue' (Page 220)

Discuss: What must it be like to play for a team other than the one you have supported and to which your family has allegiance?

Activity: Create a supporters' flag or banner for one of the racing factions.

Read chapter X.

Discuss: What is 'shipwrecking'?

Activity: Write a newspaper report of this race.

Activity: Write a profile of Cyrus – whose point of view is the profile written from – a Blues or Greens fan? Might they have different things to say about him?

'And he knew then, that the outcome was never in doubt.' (Page 290)

Discuss: Why does Gray choose to write the race in which Damon is nearly killed, but not the race he then wins?

'None of us came into this sport thinking it was safe and cosy, least of all your cousin. We all go out on that track, knowing we're risking our lives, and dreaming of glory while we do it.' (Page 293)

Discuss: Is there any job or sport you would do that would risk your life? Do we have more safety restrictions on spectator sport today? Is that a good thing?

Activity: Write some rules and regulations for chariot-racing if it was held today. What would be the safety restrictions? What additional equipment or safeguarding might there be?

Charioteers

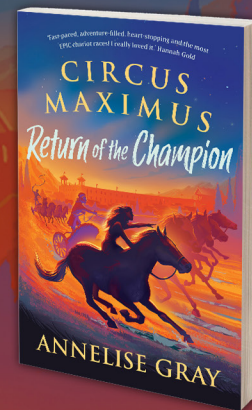
'Damon craned his neck to get a glimpse of his hero, who moved with a bandy-legged swagger, arms swinging lazily at his sides.'

'That was the kind of driver he wanted to be. Tough, ruthless. Someone the others feared. Just like his father.' (Page 15)

ANNELISE GRAY

CIRCUS
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Return of the Champion



Teaching Resources

Discuss: How does Gray portray the charioteers as being hero-worshipped in Ancient Rome?

Activity: Create an Instagram page for a famous charioteer in Ancient Rome. What pictures would you show, which captions?

'That's a legend of the track, lad, and he's about to have his final race. Show some respect.' (Page 17)

Discuss: Do you think Gray has borrowed ideas about charioteers from our current culture of footballers – respecting legends and hero-worshipping players? Why do humans find sportsmen and women so magnetic?

Activity: Take one charioteer and make comparisons with a current famous sports person. You may wish to lay this out as a poster or character profile or create Top Trumps cards.

'How are you going to become a great charioteer if you don't think you're the best?' (Page 41)
'You won't ever have what it takes unless you can say truthfully what you did wrong.' (Page 135)
'He said a good charioteer doesn't have to shipwreck anyone.' (Page 159)

Discuss: What sort of mindset did a good charioteer have to have? Does this compare to modern-day sports psychology?

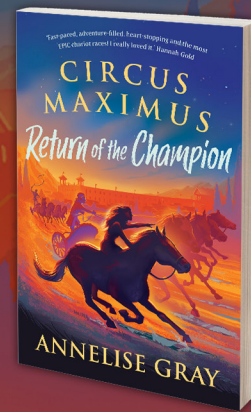
Activity: Create an activity sheet or schedule for a training charioteer, aimed at improving and sustaining good mental health. Which activities would you set them to do?

'Every street kid in this city wants a chance to get to the Circus Maximus.' (Page 67)
'Balance, strength, competitive instinct – it's there.' (Page 67)
'You and me, we had the likes of Scorpus helping us on our way up the ranks. Damon doesn't have anybody.' (Page 67)
'There are two kinds of champion,' he said. 'Those who win fighting fair, and those who win fighting dirty. You don't want to be the second kind, believe me.' (Page 75)

Discuss: What does this say about Parmenion's character?

'Their driving styles were in stark contrast – the slight, eager figure of Alexio almost dancing from foot to foot, and the giant Cyrus, crowned with his bull-horn helmet, using his superior heft and muscle to steer his team.' (Page 80)
'He had never seen anyone like this driver, who steered with such a light touch on the horses' mouths but who retained perfect control. It looked effortless.' (Page 107)

Activity: Compare the backgrounds, strengths, and weaknesses of the main charioteers: Cyrus, Alexio, Dido, and Damon. Use as much information as you can glean from the text. How will you present your findings – in graphs and diagrams, in text?



Training

'Now. Pick up the reins again, and don't break those eggs.' (Page 152)

Read Chapter XIX.

Discuss: What methods does Dido use to teach Damon? Why? Does it remind you of any other training or coming-of-age films or narratives?

Activity: Make a step-by step comic strip guide to Dido's idea of strength training.

Activity: How is the training Damon has to do comparable to exercises people do today in the gym? Can you sketch or explain comparable modern exercises?

Now read the next training scene pages 165-169.

Discuss: What is Dido teaching Damon here? What are modern methods of strength training the core?

Discuss: How does it help Damon to see Dido performing the same exercise?

'He had seen the look on Dido's face and it told him everything he needed to know.' (Page 185)

Read the scene of Damon's first race in XXIII.

Activity: Write a diary entry of that day as if you are Dido. How do you think Damon did? What are your emotions about the day? How will you approach training the following day?

'an example of the discipline needed to make it as a charioteer.' (Page 200)

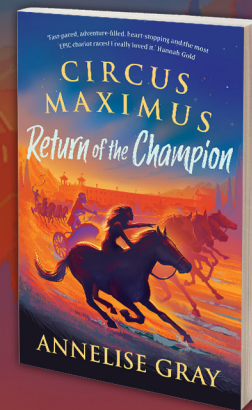
Discuss: Do athletes always need to be disciplined?

Activity: Create a linear graph to show Damon's progression in discipline. Cite examples along the way of when he was 'hot-headed' to being 'disciplined.' Can you give counter examples of a famous sports person today?

Emperors

'Rumour had it that Claudius was ill, which surprised no one – the elderly ruler of Rome was known for his frailty.' (Page 22)

'Caligula silenced the protestors though.' (Page 34)



Teaching Resources

'It doesn't suit him to have his family disrespected, especially not when he's so unpopular himself.'
(Page 34-35)

'where Emperor Claudius took a sedate ride each day.' (Page 38)

'To him, Claudius seemed a harmless, almost pathetic figure, with his white hair and nervous, twitchy way of carrying himself.' (Page 53)

'To entertain themselves, some of the spectators began to chant rude songs about the emperor.'
(Page 307)

Discuss: Gray paints a particular picture of Claudius as opposed to the emperor Caligula who came before him. What difference does their view of the emperor make to the people of the Roman empire and how they behave? What makes a good emperor?

Activity: Research Emperor Claudius. What does history say about him? Create a profile highlighting his strengths and weaknesses.

Women

'A formidable businesswoman, she was renowned for the excellence of her food and for the efficiency with which she would eject rowdy customers.' (Page 28)

'He'd met very few girls in his life and none of them had been like this.' (Page 124)

Discuss: What do we learn in the text about Corinna and Faun?

Research: What was the role of women in Ancient Roman society? Did they have equal rights to men?

Discuss: Does Gray portray all the women in her novel as being strong? In what way?

'It was all trickery, of course. She'd bewitched the horses somehow, maybe Caligula too for all we know.' (Page 53)

'It took him a moment to realise it was a woman he was staring at' (Page 107)

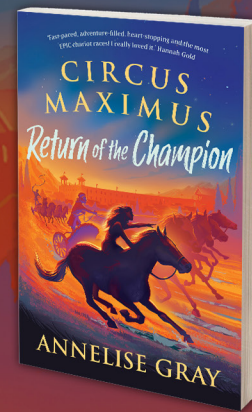
'the girl who had defeated both Caligula and his father at the Circus Maximus. The sorceress.'
(Page 108)

'You drive for the witch woman? Poor you. Must feel like your mama's in charge, huh? Is that it? You a mama's boy?' (Page 178)

'We can't get any apprentices, because...well...who'd admit to being trained by a woman?' (Page 129)

Discuss: Why does Dido hesitate in her speech here? Why do you think being trained by a woman might be a disadvantage in Ancient Rome? Why do so many of the characters refer to Dido as a 'sorceress'?

'Today though, she had chosen to put on women's clothes, like Anna wore, and had covered her hair.' (Page 179)



Teaching Resources

Discuss: How did women normally dress in Ancient Rome? Why does Dido not generally conform to these 'normalities'?

'Great men have often recorded their deeds, to preserve them for future generations. Why should a woman not celebrate her greatest achievement? Her son.' (Page 197)

Discuss: Is Agrippina's greatest achievement her son?

Activity: Can you name or research some famous texts by women that document history? When in history were they written?

'Burrus cast a disparaging look at the array of perfumes and cosmetics on the table beside Agrippina's high-backed chair.' (Page 235)

Discuss: Why does Burrus cast a disparaging look at these traditionally women's objects when he's in Agrippina's bedchamber?

Activity: Compare and contrast Dido and Agrippina and their positions in society, as well as how they are viewed. How do they use the power they do have? Who is more powerful?

Friendships

'Sometimes, friendships come to an end.' (Page 36)

Discuss: Although Hanno says this about Parmenion and Dido, does it foreshadow the friendship over the course of the novel between Lucius and Damon?

Activity: Compare the friendships in the novel... Lucius and Damon, Dido and Parmenion, Hanno and Parmenion. Which is the strongest friendship? Which other friendships are there? Which has longevity and why? Create an infographic showing your answers.

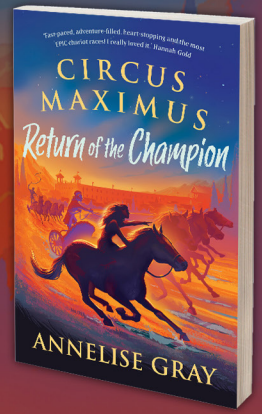
'I know you and Lucius are friends...but you are different.' (Page 56)

'The empress has big plans for Lucius. She's not going to let him consort with a stable grub like you forever. Sooner or later, she'll make him choose. You really think he'll pick you over his mother?' (Page 57)

Discuss: Does there have to be an equal balance of power in a friendship?

'Darius couldn't shrug off the feeling that maybe he had offended his friend by beating him once too often.' (Page 58)

Discuss: Lucius leaves without saying goodbye. Do you think this is Lucius's decision or his mother's? Give evidence from the text to back up your answer.



'You'll go away. I won't have you as a friend any more.' (Page 69)

'Lucius, I have tried, any number of times, to introduce you to eligible companions – sons of senators, princes from our client kingdoms. You won't make the slightest effort with any of them.' (Page 197)

Discuss: Do friendships have to be close in geographical location? Did it matter more in Ancient Rome?

Activity: Is it difficult to make new friends in a new location? Give tips on making friends – make a ten-point guide to how to make and keep friends.

'But...' Lucius's voice faltered. *'Who will I spend time with? I don't have any other friends.'* (Page 95)

'We'll find you some other boys to play with,' she said. *'Friends who share all of your interests.'* (Page 95)

'Two lads together, doing what lads do.' (Page 98)

'By the sound of it, there wasn't anyone else his own age, nobody with whom he might make friends.' (Page 99)

'We were best friends, once upon a time.' (Page 131)

'Whenever we used to get into trouble, he always protected me and said it was his fault.' (Page 219)

Discuss: What is friendship for? Why do you think friendships fail? Do friends have to share interests?

Activity: Create a recipe for friendship. Which qualities do the friends need to bring (ingredients), and which behaviours are needed to maintain that friendship (method)?

'Have you ever considered just not being rude? You might find people like you more.'

'I don't care about being liked,' he muttered.

'Of course you do. Everyone does.' (Page 159)

Discuss: Is Faun right? Does everyone care about being liked? Do you?

Activity: What are some of the things you do to be liked? Are any of them different to what you want to do? Is being liked part of friendship?

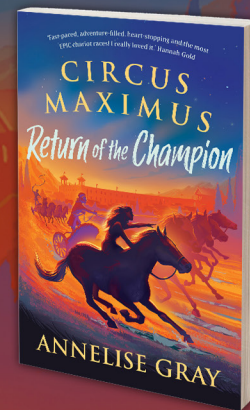
'You were my only friend. That was the best part of my day when we were together.' (Page 234)

Discuss: When Damon explains what his life was like as a slave, Lucius doesn't seem to respond. Is it possible to be friends with someone who has a totally different lifestyle?

'Isn't that what friends do? Or do you still see me as a slave?' (Page 273)

Read pages 273-274.

Discuss: What do you make of this scene between Damon and Lucius. Has the balance of power shifted?



Activity: Role play this scene. Then re-enact it, but this time have one character freeze whilst the other adlibs their interior monologue. How do you feel about Damon if you are Lucius, and vice versa?

Father and child relationships

'The man squatted and smiled in a fatherly way.' (Page 26)
'Damon wasn't fooled. Afranius Burrus hadn't risen through the ranks of the Roman army, or won his reputation as close confidante to the Empress Agrippina, and Emperor Claudius's most hard-headed advisor, by being kind to children.' (Page 26)

Discuss: What does Gray mean by 'in a fatherly way'? How does Gray imply Burrus's character here without specifying it?

'It was no good arguing with Lucius when it came to the subject of his stepfather.' (Page 16)
'Britannicus was obviously delighted to spend time with his father, but Lucius lagged behind, responding with dead-eyed insolence whenever he was included in the conversation.' (Page 53)
'I've already got a father,' he sobbed. 'At least, I had one. I don't need that stuttering lizard. I can't stand him! He's so old and disgusting.' (Page 76)

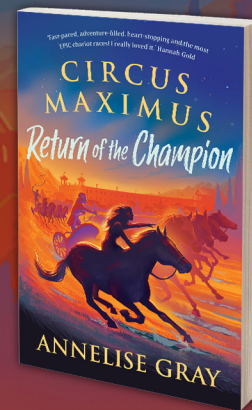
Discuss: Why does Gray emphasise the boys' different relationships with Claudius? What does it say about the boys?

Activity: Create a mind map or word cloud about parenthood. Now link the words you have brainstormed with the characters in the novel.

'Damon lived for those stories, especially when they involved his father, who had been Darius's teammate in the Greens.' (Page 38)
'Besides, I've got Papa's blood, haven't I?'
'Yes, wolf-cub. When I look at you, it's as though your father's alive again. You have the same fire in your eyes, the same handsome face. In other ways though, you're not like him.' (Page 51)
'wrapped in his father's old tunic that he always slept in.' (Page 51)
'It was as if stars were bursting to life inside Damon's head. Besides his mother, the only person who'd ever been able to tell him anything about his father was Darius.' (Page 62)
'He was a Green supporter in his blood – that was his father's faction and so it had to be his too.' (Page 81)

Discuss: What are the ways in which Gray shows the importance of Damon's father to the story, even though his character is not alive during the timespan of the novel?

Activity: Compare and contrast Lucius's relationship with his stepfather to Damon's relationship with his dead father. What does it tell you about their characters? Write a few paragraphs to explain your answer, giving evidence from the text.



Teaching Resources

Read the end of Chapter X, pages 83-84.

'It's not my place to ruin a boy's dreams of his father. Take my advice though. Choose your loyalties wisely.' (Page 84)

'You think she would hold the crimes of the father against the son?' said Corinna. 'She's stronger than that, Parmenion. Give her a chance.' (Page 93)

'Look, Dido, I know Nicias was a piece of work. Damon isn't him though. He's lonely, confused, angry. But he's got heart.' (Page 130)

Discuss: There is a famous quotation from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* that reads "The sins of the father are to be laid upon the children." Why might Gray be invoking this? What does it mean, and does it apply to any of the characters in this novel?

'Damon noticed that he squeezed Parmenion's shoulder, as if he were a father reassuring his son.' (Page 105)

'You were the closest thing he had to a father.' (Page 139)

'Orion flicked up his heels and squealed. Porcellus answered, a deep rumbling sound from his belly. The young cold quivered, paused his antics and looked abashed.

Scorpus smiled.

Father telling son,' he said.' (Page 161)

Activity: Track the parent/child relationships in the novel. Create a line graph with the different relationships on it – when are the positive interactions, and when are the negative (on the X axis)? Who has the most positive parent/child relationship, and who the least?

Activity: Write a poem about mothers/fathers and sons/daughters using one of the relationships as your inspiration.

'Sensing victory, Damon allowed himself to imagine that his father was watching, cheering him on.' (Page 184)

Discuss: Is it his mind wandering that causes Damon to slip up, or is it the specific thoughts of his father? Read the pages 327 to 328.

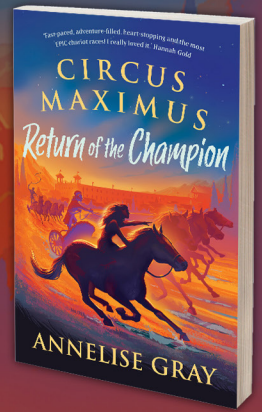
Discuss: How does the relationship of fathers and their children affect the actions of the characters in this scene?

Activity: Create a collage/picture/story to explore your relationship with a parent or parent figure in your life.

The Past

'Parmenion watched the boys disappear into the crowd. He shook his head.

'More trouble than it's worth. Let the dead sleep.' (Page 20)



'The boy at the stables you mean? Unexpected isn't strong enough. Gave me the shivers. It was like seeing a ghost.' (Page 30)

'Let the past go, Dido,' he said gentle. 'It's what I keep telling you.' (Page 117)

Activity: Piecing together everything you have learnt about what happened to Abibaal, and the relationship between Dido, Parmenion and Nicias, write a diary entry as if you are Dido on the day that Parmenion returns to Utica bringing Damon.

'It's just...when I saw him...when you brought him here yesterday...it felt as though I was seeing a ghost.' She made a gesture of despair. 'Every time I look at him, I see Nicias.' (Page 130)

'I'm sorry Nicias had a difficult start in life. Lots of people do. They don't all turn into monsters.' (Page 139)

'You're the one who's always telling me not to live in the past.' (Page 139)

Discuss: Do the characters no longer alive play as much of a role in the novel as the characters who are living?

Activity: Make brief notes on the dead characters in the novel. What do you learn about them?

'There's corn shortages in the city, people are hungry and they've got short memories. The worse a ruler Claudius is, the more they're willing to forgive his predecessor and forget what he was really like.' (Page 144)

Discuss: So much of the characters' pasts affect their future decisions, and yet as a collective, Gray seems to suggest people forget the past faster. Do we remember personal failures and successes more than those in the world around us? Do we forgive politicians more easily than our friends?

Activity: Take an episode that has happened in your past that makes a difference to your present and future. Can you write about it?

Ending

'Hands buried in Porcellus's mane, Dido leaned low over his silken neck, her wild hair whipped into a tangle about her face. She looked over her shoulder, her green eyes full of laughter, and blew a kiss to the wind.' (Page 338)

Discuss: Is this a fitting end to the story?

Activity: If you could sketch out what might happen next to Damon and Dido, what would you write?

ANNELISE GRAY

CIRCUS
MAXIMUS

Return of the Champion

Teaching Resources



Further Reading

- Circus Maximus: Race to the Death* by Annelise Gray
Circus Maximus: Rivals on the Track by Annelise Gray
Circus Maximus: Rider of the Storm by Annelise Gray
Vita and the Gladiator by Ally Sherrick
Escape from Rome by Caroline Lawrence (part of the Roman Quests series)
The History Keepers: Circus Maximus by Damian Dibben
Terrible True Tales: Romans by Terry Deary
Totally Chaotic History: Roman Britain Gets Rowdy by Greg Jenner
The Magnificent Book of Treasures: Ancient Rome by Stella Cakdwell and Eugenia Nobati
We Are the Romans: Meet the People Behind the History by David Long and Allen Fatimaharan
Kentucky Thriller by Lauren St John
Black Beauty by Anna Sewell
National Velvet by Enid Bagnold
The Horse Who Came Home by Olivia Tuffin