

**LESSON 6****Letter to Aunt Sibyl****Drama: Improvisation**

Introduce the 'Acropoli di Cuma' and the high priestess Sibyl (picture below) who was ancient Rome's 'agony aunt'. It was believed she could offer advice and guidance to whoever came to the Oracle at the Cumae Acropolis



In pairs, pupils act in role as either Aunt Sibyl or Calpurnia/Portia improvising an imagined conversation at the Acropolis. If children need help provide prompt sheets with reminders:

**Calpurnia:**

- Has been suffering experiencing terrible nightmares: visions of her husband's statue covered in blood. Surely this is an omen?
- Has witnessed flocks of birds fall from the sky, and has heard a wild beast in the streets at night. Is something trying to warn her of danger?
- Heard that a soothsayer warned her husband to 'Beware the ides of March'

**Portia:**

- Her husband Brutus has been distant recently. Worried he is keeping secrets. Sends her slave Lucius to keep an eye on him
- How can she prove she is just as strong? Wants to swallow hot coals to make him notice her!

**Writing: Letter**

Focus: seeking and giving advice

Following on from the drama activity, explain that in role as Calpurnia or Portia, the pupils will compose a letter to Aunt Sibyl. In the next session, the children will compose a response (or can be completed as a homework

task). Discuss features of a letter to an agony aunt:

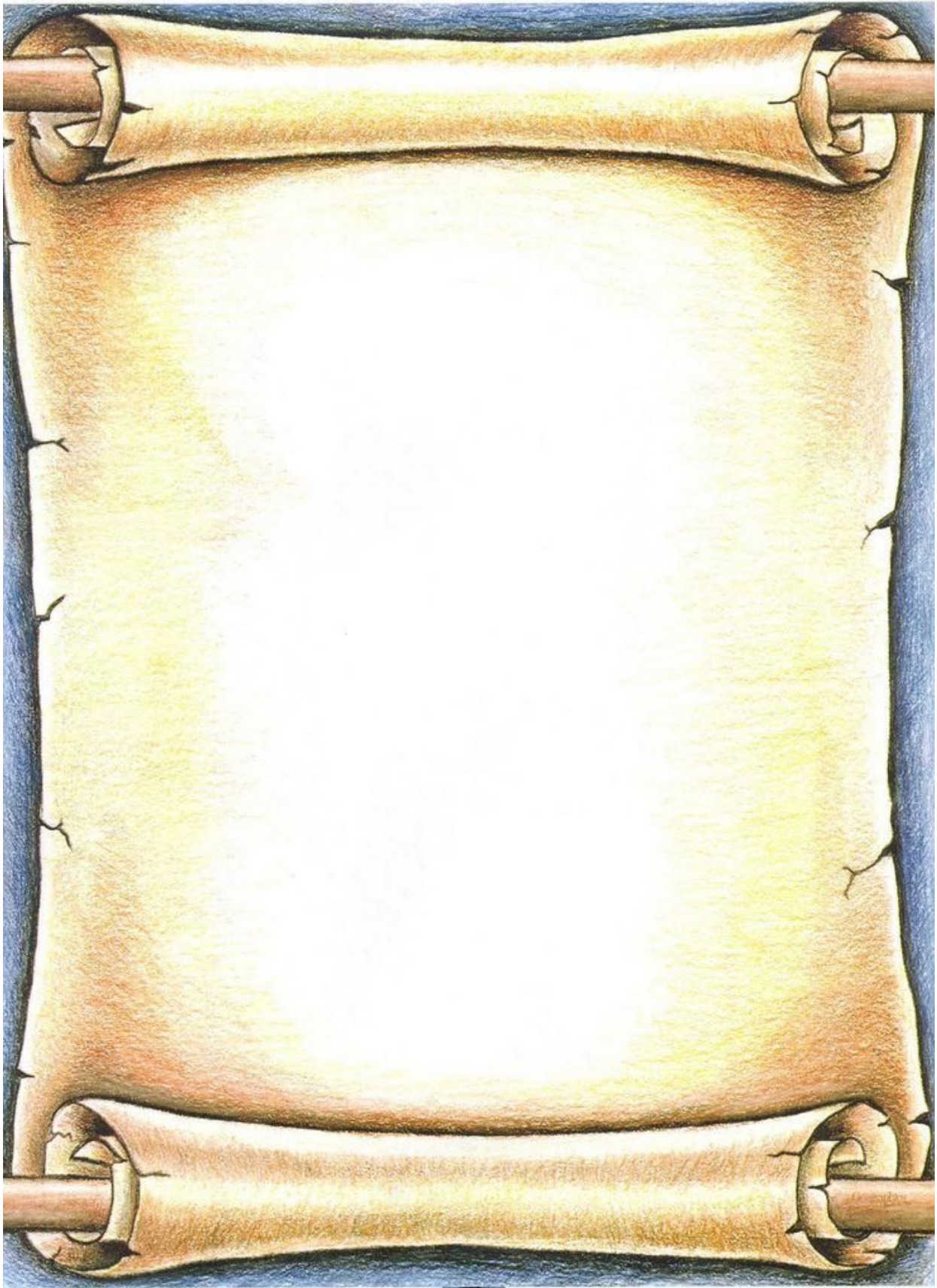
- **STRUCTURE:** introduction, explanation of background situation, elaborating on actual problem with relevant details, request for advice.
- Anonymity
- Use of connectives to structure flow of thoughts (consequently, nevertheless, furthermore...)
- Use of a question at end of letter

As a class brainstorm the kinds of phrases/words that are usually used to convey worry, torment etc. Display these on board and use as a word bank.

Features of a response letter:

- Emphasising different ways to view the situation.
- Use of connectives to show alternative viewpoints.
- Sympathetic language
- Informal, colloquial style
- Imperative 'bossy' verbs at end, instructing the women what to do
- Summing up of message/ 'bigger picture'.

Example letter to model:



Rome, 16<sup>th</sup> February 44BC

Dear Aunt Sibyl,

I just don't know what to do! Please help me. I'm writing in the desperate hope you can guide my next steps. The problem is that I fear for my husband's life, but he just won't listen! I've been suffering tormentous nightmares, and I am convinced these dreams are an ill omen. The vision which keeps plaguing me is of J's body smothered in blood. As a dutiful, good wife, surely I can't ignore such terrors. Why won't he heed my fears?.....

Furthermore, I've witnessed a bird of prey scatter into a flock of ravens. I just know, deep to my fearful core, that this must be a sign of imminent danger. My husband has a very important meeting tomorrow. Should I insist his friend takes his place? Or should I put all of this down to my tired state of mind; the recent storms have disturbed my sleep so.

Please, send me your response as soon as possible: time is of the essence!  
Yours, Anon (C)



