

ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



Episode #572
Caligula | Psychopath, Sadist, Emperor
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Transcript

[00:00:05] Hello, hello, hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English, the show where you can listen to fascinating stories and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:21] I'm Alastair Budge, and today it's the start of another three-part mini-series, this time on "[Tyrants](#)¹ Of The Roman Empire".

[00:00:31] In today's episode, we're going to talk about the original Roman [despot](#)², the [bloodthirsty](#)³, [depraved](#)⁴, and [ruthless](#)⁵ Caligula.

[00:00:40] In part two, we'll talk about one who wasn't much better, the emperor who supposedly [fiddled](#)⁶ while Rome burned, Nero.

[00:00:49] And in part three, we'll be looking at Commodus.

¹ cruel rulers who used power unfairly

² a cruel ruler with complete power

³ enjoying or wanting to see violence and killing

⁴ very evil and immoral

⁵ cruel, showing no mercy

⁶ played a small violin (but here: wasted time during a crisis)

[00:00:52] He might have been the son of Marcus Aurelius, the “philosopher emperor”, but his [exploits](#)⁷ as emperor, from claiming to be Hercules reborn to fighting in the ring as a gladiator, were not something you’d find recommended in Meditations.

[00:01:07] OK then, let's not waste a minute and get right into the story of Caligula.

[00:01:14] Perhaps you can think of a dinner party you’ve been to where someone around the table [burst out](#)⁸ in [uncontrollable](#)⁹ laughter.

[00:01:23] Once they [composed themselves](#)¹⁰, perhaps they revealed a joke they'd just been told, or a funny story they had just heard about someone they knew.

[00:01:33] Others most probably joined in the [merriment](#)¹¹, and the dinner party continued as usual.

[00:01:41] At one dinner party in ancient Rome, hosted by the then-emperor, Caligula, the host [burst out](#) in [raucous](#)¹² laughter.

⁷ brave, unusual, or exciting actions

⁸ suddenly started

⁹ impossible to stop or control

¹⁰ calmed down

¹¹ fun, happiness, laughter

¹² loud and harsh

[00:01:52] Nobody seemed to have told the young emperor anything; nobody had [slipped over](#)¹³ on a [stray](#)¹⁴ grape or spilled the wine over someone's head. There was no obvious cause for this [outburst](#)¹⁵.

[00:02:05] His [consuls](#)¹⁶, who were sitting next to him, asked him why he was laughing.

[00:02:12] He turned and said, "What do you suppose, except that at a single [nod](#)¹⁷ of mine, both of you could have your [throats](#)¹⁸ cut on the spot?"

[00:02:24] We have no historical record of what happened next, but presumably a [gulp](#)¹⁹ from one [consul](#)²⁰, perhaps an embarrassed laugh from the other.

[00:02:34] "Haha, good joke. It was a joke, right?"

¹³ fallen down by accident

¹⁴ out of place or not where it should have been

¹⁵ sudden strong expression of feeling

¹⁶ important elected leaders in ancient Rome

¹⁷ moving the head up and down to signal "yes" or to give a command

¹⁸ the front parts of their necks, where they breathed and swallowed

¹⁹ a big, quick swallow when nervous or afraid

²⁰ one of the two top elected leaders in ancient Rome

[00:02:39] These two [consuls](#), two of the highest elected officials of the Roman Empire, presumably knew that Caligula was deadly serious. A single [wave](#)²¹ of his hand or [nod](#) of his head and anyone in Rome, no matter how powerful, would be put to their death.

[00:02:58] This was a man who [revelled](#)²² in public [humiliation](#)²³, showed little [regard](#)²⁴ for human life, and held his elected officials in [utter](#)²⁵ [disregard](#)²⁶.

[00:03:10] But it was not always this way, or at least, if it was always his character, he kept it well hidden.

[00:03:19] To understand the [tyranny](#)²⁷ of Caligula's [reign](#)²⁸ as emperor, we must go back to his birth, and indeed, we must remind ourselves of a little ancient Roman history.

²¹ moving the hand to signal something

²² took great joy or pleasure in it

²³ great shame or embarrassment

²⁴ respect or attention

²⁵ complete, total

²⁶ no respect, ignoring them

²⁷ cruel and unfair control

²⁸ the period when he ruled

[00:03:32] As you may know, or remember from our mini-series on ancient Rome three years ago, the politics and structure of ancient Rome can be broadly divided into two: the Republic and the Empire.

[00:03:47] The Republic officially ended in 27 BC, and Rome became an empire, ruled by its first emperor, Augustus.

[00:03:58] Augustus was a much-loved emperor, but there was the problem of who would succeed him after his death. A problem, as you'll see, that [crops up](#)²⁹ again and again and again in the story of Ancient Rome.

[00:04:14] Augustus had no biological children, but there were several stepchildren and grandchildren [knocking about](#)³⁰, some more capable than others.

[00:04:25] After much [manoeuvring](#)³¹, he named his [stepson](#)³², Tiberius, as his heir on the condition that Tiberius adopt his nephew, Germanicus, as his own son, so the title of emperor would pass first to Tiberius, then to Germanicus.

[00:04:45] In AD 14, Augustus died, and Tiberius [duly](#)³³ became emperor.

²⁹ appears or happens

³⁰ hanging around without a clear purpose

³¹ clever or secret actions to get what he wanted

³² a son from his wife's earlier marriage

³³ as expected, properly

[00:04:53] Now, Tiberius was not exactly a people's favourite.

[00:04:57] He was [stern](#)³⁴, often [absent](#)³⁵ from Rome, and a man whose suspicious nature only deepened as he grew older. He was also [sadistic](#)³⁶ and [bloodthirsty](#), and could certainly have appeared in a mini-series on [tyrants](#), were there not others who were even more [tyrannical](#)³⁷.

[00:05:17] Despite his relative unpopularity, his rule did provide some stability, and he would go on to rule from AD 13 to AD 37, 23 years in total.

[00:05:31] But with no direct [heirs](#)³⁸, all eyes turned, yet again, to the next generation.

[00:05:39] Here, there was a clear [frontrunner](#)³⁹: Germanicus, Tiberius' adopted son, and by this point, a decorated young man and accomplished military leader.

³⁴ serious, strict

³⁵ not present

³⁶ enjoying hurting others

³⁷ cruel and unfair, like a tyrant

³⁸ people who would receive his title after his death

³⁹ the person most likely to win or succeed

[00:05:51] Germanicus was everything the Romans admired: a brilliant general, a [charismatic](#)⁴⁰ leader, and — importantly — the great-nephew of Augustus himself, so he had that all-important [pedigree](#)⁴¹, the blood tie to Augustus.

[00:06:09] What's more, he was married to a granddaughter of Augustus, Agrippina the Elder.

[00:06:15] Together, they formed what many saw as the perfect imperial couple.

[00:06:21] However, [tragedy](#)⁴² struck. Germanicus, this [heroic](#)⁴³ military leader who seemed [poised](#)⁴⁴ to become the next emperor, died suddenly in Syria in AD 19, at the age of 33.

[00:06:36] There are [rumours](#)⁴⁵ he was poisoned, perhaps on Tiberius' orders, or perhaps it was one of the many bugs that could have proved [fatal](#)⁴⁶ for travelling soldiers back then.

⁴⁰ very charming and able to attract people easily

⁴¹ important family history or background

⁴² a very sad event

⁴³ very brave

⁴⁴ ready and prepared to do it

⁴⁵ stories that may not be true, spread by people

⁴⁶ causing death

[00:06:48] In any case, he left behind a [widow⁴⁷](#) and six children. Among them was a boy named Gaius Julius Caesar Germanicus.

[00:06:59] But the soldiers had another name for him.

[00:07:03] As a child, this boy would often visit his father's military camps dressed in a tiny soldier's outfit, complete with little leather boots.

[00:07:14] The soldiers nicknamed him "Little Boots", "Caligula" in Latin.

[00:07:21] Although he is believed to have hated the nickname as an adult, and never used it himself, it stuck, and I'll continue to use it for the rest of this episode.

[00:07:33] Now, after Germanicus's death, his [widow](#) openly accused Tiberius of murder, which was not a particularly smart thing to do, especially to an emperor as [malicious⁴⁸](#) and [sadistic](#) as Tiberius.

[00:07:49] She was [banished⁴⁹](#), and she eventually died of starvation. Two of Caligula's brothers were either imprisoned or executed.

[00:07:59] Caligula, however, survived.

⁴⁷ a woman whose husband had died

⁴⁸ wishing to hurt others

⁴⁹ sent away and not allowed to return

[00:08:03] And not only did he survive, but when he was 19, he was brought to live with Tiberius, in Capri, just off the coast of Naples.

[00:08:15] Now, Caligula knew what Tiberius stood accused of: the murder of his father, and he knew what Tiberius had done to the rest of his family.

[00:08:26] And on the island, he also saw what [fate](#)⁵⁰ awaited anyone who crossed the [sadistic](#) emperor: being pushed off a high cliff if they were lucky, and being slowly [tortured](#)⁵¹ to death if they weren't.

[00:08:42] So, if Caligula did feel [resentment](#)⁵² towards Tiberius, which was clearly perfectly reasonable, he kept those feelings locked up inside.

[00:08:52] He [flattered](#)⁵³ Tiberius; he never mentioned his father once, and he learned how to play the role of the [obedient](#)⁵⁴ servant.

[00:09:03] When Tiberius finally died in AD 37, Caligula was 24 years old.

⁵⁰ end or destiny

⁵¹ hurt badly and painfully on purpose

⁵² a feeling of anger or hate because of unfair treatment

⁵³ said nice things to please him

⁵⁴ doing what he was told

[00:09:10] Now, there are some rumours that Caligula murdered Tiberius, with one account having him [suffocate](#)⁵⁵ the man with a [pillow](#)⁵⁶, but these are [unsubstantiated](#)⁵⁷.

[00:09:22] Tiberius was 77 years old, which was a [ripe old age](#)⁵⁸ at this time, and there is simply no evidence to suggest it was anything other than natural causes.

[00:09:34] It was, of course, good news for Caligula.

[00:09:39] Although he was relatively unknown as an individual in Rome, and he had little knowledge of the workings of Roman politics or the Roman army, he seemed like the obvious successor.

[00:09:52] He was the son of the [heroic](#) general Germanicus and the adopted grandson of Rome's first emperor, Augustus.

[00:10:01] He seemed to [embody](#)⁵⁹ a golden future, a new chapter for Rome.

⁵⁵ cause to die from lack of air or inability to breathe

⁵⁶ a soft cushion for the head when sleeping

⁵⁷ not proven, without evidence

⁵⁸ very old age

⁵⁹ represent or show clearly

[00:10:07] And, sure enough, he arrived in Rome and was [hailed](#)⁶⁰ as emperor. The transition from unknown boy to commander of the world's most powerful empire at the time was incredibly smooth.

[00:10:20] And for the first few months of his reign, Caligula seemed to [live up to](#)⁶¹ the hopes and dreams of the people of Rome.

[00:10:29] He threw [vast](#)⁶² gladiatorial games in celebration, he honoured all of his predecessors' last wishes, he gave every citizen of Rome a cash payment, and he made sure to double the cash payment for the Praetorian guard, the emperor's personal armed unit.

[00:10:48] He also made a big deal of publicly destroying all of Tiberius's written records of suspected [treachery](#)⁶³ among the [senators](#)⁶⁴, [symbolically](#)⁶⁵ burning them, as if saying, "This was the past, tomorrow is a new day".

⁶⁰ praised, called out as something special

⁶¹ be as good as people expected

⁶² very big

⁶³ betrayal, being disloyal

⁶⁴ members of the roman senate, the political council

⁶⁵ in a way that represented an idea

[00:11:04] He even said that he hadn't read them, which would [turn out](#)⁶⁶ to be a lie.

[00:11:10] In any case, the first few months of his rule were, as one contemporary historian put it, a "Golden Age" of happiness and [prosperity](#)⁶⁷.

[00:11:20] But, seven months or so after becoming emperor, he fell seriously ill.

[00:11:27] It's not clear what this illness was, whether he caught it randomly or whether he was poisoned in some way, but for almost a month, he was [at death's door](#)⁶⁸. It looked like he could have died at any moment.

[00:11:43] This being ancient Rome, [senators](#) were [scurrying around](#)⁶⁹ making preparations, both for the eventuality that he wouldn't recover and [succumbed](#)⁷⁰ to his illness, and that he would make a full recovery.

⁶⁶ prove to be the case, come to light

⁶⁷ a state of success, wealth, and growth

⁶⁸ very close to dying

⁶⁹ moving quickly and busily

⁷⁰ gave in, failed to resist

[00:11:58] One politician, and man of noble blood, Atanius Secundus, had what he must have thought was a [cunning](#)⁷¹ idea. He publicly [pledged](#)⁷² that he would fight in the arena as a gladiator if only Caligula recovered.

[00:12:15] Presumably, he thought it was a win-win situation. If Caligula died, which seemed highly probable, he could point at how dedicated he had been to the emperor, and how he'd been willing to fight and most probably die in the arena for his [cherished](#)⁷³ master.

[00:12:34] And if Caligula made a full recovery, he would hear of this [pledge](#)⁷⁴ and be so impressed by the man's loyalty that he would be richly rewarded.

[00:12:45] Caligula did make a full recovery, but it seems that after this return from [the brink of](#)⁷⁵ death, something changed.

[00:12:55] He heard about the [senator](#)⁷⁶'s bold promise to fight in the arena, and told him, in no uncertain terms, "ok then, get on with it".

⁷¹ clever in a tricky way

⁷² promised seriously

⁷³ loved and valued very much

⁷⁴ serious promise

⁷⁵ the edge of, about to happen

⁷⁶ a member of the roman senate, a law-making body

[00:13:06] The man, who was not in great shape and had never held a sword before, was **duly** marched into the gladiatorial area and **mown down**⁷⁷ by a professional gladiator.

[00:13:19] From that point on, the honeymoon period of Caligula's **reign** was well and truly over.

[00:13:27] The generous young emperor, the son of Germanicus, the **darling**⁷⁸ of Rome, seemed to **vanish**⁷⁹. What replaced him was a ruler who seemed to **revel**⁸⁰ in cruelty, **humiliation**, and **excess**⁸¹.

[00:13:43] Executions became an almost daily occurrence.

[00:13:47] He would invite **senators** to dine with him, serve them the finest food, and then, at the height of the feast, casually order their deaths.

[00:13:57] He delighted in seeing people **squirm**⁸². Prisoners were executed in front of him for sport.

⁷⁷ killed or destroyed quickly and completely

⁷⁸ very loved or popular person

⁷⁹ disappear suddenly

⁸⁰ take great joy or pleasure

⁸¹ having too much of something

⁸² twist the body because of discomfort or embarrassment

[00:14:05] Sometimes he would order people slowly tortured, so he could watch their [agony](#)⁸³.

[00:14:11] The Roman historian Suetonius even claims he enjoyed watching executions scheduled for his mealtimes as if it were a form of light entertainment.

[00:14:23] Then there were the [humiliations](#)⁸⁴. [Senators](#) were forced to run for long distances alongside his chariot, like [stable boys](#)⁸⁵ rather than [statesmen](#)⁸⁶.

[00:14:34] And this was layered on top of the sexual [depravity](#)⁸⁷.

[00:14:39] He is said to have [prostituted](#)⁸⁸ the wives of noblemen, inviting [senators](#) and their wives to banquets, then forcing the wives, one by one, into side rooms, forcing them to have sex with him and then describing their performance in [intimate](#)⁸⁹ detail, publicly, in front of their husbands.

⁸³ great pain

⁸⁴ situations that caused great shame and embarrassment

⁸⁵ young men who looked after horses

⁸⁶ important, experienced political leaders

⁸⁷ extreme evil or moral corruption

⁸⁸ used their body for sex

⁸⁹ very close and personal

[00:15:00] There are accounts of him creating a [brothel](#)⁹⁰ inside the imperial palace, complete with hundreds of women and young boys.

[00:15:09] And when it wasn't humiliation and sexual [depravity](#), he is also remembered by historians as an ineffective and [cowardly](#)⁹¹ leader of Rome. One account has him marching his troops northwards, as if to attack Great Britain, but after lining his troops up on the beach in Gaul, he orders them to collect seashells instead of continue their mission, declaring these the "[spoils](#)⁹² of the ocean".

[00:15:38] To many, this became a perfect image of his reign: playing at war while [humiliating](#)⁹³ Rome's soldiers.

[00:15:47] And then, perhaps most famously, came his [obsession](#)⁹⁴ with divinity.

[00:15:53] Previous and subsequent emperors became [deified](#)⁹⁵ after death, but Caligula demanded worship in his own lifetime.

⁹⁰ a place where people paid for sex

⁹¹ lacking courage, easily scared

⁹² goods or treasures taken, often after a war

⁹³ causing deep shame or embarrassment to them

⁹⁴ a strong and constant focus on it

⁹⁵ treated like a god

[00:16:02] He had temples [erected](#)⁹⁶ to his own glory, with priests appointed to offer sacrifices to him as though he were Jupiter. He appeared in public dressed as Apollo, Mercury, even Venus, the female goddess of love.

[00:16:20] He reportedly once appeared in the theatre dressed as Venus, complete with [wig](#)⁹⁷ and dress, delighting in the outrage of Rome's conservative [senators](#).

[00:16:30] He simply didn't care what Roman high society thought about him; he threw money [hand over fist](#)⁹⁸ at the Praetorian guard and knew that this money [assured](#)⁹⁹ loyalty, and therefore protection.

[00:16:44] Well, it did for a while, as we'll discover in a few minutes.

[00:16:49] Protected by a seemingly loyal imperial guard and with his [ruthlessness](#)¹⁰⁰ against political enemies well known, it seemed there was nobody or nothing to stop him.

[00:17:01] He spent [lavishly](#)¹⁰¹, not just on himself but on public projects.

⁹⁶ built or put up

⁹⁷ fake hair worn on the head

⁹⁸ very quickly and in large amounts

⁹⁹ made certain, promised, or guaranteed

¹⁰⁰ showing no pity, being very cruel

¹⁰¹ richly, in a very fancy or excessive way

[00:17:06] He built [pleasure-galleys](#)¹⁰² to cruise the Bay of Naples: vast ships with baths, [colonnades](#)¹⁰³, banquet-halls and even vines.

[00:17:17] In a lake just south of Rome, Lake Nemi, he launched [colossal](#)¹⁰⁴ [barges](#)¹⁰⁵ with [marble](#)¹⁰⁶ flooring.

[00:17:24] As a quick side note for the seriously dedicated listeners among you, you may remember these [barges](#) from episode number 516, on the history of underwater exploration. Well done if so.

[00:17:37] Anyway, back to Caligula.

[00:17:39] At the start of AD 41, not even 4 years into his rule, clearly, some people were thinking enough was enough.

[00:17:50] On January 24th, AD 41, he was preparing for a trip to Alexandria, in Egypt.

[00:17:58] He had been doing one of his favourite activities—watching gladiatorial games—and was heading inside for [a spot of](#)¹⁰⁷ lunch. He had been told that there was a

¹⁰² large decorated boats used for fun and parties

¹⁰³ rows of columns supporting a roof or structure

¹⁰⁴ extremely large

¹⁰⁵ flat boats used to carry heavy loads

¹⁰⁶ a hard, smooth stone often used in buildings and statues

¹⁰⁷ a small amount of

group of young boys who were practising, and could he come and [spare](#)¹⁰⁸ a few words?

[00:18:15] As he was about to address the boys, two of his trusted Praetorian guards [pounced](#)¹⁰⁹ on him, [stabbing](#)¹¹⁰ him a total of 30 times in the neck, chest and [genitals](#)¹¹¹

.

[00:18:28] One report even has them [stripping](#)¹¹² and eating his flesh.

[00:18:33] Caligula, “Little Boots”, was dead.

[00:18:37] Now, as for the motivations behind this assassination, there is no evidence of a wide [plot](#)¹¹³ among [senators](#) for [moral](#)¹¹⁴ [grounds](#)¹¹⁵, for the purposes of “saving Rome”, or anything like that.

¹⁰⁸ give, let them have

¹⁰⁹ jumped on him suddenly, like an attack

¹¹⁰ pushing a knife into him

¹¹¹ the private parts of his body used for sex

¹¹² taking off

¹¹³ a secret plan

¹¹⁴ related to ideas about right and wrong

¹¹⁵ reasons or cause

[00:18:52] One hypothesis is that it was more personal.

[00:18:57] The man who is said to have landed the first **blow**¹¹⁶, Cassius Chaerea, was a brave and **distinguished**¹¹⁷ Praetorian, but he was often **teased**¹¹⁸ by Caligula for having a **high-pitched**¹¹⁹ voice, and being **effeminate**¹²⁰ in his manners.

[00:19:14] So yes, Caligula might have been seriously **unhinged**¹²¹ and utterly inappropriate as a Roman emperor, but one theory is that he was murdered for being a **bully**¹²² rather than anything more strategic than that.

[00:19:30] And on this note, much of what we know about Caligula as a man and his reign comes down to only a few sources that were written decades after his death. These were second, often third-hand accounts, and there is little way of verifying these claims.

¹¹⁶ hit

¹¹⁷ respected, important, well known

¹¹⁸ made fun of

¹¹⁹ very sharp and high

¹²⁰ showing qualities thought to be more like a woman than a man

¹²¹ mentally unstable or crazy

¹²² a person who hurt or frightened weaker people

[00:19:50] The most famous example is one that you might be surprised hasn't come up yet: that he "made his favourite horse a [senator](#)", and this is an example of how insane he was.

[00:20:02] Firstly, this isn't historically accurate, in that the historian [recalling](#)¹²³ it says that Caligula suggested that he would make his horse a [consul](#).

[00:20:13] And secondly, it was almost certainly a joke by Caligula, and one that the historian didn't get.

[00:20:20] We know that Caligula loved playing jokes and had a [devilish](#)¹²⁴ sense of humour, and it seems much more probable that either he was planning on doing this to [ridicule](#)¹²⁵ his [senators](#), or that he made a [passing](#)¹²⁶ comment along the lines of "so and so is so useless that my horse could govern better than they could".

[00:20:42] He wasn't actually planning to make his horse a [senator](#).

[00:20:46] So, to wrap things up, Caligula met his end at the hands of the men he thought he could trust. And they didn't just kill him; shortly after he was killed, so too

¹²³ remembering

¹²⁴ diabolical, wicked, or naughty

¹²⁵ mock, make fun of

¹²⁶ short or quick

were his wife and young daughter, in order to completely [eradicate](#)¹²⁷ all lines of succession.

[00:21:05] Instead, his uncle, Claudius, was made emperor, and he ruled for 13 years before the subject of the next episode, Nero, took over.

[00:21:15] As for Caligula, he didn't even rule for four years, but his name is forever associated with [cruelty](#)¹²⁸, [despotism](#)¹²⁹, and the [perils](#)¹³⁰ of [unchecked](#)¹³¹ absolute power.

[00:21:29] OK, then, that is it for today's episode on Caligula, the potential golden boy turned [sadistic](#) killer.

[00:21:36] I hope it's been an interesting one and that you've learnt something new.

[00:21:40] As always, I'd love to know what you thought of this episode.

[00:21:43] You can head right into our community forum, which is at community.leonardoenglish.com and get chatting away to other curious minds.

¹²⁷ remove or destroy

¹²⁸ behaviour that caused others to suffer

¹²⁹ rule by a cruel and absolute leader

¹³⁰ great dangers

¹³¹ not controlled or stopped

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #572
Caligula | Psychopath, Sadist, Emperor

[00:21:51] As a reminder, this is part one of a three-part mini-series on the theme of Roman Tyrants. Next up it'll be Nero, and in part three, it will be Commodus.

[00:22:02] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:22:08] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Tyrants	cruel rulers who used power unfairly
Despot	a cruel ruler with complete power
Bloodthirsty	enjoying or wanting to see violence and killing
Depraved	very evil and immoral
Ruthless	cruel, showing no mercy
Fiddled	played a small violin (but here: wasted time during a crisis)
Exploits	brave, unusual, or exciting actions
Burst out	suddenly started
Uncontrollable	impossible to stop or control
Composed themselves	calmed down
Merriment	fun, happiness, laughter
Raucous	loud and harsh
Slipped over	fallen down by accident

Stray	out of place or not where it should have been
Outburst	sudden strong expression of feeling
Consuls	important elected leaders in ancient Rome
Nod	moving the head up and down to signal “yes” or to give a command
Throats	the front parts of their necks, where they breathed and swallowed
Gulp	a big, quick swallow when nervous or afraid
Consul	one of the two top elected leaders in ancient Rome
Wave	moving the hand to signal something
Revelled	took great joy or pleasure in it
Humiliation	great shame or embarrassment
Regard	respect or attention
Utter	complete, total
Disregard	no respect, ignoring them
Tyranny	cruel and unfair control
Reign	the period when he ruled

Crops up	appears or happens
Knocking about	hanging around without a clear purpose
Manoeuvring	clever or secret actions to get what he wanted
Stepson	a son from his wife's earlier marriage
Duly	as expected, properly
Stern	serious, strict
Absent	not present
Sadistic	enjoying hurting others
Tyrannical	cruel and unfair, like a tyrant
Heirs	people who would receive his title after his death
Frontrunner	the person most likely to win or succeed
Charismatic	very charming and able to attract people easily
Pedigree	important family history or background
Tragedy	a very sad event
Heroic	very brave

Poised	ready and prepared to do it
Rumours	stories that may not be true, spread by people
Fatal	causing death
Widow	a woman whose husband had died
Malicious	wishing to hurt others
Banished	sent away and not allowed to return
Fate	end or destiny
Tortured	hurt badly and painfully on purpose
Resentment	a feeling of anger or hate because of unfair treatment
Flattered	said nice things to please him
Obedient	doing what he was told
Suffocate	cause to die from lack of air or inability to breathe
Pillow	a soft cushion for the head when sleeping
Unsubstantiated	not proven, without evidence
Ripe old age	very old age

Embody	represent or show clearly
Hailed	praised, called out as something special
Live up to	be as good as people expected
Vast	very big
Treachery	betrayal, being disloyal
Senators	members of the roman senate, the political council
Symbolically	in a way that represented an idea
Turn out	prove to be the case, come to light
Prosperity	a state of success, wealth, and growth
At death's door	very close to dying
Scurrying around	moving quickly and busily
Succumbed	gave in, failed to resist
Cunning	clever in a tricky way
Pledged	promised seriously
Cherished	loved and valued very much

Pledge	serious promise
The brink of	the edge of, about to happen
Senator	a member of the roman senate, a law-making body
Mown down	killed or destroyed quickly and completely
Darling	very loved or popular person
Vanish	disappear suddenly
Revel	take great joy or pleasure
Excess	having too much of something
Squirm	twist the body because of discomfort or embarrassment
Agony	great pain
Humiliations	situations that caused great shame and embarrassment
Stable boys	young men who looked after horses
Statesmen	important, experienced political leaders
Depravity	extreme evil or moral corruption
Prostituted	used their body for sex

Intimate	very close and personal
Brothel	a place where people paid for sex
Cowardly	lacking courage, easily scared
Spoils	goods or treasures taken, often after a war
Humiliating	causing deep shame or embarrassment to them
Obsession	a strong and constant focus on it
Deified	treated like a god
Erected	built or put up
Wig	fake hair worn on the head
Hand over fist	very quickly and in large amounts
Assured	made certain, promised, or guaranteed
Ruthlessness	showing no pity, being very cruel
Lavishly	richly, in a very fancy or excessive way
Pleasure-galleys	large decorated boats used for fun and parties
Colonnades	rows of columns supporting a roof or structure

Colossal	extremely large
Barges	flat boats used to carry heavy loads
Marble	a hard, smooth stone often used in buildings and statues
A spot of	a small amount of
Spare	give, let them have
Pounced	jumped on him suddenly, like an attack
Stabbing	pushing a knife into him
Genitals	the private parts of his body used for sex
Stripping	taking off
Plot	a secret plan
Moral	related to ideas about right and wrong
Grounds	reasons or cause
Blow	hit
Distinguished	respected, important, well known
Teased	made fun of

High-pitched	very sharp and high
Effeminate	showing qualities thought to be more like a woman than a man
Unhinged	mentally unstable or crazy
Bully	a person who hurt or frightened weaker people
Recalling	remembering
Devilish	diabolical, wicked, or naughty
Ridicule	mock, make fun of
Passing	short or quick
Eradicate	remove or destroy
Cruelty	behaviour that caused others to suffer
Despotism	rule by a cruel and absolute leader
Perils	great dangers
Unchecked	not controlled or stopped

Language spotlight

1. Hand over fist

- **Meaning:** very quickly and in large amounts, usually about money.
- **Synonyms:** rapidly, fast, at a great rate.
- **Antonyms:** slowly, gradually.
- **Examples:**
 - The company was making money **hand over fist** after the new product launch.
 - During the gold rush, shopkeepers earned profits **hand over fist**.

2. At death's door

- **Meaning:** very close to dying.
- **Synonyms:** near death, critically ill.
- **Antonyms:** in good health, full of life.
- **Examples:**
 - The old man was **at death's door** after the accident, but he survived.

- She looked so weak, as if she were **at death's door**.

3. Crops up

- **Meaning:** appears or happens unexpectedly.
- **Synonyms:** comes up, shows up, arises.
- **Antonyms:** disappears, fades away.
- **Examples:**
 - Something urgent always **crops up** when i try to relax.
 - Rumours about the politician keep **cropping up** in the news.

4. On the brink of (something)

- **Meaning:** very close to doing or experiencing something (often bad).
- **Synonyms:** about to, close to, on the edge of.
- **Antonyms:** far from, safe from.
- **Examples:**
 - The country was **on the brink of** civil war.

- She was **on the brink of** tears after hearing the bad news.

5. Mown down

- **Meaning:** killed or destroyed quickly and in large numbers.
- **Synonyms:** wiped out, cut down, destroyed.
- **Antonyms:** spared, saved.
- **Examples:**
 - Soldiers were **mown down** in the battle.
 - The flowers in the field were accidentally **mown down** by the tractor.

Quiz

Listening Comprehension Multiple Choice Questions

1. What shocking thing did Caligula supposedly do with his horse?
 - a) Fed it gold
 - b) Made it a consul
 - c) Let it sleep in his bed
 - d) Sold it to the senate

2. Nero was accused of doing what while Rome was burning?
 - a) Sleeping
 - b) Writing poetry
 - c) Fiddling
 - d) Hiding in the Senate

3. What kind of ruler was Caligula often remembered as?
 - a) Wise and kind

b) Bloodthirsty and cruel

c) Generous and fair

d) Quiet and shy

4. What happened to Caligula's wife and daughter after his assassination?

a) They were sent into exile

b) They were spared

c) They were killed

d) They fled Rome

5. Why was Commodus unpopular with the Senate?

a) He ignored them and acted cruelly

b) He spent too much money on the army

c) He left Rome for many years

d) He gave all power to his stepson

True or False

6. Nero was loved by the Roman people for his poetry and singing. (True/False)
7. Germanicus, Caligula's father, died in battle at the age of 50. (True/False)
8. Caligula once forced a senator to fight as a gladiator because of a promise he had made. (True/False)
9. Caligula initially appeared to be a generous and popular emperor. (True/False)
10. Caligula was assassinated after ruling for less than four years. (True/False)

Fill-in-the-Blank

11. Tiberius was 77 years old, which was a ____ old age at this time, and there is simply no evidence to suggest it was anything other than natural causes.
12. For the first few months of his reign, Caligula seemed to live __ to the hopes and dreams of the people of Rome.
13. This being ancient Rome, senators were scurrying _____ making preparations, both for the eventuality that he wouldn't recover and succumbed to his illness, and that he would make a full recovery.
14. He was often teased by Caligula for having a high-_____ voice, and being effeminate in his manners.

15. At one dinner party in ancient Rome, hosted by the then-emperor, Caligula, the host _____ out in raucous laughter.

Vocabulary Practice

16. What does **tyranny** mean?

- a) A fair system of government
- b) Cruel and unfair rule by one person
- c) The power of the people
- d) A short period of peace

17. What does **humiliation** mean?

- a) Great pride
- b) Great joy
- c) Great shame or embarrassment
- d) Great bravery

18. What does **succumbed** mean?

- a) Gave in or failed to resist
- b) Resisted strongly
- c) Recovered from illness
- d) Fought bravely

19. What does **frontrunner** mean?

- a) The person most likely to win
- b) The first person to arrive
- c) Someone who runs quickly
- d) The last person in a race

20. What does **lavishly** mean?

- a) In a very simple way
- b) In a very rich or excessive way
- c) In a very quiet way

d) In a very careful way

Answers

1. b) Made it a consul
2. C) Fiddling
3. B) Bloodthirsty and cruel
4. c) They were killed
5. a) He ignored them and acted cruelly
6. False
7. False
8. True
9. True
10. True
11. ripe
12. up
13. around
14. pitched
15. burst
16. b) Cruel and unfair rule by one person
17. c) Great shame or embarrassment
18. a) Gave in or failed to resist
19. a) The person most likely to win
20. b) In a very rich or excessive way