TYRANNY

Task 1: Answer ⓐ OR ⓑ in questions 1-9.

❶ Tyrants ⓐ **follow** OR ⓑ **ignore** the rule of law.
❷ Tyrants ⓐ **protect** OR ⓑ **intimidate** the weak.
❸ They gain and hold power through ⓐ **military force** OR ⓑ **democratic elections**.
❹ Their rule is often marked by ⓐ **honest** OR ⓑ **corrupt** behaviour.
❺ They usually ⓐ **conceal and distort** OR ⓑ **reveal and respect** the truth.
❻ Tyrants often establish a ⓐ **free press** OR ⓑ a **propaganda machine**.
❼ They ⓐ **undermine** OR ⓑ **protect** human rights.
❽ They ⓐ **show respect for** the citizens and their dignity OR ⓑ **threaten and manipulate** citizens.
❾ Tyrants ⓐ **imprison, torture or kill people without trial** OR ⓑ **ensure that people have a fair trial**.

Task 2: Highlight.

Which words or phrases below do you believe might represent the actions of tyrants? You should be able to find **eight** words or phrases.

1 exploit citizens • **2** hold fair elections • **3** violate human rights
4 violate or break the law • **5** uphold human dignity
6 assassinate opponents • **7** act with decency and honour
8 uphold justice • **9** threaten people • **10** persecute opponents
11 hold fake elections • **12** force confessions • **13** hold fair trials
14 ensure that the justice system is separate from the government

Task 3: An Ancient Roman Tyrant

First, read this brief introduction and the back of this handout:

Nero seemed like an obedient and appreciative teenager when he first became the Roman Emperor. He was only 17 years old. He was so grateful to his mother Agrippina for helping him to gain power that his first watchword (like a password) for the palace guard was “the best of mothers”. Yet five years later, he ordered his mother’s death. According to one account, as she stood waiting to be killed by Nero’s soldiers, Agrippina tore her clothes from her stomach and cried, “Strike here, for this bore Nero.”

Agrippina was not Nero’s only victim. He is thought to have been responsible for the deaths of his 20-year-old wife, Octavia, his 14-year-old stepbrother, Britannicus, and his old tutor, Seneca.

You can read the whole horrifying and sordid story on the back of this handout.

Afterwards, read this short biography of Nero.

Write this heading in your workbook:

Portrait of a Tyrant

List the behaviours that Nero displayed which could be characterised as “tyrannical”. Use some of the wording above if possible. You are allowed to use dot points if this helps you.

The early years of Nero's reign

Although Nero's private life grew steadily more immoral, he remained a popular ruler. At first the murders he ordered only affected the ruling family. He did have some other unpleasant pastimes, such as joining with a band of upper-class louts to wander the streets at night and have fun attacking passers-by; but he was not recognised.

His government was carried on by Burrus and Seneca, who were anxious to rule well. Laws were passed that pleased the senate. Nero put millions of sesterces into the treasury from his private fortune, which pleased the people. When he had to hear law cases, Nero gave sensible judgements written, no doubt, by Seneca. Even the killing of his mother in 59 AD and his wife, Octavia, in 62 AD did not lose Nero any real popularity.

How Agrippina lost her influence over Nero

Seneca and Burrus both felt that Agrippina's influence was dangerous and would harm Nero's position. They therefore worked to weaken Agrippina's power.

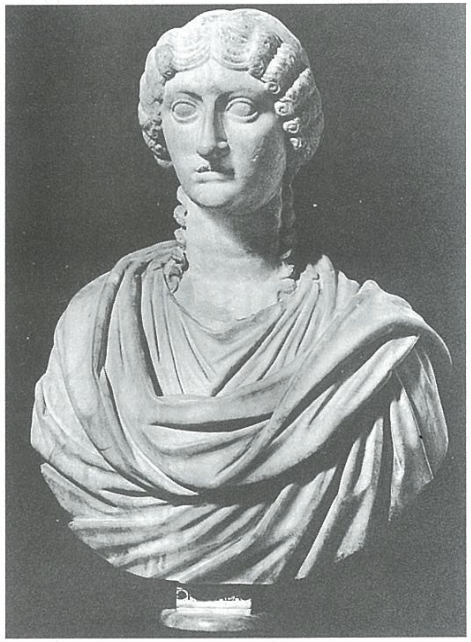
Agrippina continued to nag at Nero about obedience and carrying out his duties. She made him act in a dignified manner, when he had other ideas. She was always reminding him how much he owed to her.

When Nero took a mistress, a beautiful freedwoman named Acte, his mother was furious and did everything she could to break up the affair. Burrus and Seneca, on the other hand, accepted it. They knew he thoroughly disliked his wife, Octavia. The situation made Nero very resentful towards Agrippina.

As Nero became harder for her to handle, Agrippina tried to threaten him by saying she would support Britannicus's claim to the throne. She had gone too far. Nero was so alarmed that he had Britannicus poisoned. Agrippina turned angrily on Nero. She began supporting Octavia as the 'wronged' wife. Nero ordered her out of the palace.

When an enemy of Agrippina accused her of supporting another rival for the throne, Nero panicked. He wanted both his rival and his mother killed. Agrippina had to face an inquiry but was found innocent. Her life was saved by Seneca and Burrus.

For a short while Nero and his mother seemed to be on better terms. But it did not last, because Agrippina continued ordering Nero to act in a more dignified manner. Nero may have fallen in love again and wanted to divorce Octavia. Agrippina would certainly have opposed this.



A statue believed to be of Poppaea, a married woman whom Nero fell in love with

Nero had a strong artistic streak and wanted to perform in public by entering the singing and chariot racing events in the public games. This was considered shocking conduct for any high-born Roman, especially so for the emperor. Nero knew that his mother totally disapproved of his ambitions.

A bacchante dancing. Nero longed to take part in this kind of theatre.

Class discussion

Which do you think would be the strongest reasons for Nero wanting to get rid of his mother?

How did Agrippina die?

Nero decided that his mother must die. He wanted to make her death look like an accident because Agrippina was very popular with ordinary Romans. He planned to invite her to a dinner and treat her with a show of respect and affection. It was arranged that she should return to her house across the bay on board a ship that would sink.

Anicetus, commander of the fleet, was in charge of carrying out the murder. The plan went well until Agrippina and a maid-servant were tipped into the sea. The maid called out that she was Agrippina to get the sailors to save her. While the sailors clubbed the maid to death, Agrippina kept silent and swam away until a sailing boat picked her up and took her to the shore.

Agrippina realised that Nero had planned her death and felt that the only way she could save herself was to pretend ignorance. She therefore sent word to Nero that she had been saved from the 'accident'. News of his mother's survival terrified Nero, who thought she might tell the people what he had tried to do. Nero sent Anicetus and a group of sailors to Agrippina's house to make sure she did not survive. The sailors clubbed her down and stabbed her to death.

It was announced that Agrippina had plotted to kill Nero. Nero had been saved while his mother had lost her life. Leading citizens gave thanks for the emperor's 'escape' from harm.

Nero at 23, not long after the murder of his mother