Life in Roman Britain: Ellie’s Historical Journey

Learning objective: To understand the impact of the Roman Empire on daily life in Britain and evaluate the changes it brought to the landscape.

Read the text carefully and answer the questions below. Use evidence from the text to support your answers where required.

When the Romans arrived in Britain, they brought significant changes that transformed the island into a bustling province of their vast empire. Ellie the elephant, who loves uncovering the secrets of the past, notes that the Romans were master engineers. They constructed an intricate network of straight roads, which allowed soldiers and traders to move quickly across the country. These roads were so well-built that many still serve as the foundation for our highways today.

In the towns, Romans built grand public baths and forums where people could socialise. Wealthy citizens lived in villas equipped with a hypocaust, an ingenious underfloor heating system that used hot air to keep rooms warm during the chilly British winters. However, life was not the same for everyone. While the elite enjoyed imported olive oil and fine pottery, many local Britons continued to live in roundhouses, working as farmers. The Romans also introduced new foods, such as cherries and cabbages, and established a common currency using coins. This period of history was a time of great architectural and social evolution, leaving a permanent mark on the landscape of Britain.

Word bank: Aqueduct · Province · Hypocaust · Villa · Occupation · Infrastructure

1. Identify two examples of new foods that were introduced to Britain by the Romans. (2 marks)

2. What was the purpose of a hypocaust in a Roman villa? (2 marks)

3. Why were the straight roads built by the Romans considered so important for their empire? (3 marks)

4. Explain why the experience of living in Roman Britain would have been different for a wealthy citizen compared to a local farmer. (3 marks)

5. Do you think the Roman occupation had a mostly positive or negative impact on Britain? Justify your opinion using evidence from the text. (3 marks)

Draw: Draw a cross-section of a Roman villa showing the hypocaust system under the floorboards, including the furnace outside.

Extension challenge: Research the 'Watling Street' or another famous Roman road in Britain. Write a short paragraph explaining where it started and where it ended.