Category 3: Multimodal presentations (Nero)

Criterion 3: Radio interview

This sample contains an extract from a student’s final response. It shows sections of the script presented to the class. The annotations show the qualities of the student work that match aspects of the A standard for Criterion 3: Communicating historical knowledge. This document should be viewed with the document annotated to show the match to Criterion 2 descriptors.

At Standard A, a student response to a historical question:

- consistently communicates accurately selected definitions, key historical concepts, terms, events, developments and people, and the relationships amongst them
- presents coherent, valid historical arguments that:
  - incorporate concepts of changes and continuities over time
  - use extensive vocabulary in a succinct and effective manner
  - accord closely with the style and conventions applicable to the format of the task
  - refer to evaluation processes without disrupting the argument
  - incorporate direct and indirect references to diverse relevant historical evidence
  - accurately use the conventions of a recognised system of referencing
- meets stipulated or negotiated requirements of tasks in most instances.

Comments

Accords closely with the style and conventions applicable to the format of the task

Introduction, welcome, and question and answer format all accord with the chosen presentation format

Use extensive vocabulary in a succinct and effective manner.
The context (radio interview with a history professor) is established and sustained by effective language choices

Refer to evaluation processes without disrupting the argument

Script

(Introduction setting the scene/context not shown)

Professor, who are our primary sources when we discuss Nero? And why should we trust the information given to you by them?

I’m ebullient that you asked. First of all, let me begin by stating the folly of believing that all historians are equal and must be trusted equally; it’s a blatant lie. We have five main sources of information pertaining to Nero. These are Tacitus, Cassius Dio, Fabius Rusticus, Dio Chrysostom and Suetonius. Now, to save you the trouble of doing the exact same thing again later, I’ll briefly outline the aforementioned historians — separate the “good” from the “bad” if you prefer.

Okay, Tacitus is often considered the most reliable of our ancient sources. Firstly he was born straight after the death of Nero, effectively eliminating the barrier or time; his associates would almost certainly have been in direct contact with the Roman Emperor during his reign. Also, his technique as a historian was quite unique for the time.

(Discussion of Tacitus and other sources, and Nero’s background and rise to power)
Nero became Emperor of Rome in 54, following the death of Claudius by method of poisoned mushrooms. There are numerous accounts of how Nero was purported to gain the monarch, none of which can be declared certain. According to Cassius Dio, on the first evening of his rule Nero “declared mushrooms to be the food of the gods, since Claudius by means of the mushroom had become a god”, placing substantial suspicions of assassination on Nero. Our secondary source, Matyszak, alludes to Nero’s apparent surprise at receiving the *toga virilis* in his book *The Sons of Caesar*, suggesting Agrippina the Younger as the true assassin in an attempt to control her son’s life. Matyszak, a professional historian focused on Rome, possesses a plethora of degrees, giving his theory credibility. Either way, it’s palpable that Nero’s ascension was unholy.

Did Nero live up to the expectations formulated by his great ancestors? Were the citizens of Rome satisfied with his rule?

In the early days of Nero’s reign he ruled according to the Romans’ expectations. Davies asserts he was considered to have governed well in his *quinquennium* — that’s his first five years. Suetonius tells us of Nero’s benevolence and capability, writing that “when he was asked according to custom to sign a warrant for the execution of a man who had been condemned to death he said: How I wish I had never learned to write!” (Further discussion and evaluation of his rule, those who advised him, events leading to downfall.)

That’s powerful stuff, Professor. How did the citizens of Rome react to his death?

If Chrysostom is to be believed, his former subjects yearned for his return. “There was nothing,” he said, “to prevent his continuing to be Emperor for all time, seeing that even now everybody wishes he were still alive.” Although Chrysostom abstractly claims this, his perception was perhaps distorted by the turbulent and chaotic *Year of Four Emperors* that followed, of which wishing for Nero’s return was entirely excusable. However, before nostalgia set in, I can imagine that many rejoiced over the fall of the tyrant who had gripped Rome in his juvenile fist.

To conclude can I ask you, who was the real Nero?

The gap of time has stolen from us irrevocably the chance of drinking with Vlad, or campaigning with Alexander. We can read every surviving fragment that remains concerning Nero, but we can never meet the man himself and make a conscious judgment of character. Bradley, a renowned history author with many credentials, notes that Nero himself once said, “I will keep personal and state affairs separate.” The statement only epitomises my essential point: that although most ancient and modern historians suggest that Emperor Nero’s position was occupied by a man inadequate for the job, we can never know Nero, the person.

(Final thanks from interviewer not shown)