**Roman Gladiators**

The spectacle of gladiatorial combat was initiated by wealthy Romans over 250 years before the birth of Christ as a part of the ceremonies held to honor their deceased relatives. Later, these games became separate events sponsored by Rome's leading citizens in order to enhance their prestige. With the decline of the republic and the rise of the empire, gladiator games were appropriated by the emperor. The primary purpose of these life-or-death duels was to entertain the multitude of spectators that jammed the arena.

Although some freemen elected to live the life of a gladiator, the majority were slaves, captured during the numerous wars Rome fought to expand its territory.

*The Roman philosopher Seneca took a dim view of gladiatorial contests and the spectacle that accompanied them… In a letter to a friend, he describes what he saw in the arena during the reign of Emperor Caligula:*

The other day, I chanced to drop in at the midday games, expecting sport and wit and some relaxation to rest men's eyes from the sight of human blood. Just the opposite was the case. Any fighting before that was as nothing; all trifles were now put aside - it was plain butchery.

The men had nothing with which to protect themselves, for their whole bodies were open to the thrust, and every thrust told. The common people prefer this to matches on level terms… Of course they do. The blade is not parried by helmet or shield, and what use is skill or defense? All these merely postpone death.

In the morning men are thrown to bears or lions, at midday to those who were previously watching them. The crowd cries for the killers to be paired with those who will kill them, and reserves the victor for yet another death. This is the only release the gladiators have… There was no escape for them. The slayer was kept fighting until he could be slain.

'Kill him! Flog him! Burn him alive!' (the spectators roared) 'Why is he such a coward? Why won't he rush on the steel? Why does he fall so meekly? Why won't he die willingly? "

"Gladiators, 50 AD," EyeWitness to History, www.eyewitnesstohistory.com (2005).

**Annotate the text. Provide line numbers with evidence from the text with your answer.**

1. The words ***citizens*** and ***republic*** are used on line 4. On line 5, circle the contrasting words.

2. How do the words ***events***, ***leading citizens***, and ***enhance*** on lines 3-4 help you to better understand the   
 word ***prestige*** on line 4? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

3. Who were gladiators? What did they do? Provide evidence from the text with your answer. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
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4. The word ***parried*** on line 16 means to deflect or avoid. Which four words from lines 14-16 will help you to   
 better understand the meaning of the word? Underline and annotate the words in the text.

5. On line 19, the author writes, “This is the only release the gladiators have…” What does the word ***this*** refer   
 to? Explain why this is the only release for a gladiator. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
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6. On line 9 the text states, “*Seneca took a dim view of gladiatorial contests and the spectacle that   
 accompanied them.”* This begins to set the mood of the text. What other pieces of evidence from the text   
 help you to understand the mood? Explain your choices. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
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