

## Religious Education: First Year

TASK	Write a letter to Pontius Pilate	
TOPIC	The context into which Jesus was born	
LEARNING INTENTION	Students will have an understanding of the political and religious structures in Palestine at the time of Jesus.	
TASK DESCRIPTION	<p><i>As a Roman spy, posing as a Pharisee, Sadducee, Zealot, or Essene, write an anonymous letter to Pontius Pilate informing him about the lifestyle of the different political and religious groups at the time of Jesus.</i></p> <p>Having studied the everyday life of Jews in Palestine (including climate and landscape, homes, jobs, ancient Judaism and the Temple and synagogue) and then completed a class discussion and written questions on the four groups, students were given time in class and at home to complete the task.</p>	
CRITERIA FOR SUCCESS	<p>Students will be able to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ identify i) economic status and everyday life including housing; ii) occupations with specific reference to interest/participation in temple/synagogue life; iii) religious outlook and practices; iv) belief in a Messiah and v) reaction and response to Roman occupation</li> <li>▪ predict how Jesus might react to the lifestyles/actions of these groups.</li> </ul>	
WORK SAMPLES	HIGH SUCCESS	MEDIUM SUCCESS
	Sally Andy	



high priest

158 Nazareth Ave,  
Nazareth,  
13 Nov. 30 A.D.

Dear Pontius,

How's it going? I just wanted to let you know how I'm getting on as a Sadducee here in Palestine. I am living with a rich family in a big beautiful house. There are two boys in the family and are High Priests <sup>A</sup> in the Temple. Our religion is important to us and we follow god's law. People who do not follow god's law we call them sinners. We do get along with the Romans because we would like to keep our position in the temple. The temple is a big multi-storey building. It is a beautiful <sup>A</sup> building that holds a thousand people. The High Priest in the temple is always a Sadducee <sup>B</sup>. I am in the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin is a court that judges people who do not keep god's law. We're not really waiting on the Messiah. Yeah we do get on with the Romans because we would like to keep our position as a High Priest. I don't think the Sadducees will get on with the person who says he is the son <sup>C</sup> of god because they sell stuff in the temple.

That's all for now. Talk to you soon. Anon. <sup>D</sup>

## Feedback for Sally

<b>A</b>	You have made the letter very believable by mentioning the people in the family and their position as high priests. I like the way you have given added information about the size and decoration of the temple.
<b>B</b>	To improve further, you could explain why Sadducees don't believe in life after death and how important the Torah is for them. This is one interesting difference between the Sadducees and the Pharisees.
<b>C</b>	You have stated clearly yet briefly why the Pharisees don't like Jesus. Once you have studied conflict in Jesus' life you will be able to give examples of times when Jesus and the Sadducees didn't get along.
<b>D</b>	To finish your letter you could ask a question like "Have there been any more attacks by the Zealots?" or "What are people saying about Jesus?". This would help you to show that you know about the other groups and also help the reader to really imagine what life as a Roman spy might be like.

## Commentary for teachers

- The student has met and explored the given criteria in great detail
- The letter is neatly presented and flows in a sequential manner. The student has personalised the task both in the introduction and in her reference to the members of the family
- She has clearly highlighted the centrality of the Temple in the life of the Sadducees. Her detailed description of the building shows a useful and intelligent integration of prior learning into a new task
- She has made the connection between the powerful position held by the Sadducees and consequently their attitude to Roman occupation. The unique presentation of her predications of how the relationship between Jesus and the Sadducees will unfold indicates that there is great scope for the student to explore further the central theme of conflict in the life of Jesus.



pharisees

Jericho Road,  
Jericho,  
Palestine,  
31 May 30 AD.

Dear Pontius,

I am writing to you to let you know all is well. I am enjoying my life as a pharisee. I am living in an ordinary one-story house with one bedroom and **A** one window that has a nice view. I have a job as a Rabbi in a local synagogue teaching people about God and Jewish laws. Religion is very important in the pharisee lives. If people don't follow their Jewish laws they are called sinners **B** for example tax collectors, poor people, and Romans. The Bible is very important to them. They don't like the way Jesus breaks **C** the Jewish laws. They don't like the way he tells them how to live their lives. They concentrate on their own Religion. They don't like the Romans because they don't follow God's laws and try to ignore them. Goodbye for a good while. I will write a letter to you again soon to let you know how things are going on here in Palestine. **D**

Anon.

## Feedback for Andy

<b>A</b>	The opening of your letter is good. I could really picture the spy enjoying his mission as a Pharisee. - To improve further, next time write each of your ideas into paragraphs to make it even easier for the reader to follow.
<b>B</b>	By mentioning the people that the Pharisees call sinners you are giving us a great idea of what the Pharisees are like and how they might be different to Jesus. This makes it easier for the reader to understand why they don't get along.
<b>C</b>	To improve further, remember to mention how important life after death and the Messiah are for the Pharisees. This will help the reader to understand why the Pharisees feel how they do about Roman occupation and the other political and religious groups at the time.
<b>D</b>	To finish, it can be interesting to ask a question like "Have there been any more attacks by the Zealots?" or "What are people saying about Jesus?" This would help you to show that you know about the other groups.

## Commentary for teachers

- The student has met and explored the given criteria well
- In mentioning such groups as the tax collectors the student shows an ability to integrate prior learning into a related topic
- He has cleverly recognised and included the Bible as a key element in Pharisean tradition and displays a great appreciation of the centrality of religion in their lives
- He has captured the 'separateness' experienced between the Pharisees and other groups in society (including the Romans) and thus makes it possible for the teacher to introduce and explore the theme of conflict in the life of Jesus particularly as it relates to the Pharisees
- While there is certainly room for the student to expand on their ideas there is great scope for further exploration of this and other related topics.