LO: to identify the features of an informal letter

BLP: Noticing 4, Making Links 5

 24th February 420 BC

Dear Mum,

Words can’t describe how much I miss you, yet I know I must be brave and make you proud.

Since leaving you, I have endured many hardships; I’m determined to succeed and become an excellent soldier. The camp, which is large, is nestled between huge mountains. It’s surrounded by barren landscape with little vegetation. It has cramped dormitories where we sleep on hard beds made from reeds collected by ourselves (from the river Eurotas).

There is little time for sleep though as we rise at dawn to study – survival skills mainly. After study, we train under the scorching sun to toughen us up – apparently! We wear coarse cloaks, with frayed edges and no shoes; we train until we’re exhausted! The orders given by our officers are demanding and relentless. Daily, we march bare-footed with sweat pouring from our shaven heads. Sometimes, we’re matched against each other in violent games with a ball and in straightforward fights. We work at gymnastics and other physical activities such as: running, jumping, javelin, discus throwing, swimming and hunting. We’re beaten up by older boys without warning, which is another part of our training! I appreciate the need for self-discipline although we spend much of our time hungry – our bellies empty! Food is rubbish and rationed; we’re forced to steal. If we’re caught, we’re flogged. Luckily, I’ve managed to escape this punishment – fingers crossed! Only the other day, I witnessed an unfortunate, seven-year-old boy stealing some figs from the food store. Unfortunately for him, he was also spotted by the officers who flogged him severely!

We’re taught stories of courage and fortitude. Yesterday, I heard the story about a boy who followed the Spartan code. He had captured a live fox and intended to eat it. The boy noticed some Spartan soldiers coming, and hid the fox beneath his shirt. When the soldiers confronted him, he allowed the fox to chew into his stomach rather than confess, and showed no sign of pain in his body or face - gross. I guess this is the Spartan way.

I am hoping the years will pass quickly and I will pass my fitness test. The opportunity to serve Sparta is my only goal! However, I have heard talk of many difficult tests to come; the Krypteia (a survival test) fills me with dread. I will have to spend time alone outside of the camp – scary! Another challenge takes place at the festival of the goddess Artemis Ortheia. The older boys have to take part in a contest in which they snatch as many cheeses as possible from the steps of the altar to the goddess. They run the gauntlet of the guards, who hold whips, and are instructed to use them as hard as they can. Some boys died last time! Hopefully, the gods will give me courage when my time comes.

Meanwhile, I will continue to be loyal to Sparta and my ‘brothers’. I hope that you’re well and I can’t wait to hear from you.

Big hugs,

Alexon.