**PASSAGE 1:** This is an account of the disastrous eruption of the volcano Vesuvius, and what happened at that time to an eighteen-year-old student and his uncle.

Vesuvius

Across the Bay of Naples in Italy, the volcano Mount Vesuvius dominates your view from almost every

angle. It stands like a sentinel over the cluster of towns that huddle in its fertile foothills. Behind sheets

of mist it is ghostlike; in the warm sunshine it is magnificent, but it always seems to brood secretively

over the surrounding land and sea, full of silent menace.

The disastrous eruption in the year 79 was one of the world’s most famous natural catastrophes.

Then, of course, there were no rescue teams, no earth-moving apparatus and no emergency

hospitals. Those people who could escape did so, and attributed the explosion to the gods and to the

giants who had recently been seen ranging over the mountains. Anyway, there could have been no

rescue, since the city of Pompeii was covered with 29 metres of small pumice stones and volcanic

ash. Anyone who stayed behind or who revisited the site in the next day or two was either smothered

or killed by a cloud of poisonous gases and dust. It was estimated that 20,000 died there.

Another victim of the explosion was the smaller seaside town of Herculaneum. Unlike Pompeii, this

was buried in a mudslide, which then solidified, preserving a good deal of the town. 1,600 years later,

both towns were discovered and painstakingly excavated, revealing houses with their roofs on,

decorated pavements, wall paintings, theatres and shops. Many bodies were found which had turned

to statues as they died.

We are fortunate in having an account of the eruption of Vesuvius which was written by an eighteenyear-

old student called Pliny. He observed what happened from a comparatively safe distance before

he was forced to escape. His uncle, known as Pliny the Elder, was a famous academic who wrote an

encyclopedia called Natural History and other books on subjects such as a history of all the wars

between the Romans and the Germans (in twenty volumes) and the use of missiles while on

horseback. However, he was also famous for his service to the state. He had experienced military

service in Germany and had held administrative posts in Spain. He was, at that time, in charge of the

Roman navy in the Bay of Naples. He therefore called for a boat so that he could find out more about

the little-known science of volcanoes. He had barely set off when a neighbour found herself trapped at

the water’s edge. He realised the gravity of the situation, called for more boats and made it his priority

to rescue the stranded citizens.

His nephew, the young Pliny, decided to stay in the house and finish the homework that Pliny the

Elder had given him. From there he wrote about the eruption as follows: ‘I cannot give a more exact

description of the shape of the cloud than by comparing it to that of a pine tree, for it shot up to a great

height in the form of a trunk which formed itself at the top into several branches. The cloud was at one

moment white and at another moment spotted, as if it had carried up earth and cinders.’

Later, when the young Pliny realised he must escape, he described how the wheels of the carts could

not hold steady on the piles of small stones. From where they were they could see ‘the sea sucked

back, as if it was driven by the convulsions of the earth. Behind us, a black and dreadful cloud burst

out in gusts of fiery, snakelike vapour. Now and again, the cloud yawned open to reveal long, fantastic

flames, like flashes of lightning, but much larger.’ What a fearful experience for an eighteen-year-old!

Meanwhile, Pliny’s uncle had reached comparative safety further round the bay, with his friend

Pomponius. He went to bed, exhausted. Pomponius reported that ‘His breathing (as he was pretty fat)

was heavy and sonorous, and was heard by those who attended him outside his bedroom door.’ Later

the next day, Pliny the Elder became unwell, drank copious amounts of water, and requested another

rest. Soon after, he collapsed and died, whether from the weakness of his heart, or the results of

inhaling toxic gas, nobody knew.

The young man must have missed his uncle, whom he admired for his never-ending quest for

knowledge as much as for his executive powers. He had also lost his teacher. At least the younger

Pliny survived the volcano and became a politician, serving his country well

**PASSAGE 2:** In this passage the writer describes a journey to the Kamchatka Peninsula, one of the most

volcanically active regions on Earth.

Russia’s Frozen Inferno

Late last summer I spent a month studying volcanic eruptions with an international team that included

French explorers, a German photographer called Carsten Peter, and a Russian guide named Feodor

Farberov.

Carsten has spent his life documenting volcanoes with a camera. The closer he gets to the volcano,

the happier he is. Not so Feodor, a 39-year-old, stolid, muscular, bearded mountaineer. He was born

in a village at the foot of Klyuchevskoy and grew up with the dangers and discomforts of volcano

research. ‘Volcanic ash covered everything,’ he recalled. ‘Our water, our air, even our food tasted of

sulphur.’ Having seen ‘enough eruptions for a lifetime,’ Feodor now likes his mountains cold, quiet

and covered with snow for skiing.

Bezymianny, one of the dozen volcanoes that make up the peninsula’s group, was thought to be

dormant until 1955, when it suddenly began to shake and swell and spew. On March 30th 1956, it

exploded, enveloping the area in a shroud of ash. Within two days the ash reached Alaska, and two

days later it was detected over the British Isles. The explosion flattened trees 15 miles away. Like the

eruption of Mount St. Helens, it started with a giant avalanche, then blew out sideways, leaving a

huge horseshoe-shaped crater.

We hiked through soft ash, sinking knee-deep at times, climbed heaps of shattered rock, and

scrambled in and out of rocky gorges. Through wind and whipping clouds we climbed to the crater’s

broken rim and looked over. The inner cliffs dropped hundreds of feet to a circular channel, ringing a

new mountain rising from the ruins of the old – a huge dome of smoking rock with its summit towering

over us. On the floor of the channel sprawled a field of ice and snow, blackened by cinders and split

by crevasses that gaped white in the enveloping mists. As we clung to the sharp edge, the dome

threw down showers of rock from its steep sides. When large boulders hit the ice below, they left

white wounds in the dark surface.

Another of Kamchatka’s volcanoes is Mutnovsky. It is a complex structure with multiple active craters.

In March 2000, steam blasts rocked one of the craters, and, within it, a glacier began to collapse. A

large section of the glacier vanished, and a green acidic lake appeared in the middle of the broken

ice. This kind of activity indicates that Mutnovsky is heating up and signals the possibility of even

greater eruptions.

We set out just after dawn to follow a river up into that crater. Our path led across slopes of wet,

slippery ash, past narrow openings in the rocks belching steam. Scrambling across the glacier, its

surface a mass of dirty ice and cinders, we skirted the lake and climbed to a narrow divide. Standing

on ice, we felt the hot breath of volcanic gases. Around us rose the steep crater walls lined with red

and yellow deposits of sulphur. Slabs of glacier peeled off and crashed into the sour, pea-green

water.

Carsten was ecstatic. When he and one of the other explorers decided to crawl under the glacier into

a dark ice cave formed by a river of warm water, I followed. Feodor just shook his head.

We crab-walked under huge blocks of ice that had fallen around the entrance, then waded through

shallow water to the edge of darkness. Pale light fell from crevasses in the roof, barely illuminating a

world of grey: grey shadows, grey ice, grey ash, grey river. The inner walls were hung with icicles.

The ice groaned above and around us – the internal workings of the glacier as it melted and moved.

The hairs on my neck rose and, with them, dreadful imaginings. Not only could the tunnel implode at

any moment but also the lake, held back by only a wall of ice, could drain in a flash. It looked as if part

of the cave had collapsed a few weeks earlier. What if another eruption occurred while we were down

there?

**Answer on Passage 1 only**

**A1**

1. How is Mount Vesuvius described?
2. When did the eruption happen?
3. What was the eruption considered to be?

**A2**

The narrator is trying to explain the horrendous events when the mount erupted. How does he try to do this?

You should comment on:

* what he says to influence readers;
* his use of language and tone;
* the way he presents his information.

**A3**

1. What is suggested in the lines “comparative safety”?
2. What is suggested by “his breathing… was heavy and sonorous”?
3. What is the writer suggesting when he says “drank copious amounts of water”?

**A4**

What do you think and feel about the writers impressions of the volcanic eruption?

You should comment on:

* + - what is said;
		- how it is said.

**You should now read and refer to both Passage 1 and Passage 2**

**A5**

According to the two writers Volcanos are dangerous. Why should explorers consider this when exploring Volcanoes?

**A6**

Both of these texts are about volcanic activity.

Compare the following:

The writers experiences of volcanoes

How they get their information across to the reader