Poetry:

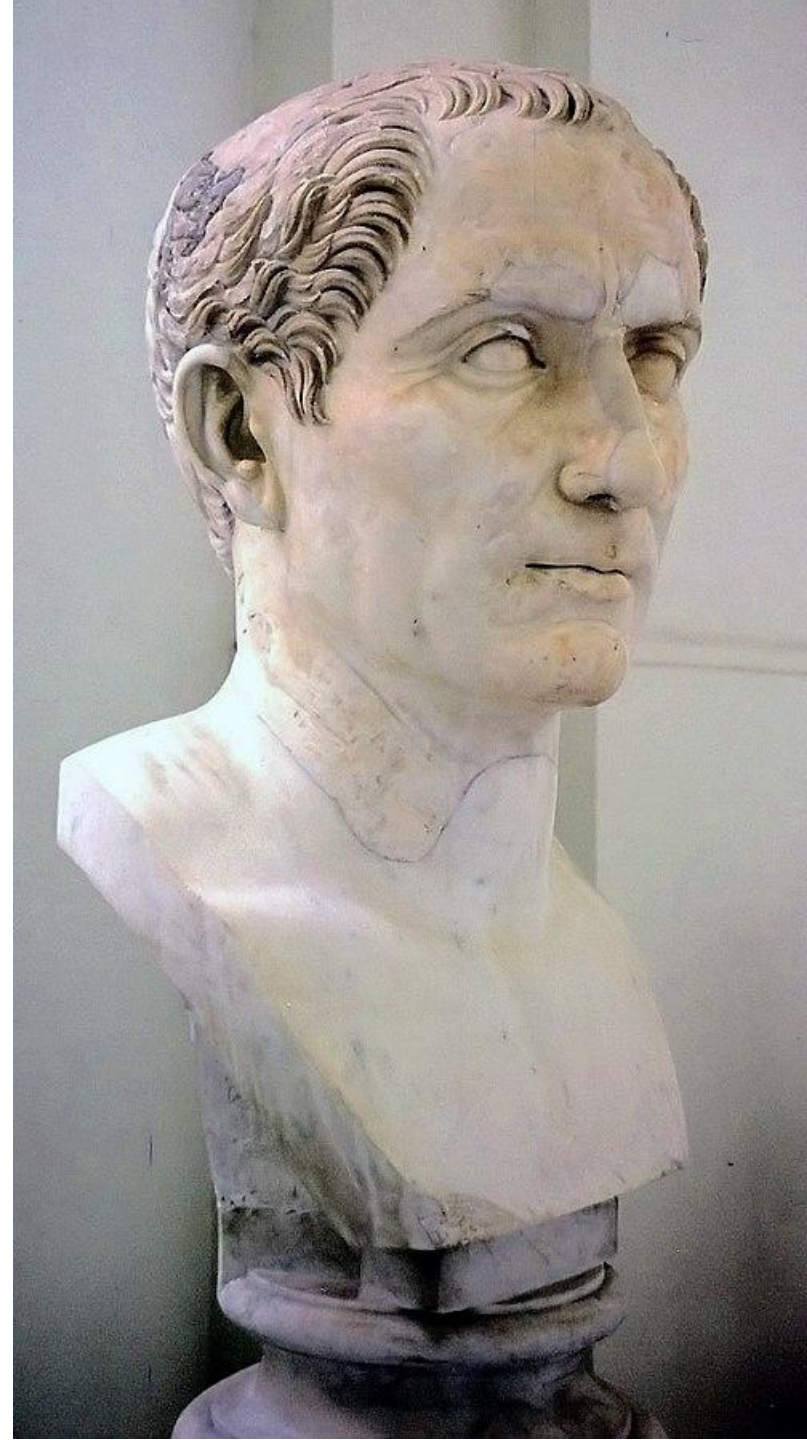**'Questions from a worker who reads'**

by Bertold Brecht

The title tells us that the narrator of this poem (the person speaking) is "a worker who reads".
This worker has been reading history books. But he is not happy with how these books are written. He has many questions for the writers of these books.

Surviving ruins of Babylon, the greatest city in the world around 4,000 years ago
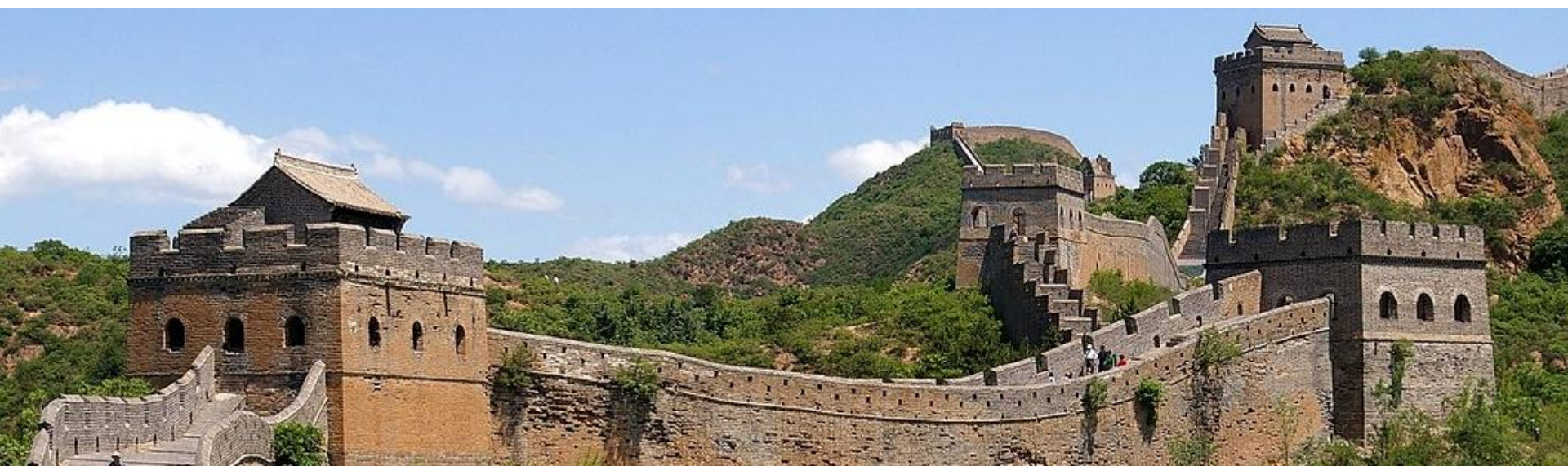
- Thebes, Babylon, Lima, Rome, Byzantium – huge, famous cities from ancient times
- The caesars – Roman emperors
- Atlantis – a city from ancient legends that sank underwater
- Alexander – Alexander the Great, an ancient Greek leader
- Masons – stone-workers

*Julius Caesar ,
Emperor of Rome*

1. Make a list of the historical leaders the narrator mentions.
2. The narrator asks many questions. Write out the one you find most interesting.
3. Choose 3 of the narrator's questions and try to answer them in your own words.
4. In what ways does the "worker who reads" have a different point of view to the people who wrote the books?
5. Why do you think his point of view is different?

Notes on "Questions from a worker who reads" by Bertold Brecht

The "worker who reads" is probably an autodidact, someone who did not go to college or school but educated themselves.

This autodidact feels as if the history books are leaving out the most important things:
• The workers and slaves who built the great cities,
• The soldiers who won the battles,
• The people who cried for their lost family members.

Instead, the books describe "great leaders" such as Alexander and Julius Caesar. They describe the great cities of Thebes and Babylon – as if they just appeared by magic. The worker believes that this is unfair.

Bertold Brecht was a famous writer of poems and plays. He lived in Germany in the early Twentieth Century, living through two world wars and a time of great political drama and tension. He was a Communist.

1. What is a Communist? If you don't know, look it up.
2. Can we see the influence of Brecht's Communist beliefs in 'Questions from a worker who reads'?

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