**Labyrinth**

*In the following passage from the novel “Labyrinth”, Alice, the main character, is spending the summer working in France.*

1 Alice notices a fly on the underside of her arm.

2 Insects are an occupational hazard at a dig, and for some reason there are more  
 flies higher up the mountain where she is working than at the main entrance site  
 lower down.

3 Her concentration broken, Alice stands up and stretches. Ashe unscrews the top of  
 her water bottle. It’s warm, but she’s too thirsty to care and drinks it down in great  
 gulps. Below, the heat haze shimmers above the dented tarmac of the road. Above  
 her, the sky is an endless blue.

4 It’s her first time in the Pyrenees, although she feels very much at home. In the main  
 camp on the lower slopes, Alice can see her colleagues standing under the big   
 canvass awning. She’s surprised they’ve stopped already. It’s early in the day to be  
 taking a break, but then the whole team is a bit demoralised. It’s hard work: the  
 digging, scraping, cataloguing, recording, and so far they’ve turned up little to justify  
 their efforts. They’ve come across only a few fragments of early medieval pots and  
 bowls, and a couple of arrowheads.

5 Alice is tempted to go down and join her colleagues. Her calves are already aching  
 from squatting. The muscles in her shoulders are tense. But she knows that if she   
 stops now, she’ll lose her momentum.

6 Hopefully, her luck’s about to change. Earlier, she’d noticed something glinting  
 beneath a large boulder, propped against the side of the mountain, almost as if  
 it had been placed there by a giant hand. Although she can’t make out what the   
 object is, even how big it is, she’s been digging all morning and she doesn’t think it  
 will be much longer before she can reach it.

7 She knows she should fetch someone. Alice is not a trained archaeologist, just a   
 volunteer. But it’s her last day on site and she wants to prove herself. If she goes  
 back down to the main camp now and admits she’s on to something, everybody  
 will want to be involved, and it will no longer be her discovery.

8 In the days and weeks to come, Alice will look back to this moment. She will wonder  
 at how different things might have been had she made the choice to go and not to   
 stay. If she had played by the rules.

9 She drains the last drop of water from the bottle and tosses it into her rucksack. For  
 the next hour or so, as the sun climbs higher in the sky and the temperature rises,   
 Alice carries on working. The only sounds are the scrape of metal on rock, the whine  
 of insects and the occasional buzz of a light aircraft in the distance.

10 Alice kneels down on the ground and leans her cheek and shoulder against the rock  
 for support. Then, with a flutter of excitement, she pushes her fingers deep into the   
 dark earth. Straight away, she knows she’s got something worth finding. It is  
 smooth to the touch, metal not stone. Grasping it firmly and telling herself not to   
 expect too much, slowly she eases the object out into the light.

11 The rich, cloying smell of wet soil fills her nose and throat, although she barely  
 notices. She is already lost in the past, captivated by the piece of history she   
 cradles in the palm of her hands. It is a heavy, round buckle, speckled black and   
 green with age and from its long burial.

12 Alice is so absorbed that she doesn’t notice the boulder shifting on its base. Then  
 something makes her look up. For a split second, the world seems to have been  
 suspended, out of space, out of time. She is mesmerised by the ancient slab of stone  
 as it sways and tilts, and then gracefully begins to fall towards her. At the very last  
 moment, the light fractures. The spell is broken. Alice throws herself out of the way,  
 half tumbling, half slithering sideways, just in time to avoid being crushed. The   
 boulder hits the ground with a dull thud, sending up a cloud of pale brown dust,  
 then rolls over and over, as if in slow motion, until it comes to rest further down the   
 mountain.

**Labyrinth  
Questions**

**Look at paragraphs 1 and 2.**

1. What activity is Alice involved in? **1**

2. “Insects are an occupational hazard…” (paragraph 2)  
Explain **in your own words** what this means. **2**

**Look at paragraphs 3 to 5.**

3. Write down three things the writer tells us in paragraph 3 which show that it is hot. **3**

4. How does the writer emphasise that “It’s hard work” (paragraph 4) through   
sentence structure and word choice? **4**

5. Write down an expression from the passage which suggests the hard work has not  
been worth it so far. **1**

6. “Alice is tempted to go down and join her colleagues.” (paragraph 5)  
Give two reasons why she is tempted to do this. **2**

**Look at paragraph 10.**

8. In paragraph 10, the writer shows Alice’s feelings and thoughts as she pushed her   
hand into the soil.  
 a) Write down one expression which shows her feelings at the point. **1**

b) Write down one expression which shows her thoughts at this pojnt. **1**

9 Why does the writer repeat the word “slowly” in paragraph 10? **1**

**Look at paragraphs 11 and 12.**

10. Alice is “captivated” by the buckle she has found. (paragraph 11)  
Write down one other word from the next paragraph which also shows how interested  
she was in the buckle. **1**

11. Give two reasons why Alice does not move out of the way of the boulder until  
the last moment. **2**

12. Explain carefully what is surprising about the word “gracefully” in paragraph 12. **1**