**This is an extract from a novel by Muriel Spark, published in 1961. Miss Brodie is a teacher at a girls’ school. Miss Mackay is the headmistress. The extract takes place at the beginning of the school year. Miss Brodie has recently returned from a holiday in Italy.**

*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*

‘Good morning, sit down, girls,’ said the headmistress who had entered in a hurry, leaving the door wide open.

Miss Brodie passed behind her with her head up, up, and shut the door with the utmost meaning.

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‘I have only just looked in,’ said Miss Mackay, ‘and I have to be off. Well, girls, this is the first day of the new session. Are we downhearted? No. You girls must work hard this year at every subject and pass your qualifying examination with flying colours. Next year you will be in the Senior school, remember. I hope you’ve all had a nice summer holiday, you all look nice and brown. I hope in due course of time to read your essays on how you spent them.’

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When she had gone Miss Brodie looked hard at the door for a long time. A girl, called Judith, giggled. Miss Brodie said to Judith, ‘That will do.’ She turned to the blackboard and rubbed out with her duster the long division sum she always kept on the blackboard in case of intrusions from outside during any arithmetic periods when Miss Brodie should happen not to be teaching arithmetic. When she had done this she turned back to the class and said, ‘Are we downhearted no, are we downhearted no. I shall be able to tell you a great deal this term. As you know, I don’t believe in talking down to children, you are capable of grasping more than is generally appreciated by your elders. Qualifying examination or no qualifying examination, you will have the benefit of my experiences in Italy. In Rome I saw the Coliseum where the gladiators died and the slaves were thrown to the lions. A vulgar American remarked to me, “It looks like a mighty fine quarry.” They talk nasally. Mary, what does to talk nasally mean?’

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Mary did not know.

‘Stupid as ever,’ said Miss Brodie. ‘Eunice?’

‘Through your nose,’ said Eunice.

‘Answer in a complete sentence, please,’ said Miss Brodie. ‘This year I think you must all start answering in complete sentences, I must try to remember this rule. Your correct answer is “To talk nasally means to talk through one’s nose”. The American said, “It looks like a mighty fine quarry.” Ah, it was there the gladiators fought. “Hail Caesar!” they cried. “These about to die salute thee!’

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Miss Brodie stood in her brown dress like a gladiator with raised arm and eyes flashing like a sword. ‘Hail Caesar!’ she cried again, turning radiantly to the window light, as if Caesar sat there. ‘Who opened the window?’ said Miss Brodie dropping her arm.

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Nobody answered.

‘Whoever has opened the window has opened it too wide,’ said Miss Brodie. ‘Six inches is perfectly adequate. More is vulgar. One should have an innate sense of these things. We ought to be doing history at the moment according to the time-table. Get out your history books and prop them up in your hands. I shall tell you a little more about Italy. Keep your books propped up in case we have any further intruders.’

She looked disapprovingly towards the door and lifted her fine dark Roman head with dignity.

‘Next year,’ she said, ‘you will have the specialists to teach you history and mathematics and languages, a teacher for this and a teacher for that. But in this, your last year with me, you will receive the fruits of my prime. They will remain with you all your days. First, however, I must mark the register for today before we forget. There are two new girls. Stand up the two new girls.’

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They stood up with wide eyes while Miss Brodie sat down at her desk.

‘You will get used to our ways.’