

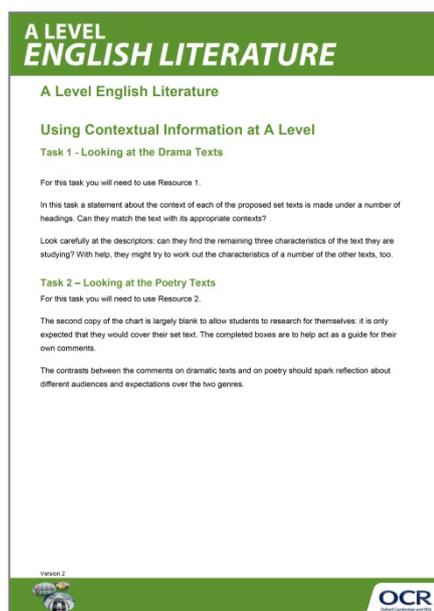
A LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE

Lesson Element

Using Contextual Information

Instructions and answers for teachers

These instructions should accompany the OCR resource 'Using Contextual Information' activity which supports OCR A Level English Literature.



The Activity:

This resource comprises 2 tasks.



This activity offers an opportunity for English skills development.

Associated materials:

'Using Contextual Information' Lesson Element learner activity sheet.



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Introduction

OCR involves teachers in the development of new support materials to capture current teaching practices tailored to our new specifications. These support materials are designed to inspire teachers and facilitate different ideas and teaching practices.

The information provided here is designed to support your teaching of Drama and poetry post 1900 component. Some or all of it may be applicable to your teaching.

The Specification is the document on which assessment is based and specifies what content and skills need to be covered in delivering the course. At all times, therefore, this support material booklet should be read in conjunction with the Specification. If clarification on a particular point is sought then that clarification should be found in the Specification itself.

Using Contextual information

At A Level, assessment objective 3 accounts for 10% for all parts of Section 2, of Drama and Poetry Pre-1900 (Exam 1).

AO3 Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received.

“Context” can be understood in a variety of ways. The object of this component is to look at the context of texts in Section 2 of Examination 1, and to reflect on the ways in which context can be understood.

Opening discussion:

Ask students to look at **their own context**. Of what influences and situations may they be said to be a product?

- Family
- Home town or village
- Society
- Historical time
- Any others?

So, when we talk of

‘The historical context of the **original text**’ we might consider

- the political context in which it was produced
- the social context in which it was produced

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- the ways in which the text would have been transmitted, performed or read
- the biographical circumstances of the writer
- attitudes of readers or audiences at the time of first production

In this section, we will begin by looking at the Drama texts set for this component. Obviously, students are only studying **one** drama text for Section 2 of the Exam, but we will begin by looking at certain features of them all.

Task 1 - Looking at the Drama Texts

Using Resource 1, Student Chart (plus Teacher's Chart, 1a) which you can download from this page:

<http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/as-a-level-gce-english-literature-h072-h472-from-2015/>

(You will need a copy of each chart for each student, but do not distribute teacher's copy until the first activity is done.)

In this task a statement about the context of each of the proposed set texts is made under a number of headings. Can they match the text with its appropriate contexts?

Look carefully at the descriptors: can they find the remaining three characteristics of the text they are studying? With help, they might try to work out the characteristics of a number of the other texts, too.

Students' final decision

	A-E	a-e	1-5
Marlowe	E	e	3
Webster	D	c	2
Goldsmith	C	a	5
Wilde	B	b	1
Ibsen	A	d	4



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Development of this task: tendencies over time.

(Give students copies of the teacher's full chart for this discussion)

Discussion of lessons from the resource chart

Under each of the headings, certain patterns may be said to emerge. They have to do with the changing nature of the theatre, of its audience, and the changing social role of drama. These are simply openings for discussion.

Political

Initially looking at tyranny of kings, then (in *Malfi*) the corruption of the court, when we reach the middle-class commercial post-Restoration theatre (Goldsmith) the drama satirises manners and social behaviour. Wilde questions Nineteenth-century 'high society' hypocrisy, then Ibsen starts to question whether social organisation allows us to develop as individuals at all.

Social

The early Renaissance theatre in England offers spectacle and reflection to a very socially diverse audience - the audience of the popular theatres of Marlowe and Shakespeare. Webster's audience is becoming richer, more a sub-section of society - more literate, and more politically astute. After the Restoration, Goldsmith offers entertainment as a commodity, with a measure of self-reflective behavioural and social satire, but Wilde in the Nineteenth century asks 'polite society' whether it has the moral authority to accompany its power. Ibsen asks even more fundamental questions - about whether we have a society in which the individual can ever flourish or develop fully.

Theatrical

Beginning in socially diverse spectacle theatrical performance becomes more elitist in Webster's time, and more concerned to evoke moods of darkness and horror. The Restoration offers a commercial theatre with full realistic setting, concerned to offer what the audience want, and although by the Nineteenth century Wilde offers spectacle and wit, his intention seems subversive - a subversion exemplified at its most direct in Ibsen's *Doll's House*.

Authorial

Initially, writing for the theatre is not a particularly high-status activity: indeed, when the Bodleian Library in Oxford was founded, contemporary dramatic texts were not allowed on its shelves at all. By the eighteenth century a literature purely for entertainment included plays, though playwrights only became wealthy if their plays were popular. Our Nineteenth Century playwrights are both controversial: Wilde



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because he was such a prominent commentator, wit and arbiter of taste (and because his moral life was so unconventional) and Ibsen because he challenged so many of the assumptions of society.

Context also applies to criticism

As we read criticism of the set texts, we need to understand the context of criticism, since each critic lives in his or her own time and is influenced by assumptions of that time, each of these critics has to be seen as being influenced by a range of contexts, changing philosophical/intellectual attitudes, and changing methods of transmission (such as conventions of theatrical performance, or ways of writing/printing or producing texts).

Task 2 – Looking at the Poetry Texts

Using Resource 2, Student Chart

The second copy of the chart is largely blank to allow students to research for themselves: it is only expected that they would cover their set text. The completed boxes are to help act as a guide for their own comments.

The contrasts between the comments on dramatic texts and on poetry should spark reflection about different audiences and expectations over the two genres.

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The contrasts between the comments on dramatic texts and on poetry should spark reflection about different audiences and expectations over the two genres.

Some notes on the headings, for discussion

Political Context

Poetry seems less immediately likely to be political than drama, but Chaucer has a great deal to say about society and the church, and Milton is a political polemicist, a pamphleteer, as well as a poet. Coleridge and his fellow Romantics experimented with revolutionary social theories ('Pantisocracy'), and certainly *Maud* reveals much of Tennyson's unhappiness with the society in which he lived. Rossetti renounces 'worldly' love and chooses a religious pathway.

Social Context

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Chaucer's work seems to be written for an aristocratic audience: Milton assumes a high level of literacy in his audience, in terms of biblical knowledge and knowledge of classical literature. Coleridge is more concerned with exploring direct experience, whether it be a vision - as in the case of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* or his domestic situation, in the natural world. Tennyson is a "public artist" in the sense of a Laureate and, to an extent, an official voice of his age: Rossetti, the only woman on our list, is also the most introspectively religious of the poets.

Publishing Context

Chaucer's work seems to be intended both for performance - he is shown in a contemporary picture reading his poems to a courtly audience - and for private ownership. - he himself seems to have supervised the manuscript transcription of his poems. Early printed copies of the poems show they appealed to wealthy owners. Milton, in his epic poem, sees himself as heir both to biblical writers and to the poets of classical literature: there are many finely printed and illustrated editions of *Paradise Lost*. Coleridge was a compulsive, if erratic publisher, essayist and journalist, but found a growing market for verse. Tennyson's work was regarded as an essential part of the library of a 'reading' home, and a sign of sensibility for the aspirational Victorian reader. Rossetti's work was more reflective and private, but had a committed following.

Biographical context

Reading verse is, except in the case of Chaucer, who seems to have read aloud, an essentially reflective and private activity, practised by highly literate individuals. All highly educated, especially in classical literature, though economic uncertainty dogged the lives of Coleridge and Rossetti, and Milton's political activities and his blindness threatened his security after the Restoration. There has been speculation about the circumstances of Chaucer's death: Tennyson seems to have enjoyed the greatest security and popular acclaim.



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Resources

Resource 1 – Student Chart

Political Context	Social context	Theatrical Context	Biographical/ Authorial Context
<p>Marlowe's EDWARD II</p> <p>Written in a society interested in the spectacles of human weakness, and in politics and power, but in which these things are safer discussed as a 'historical' record - to discuss the behaviour of Monarchs publicly may well be dangerous</p>	<p>A picture of a society where respectability and legal responsibility create a sense of claustrophobia: middle-class concerns underly the sense of status being gained by painful hard work and moral correctness. Under this male-dominated surface lie real feelings and dilemmas which are never fully articulated: where individuals are never allowed to develop as individuals</p> <p>A</p>	<p>Performed in commercial theatres with realistic scenery representing specific places, which are described in some detail in the text. There is a sense of direct appeal to the audience's judgement, and that the success or failure of plays - whether they are a 'hit', really matters</p> <p>a</p>	<p>The author is a socialite and 'wit': fascinated by social behaviour and ingenious in using conversation to both reveal and hide motivation. Under the 'social' surface, though, lies a darker and deeper concern with hypocrisy and double standards: the author was arrested and imprisoned during the play's run, and the cast gave evidence against him</p> <p>1</p>



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Political Context	Social context	Theatrical Context	Biographical/ Authorial Context
<p>Webster's DUCHESS OF MALFI</p> <p>Written for and in a society fascinated by plotting and political intrigue, where Catholicism is regarded as dangerous (though some of the audience may be secret Catholics) and power is seen as corrupting: some aspects of the play <u>may</u> be felt to reflect aspects of contemporary court life, but are 'neutralised' by a Mediterranean setting</p>	<p>This audience values style and wit above almost everything: well-turned remarks, witty or cynical, are central to most characters' appeal. Under the surface, though, there are hints of dark secrecy and corruption, and a concern with the social role of women</p> <p>B</p>	<p>Highly realistic, elegant settings, reflecting the lives and tastes of the wealthy: a sense of display and self-conscious elegance reflected in interiors, manners, dress and language. High emotional tension, centering on revelations and dark secrets, gives a powerful shape to events</p> <p>b</p>	<p>The author is interested in power and corruption, and is inclined to shock. He enjoys the macabre. He looks hard at the human and personal implications of inherited power and wealth, and at the darker sides of family relationships. He seems to have been a lawyer by training. He represents Mediterranean countries as deeply corrupted</p> <p>2</p>



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Political Context	Social context	Theatrical Context	Biographical/ Authorial Context
<p>Goldsmith's SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER</p> <p>Written for a society in which the aristocracy and middle classes attend the theatre for fun: they are interested in polite (and impolite) social behaviour, and they enjoy the spectacle of human fallibility, and enjoy fun being made of idiosyncratic behaviour</p>	<p>Written to be enjoyed in a commercial theatre which is concerned with fashion and 'manners': highly alert to the distinctions of country and town, and with the social manners of each. This society is highly concerned with social status and income, and sees marriage as bound up in this</p> <p>C</p>	<p>Probably performed most often in smaller, private candlelit theatres before a middle-class and aristocratic audience, though perhaps also performed outdoors in the bigger playhouses: does not demand highly specific locations, though enclosed chambers, darkness and eavesdropping figure largely: a sense of the 'sinister' prevails</p> <p>c</p>	<p>The author writes tragedies and historical plays, based on recently published history books: he is a brilliant user of poetic rhythm, and is exploring new ways of looking at power and human motivation. He is interested in some aspects of sexual ambiguity: he is also suspected to have been a spy</p> <p>3</p>



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Political Context	Social context	Theatrical Context	Biographical/ Authorial Context
<p>Wilde's AN IDEAL HUSBAND</p> <p>Written in a society which has a highly developed sense of social style and manners: it is fascinated by social status and moral responsibility: power and wealth may be inherited or gained by other means. Concerned with appearances and reality: with the gap between peoples' professed views and their actual behaviour</p>	<p>Written to be seen by literate middle class and aristocratic audiences who may 'decode' references to contemporary political corruption: an audience which is well-read and interested by ideas of corruption and loyalty, and which finds 'dark passion' among 'the great' intriguing</p> <p>D</p>	<p>Highly realistic, spare staging, representing the precise social respectability and status of the protagonists: the smallest details of set design (letterboxes, furnishings) have a direct relationship to the plot</p> <p>d</p>	<p>The author was born into a respectable merchant family, but his father's financial ruin showed him, through his mother, womens' capacity for selfless suffering. His plays are often attacks on the moral values of the society in which he lived</p> <p>4</p>



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Political Context	Social context	Theatrical Context	Biographical/ Authorial Context
<p>Ibsen's A DOLL'S HOUSE</p> <p>Written in a society concerned, above all, with social status and respectability, and in which men hold all the power in the household and in society. A play which is likely to disturb audiences whose social world is reflected on the stage: a play designed to upset</p>	<p>Written to be received in a public theatre which admits people of all ranks: all members of audiences may not necessarily be able to read. The audience has a growing sense of its history, and of what it means to be 'English'</p> <p>E</p>	<p>Performed sometimes before a closed, select audience in private, but more often, quite spectacularly, on big, public open stages which are being built as the play is first performed. Contains some dramatic spectacle, some court scenes, and some intimate sequences. Deliberate cruelty figures in some scenes</p> <p>e</p>	<p>The author is concerned to write a comic play which will be a 'hit' - he is making fun of conceit, and looking at the ways in which 'town' and 'country' manners conflict. He is also benignly amused by the vagaries of human behaviour, especially the effects of embarrassment</p> <p>5</p>



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Students' final decision:

	A-E	a-e	1-5
Marlowe			
Webster			
Goldsmith			
Wilde			
Ibsen			



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Resource 1a – Teacher’s Chart

Political Context	Social context	Theatrical Context	Biographical/ Authorial Context
<p>Marlowe’s EDWARD II</p> <p>Written in a society interested in the spectacles of human weakness, and in politics and power, but in which these things are safer discussed as a ‘historical’ record - to discuss the behaviour of Monarchs publicly may well be dangerous</p>	<p>Written to be received in a public theatre which admits people of all ranks: all members of audiences may not necessarily be able to read. The audience has a growing sense of its history, and of what it means to be ‘English’</p>	<p>Performed sometimes before a closed, select audience in private, but more often, quite spectacularly, on big, public open stages which are being built as the play is first performed. Contains some dramatic spectacle, some court scenes, and some intimate sequences. Deliberate cruelty figures in some scenes</p>	<p>The author writes tragedies and historical plays, based on recently published history books: he is a brilliant user of poetic rhythm, and is exploring new ways of looking at power and human motivation. He is interested in some aspects of sexual ambiguity: he is also suspected to have been a spy</p>



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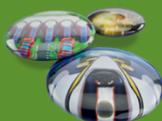
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Students' final decision

	A-E	a-e	1-5
Marlowe	E	e	3
Webster	D	c	2
Goldsmith	C	a	5
Wilde	B	b	1
Ibsen	A	d	4



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Resource 2, Student Chart

Political Context	Social context	Theatrical Context	Biographical/ Authorial Context
<p>Chaucer's 'Merchant's Prologue and Tale'</p> <p>Written to be read aloud in a courtly situation, this poem satirises and celebrates a complete cross section of the society of its time. Related by marriage to the Royal family and aristocracy, Chaucer is critical of some clergy, and reflects current 'new learning' being discovered in classical and renaissance literature.</p>		<p>Clearly valued from its first production, and initially circulated in manuscripts copied by individual illuminators known to Chaucer, some lavishly illuminated (the Hengest copy is in the National Library of Wales) this was one of the first texts to be printed, by William Caxton, and had a wide (if wealthy, and literate) audience.</p>	



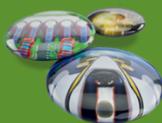
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Political Context	Social context	Theatrical Context	Biographical/ Authorial Context
Milton's 'Paradise Lost Books 9 and 10'	Written during a period of complete social and political upheaval by a man of great political influence (a pamphleteer and ambassador for the Commonwealth) who before the Commonwealth was known for plays as well as poems. The work seeks to provide a poetic justification for religious faith, to dramatise and humanise scripture, and to look at the damaging power of moral choice in human hands.		



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Political Context	Social context	Theatrical Context	Biographical/ Authorial Context
<p>Coleridge's 'Selected Poems'</p> <p>Classed as 'Romantic', Coleridge's verse is often philosophical, but is sometimes rooted in everyday life - the 'conversation poems' and touches on the philosophy of education and on the nature and effects of experience. Some of his work is politically and socially radical.</p>		<p>Coleridge wrote prolifically, as an instigator of (sometimes very ambitious) publishing schemes, initially in a publishing (though not writing) collaboration with Wordsworth. His verse is often either reflective, or visionary.</p>	



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Political Context	Social context	Theatrical Context	Biographical/ Authorial Context
Tennyson's 'Maud'			<p>The son of an upper middle-class Lincolnshire clerical family, Tennyson's poetic talent was recognised early. He went to Cambridge; where his friendship with A H Hallam was crucial to his alter work. He was overwhelmingly popular, and a major figure in Victorian society: created Poet Laureate and a peer, despite his sometimes strikingly unconventional views.</p>



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Political Context	Social context	Theatrical Context	Biographical/ Authorial Context
Rossetti 'Selected Poems'			Born into an artistic and quite unconventionally creative academic and artistic family, the increasing uncertainty and isolation of life after her father's death drew her to religion, which caused her to renounce close relationships, but to pursue religious and feminist themes.

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OCR Resources: *the small print*

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