



## From the A level Specification: Contexts of Media

In order to inform their study of the media, learners will develop knowledge and understanding of media products in relation to relevant key social, cultural, economic, political and historical contexts.

### Historical Contexts

- how genre conventions are historically relative and dynamic
- the effect of historical context on representations
- the relationship of recent technological change and media production, distribution and circulation
- the way in which different audience interpretations reflect historical circumstances.

### Social and Cultural Contexts

- how genre conventions are socially relative
- the effect of social and cultural context on representations
- how and why particular social groups, in a national and global context, may be underrepresented or misrepresented
- how audience responses to and interpretations of media products reflect social and cultural circumstances.

### Economic Context

- how media products relate to their economic contexts in terms of:
  - production, distribution and circulation in a global context
  - the significance of patterns of ownership and control
  - the significance of economic factors, including funding.

### Political Context

- how media products reflect the political contexts in which they are made through their representations, themes, values, messages and ideologies
- how media products reflect the political contexts in which they are made through aspects of their ownership and political orientation, production, distribution, marketing, regulation, circulation and audience consumption.



## Getting Started - What do these terms actually mean?

**5 Minute Task** - divide the class into pairs/threes and assign them a context to define - use the breakdown from the specification to help you.

What kind of events would be classified as....	
Historical	
Social and Cultural	
Economic	
Political	

## Two Key Ideas to Studying Contexts

- Nothing exists in a vacuum** - all media products are the result of all kinds of influences:
  - the **'creatives'** (writers, directors, producers, designers, performers) who have the original ideas;
  - the **institutions** that fund and distribute the product;
  - the **audiences** that are targeted by the product.
- Everything is connected** - all of the above are influenced by the events of the **historical** period they are living in.
  - creatives will be inspired by events and dominant ideologies in the **social** context they live in, and by other **cultural** (including media) products
  - institutions (whether commercial or public-service) will be influenced the **economic** context they are producing and distributing within
  - audience's values and beliefs (and hence what they enjoy and choose to consume) are strongly influenced by social, cultural and **political** factors.

So... when we look at representations of any social group (or place, or event) we must ask not just **how** are they being represented (i.e. what message or opinion is being conveyed) but also **why** they are being represented in this way (i.e. how have the contexts influenced these representations).



## Making Contexts Relevant

### 10 Minute Task

Ask students to reflect on a recent piece of creative work (or coursework) they have produced:

Direct Influence	How did their decisions influence the product?	How did other wider contexts influence these decisions?
<b>Creatives</b> - i.e. the student (s) who made the product	Overall aim?  Communicating personal values and beliefs?	<b>Cultural</b> - inspirations from other media  <b>Political</b> - responding to current affairs  <b>Social</b> - responding to collective values/beliefs
<b>Institutions</b> - i.e. the school/ college	Social / Religious / Ethnic mix of school  Limitations / opportunities created by technology	<b>Social / Cultural</b> - responding to what is 'mainstream' and 'alternative' in the school culture  <b>Economic</b> - responding to school budget constraints
<b>Audience</b> i.e. the exam board due to the requirements in the specification?	What did they want to include that wasn't allowed due to the rubrics in the specification?	Which context could you link this to? (e.g. <b>Political</b> - new OfQual regulations as part of government education policies)



## How To Use This Resource

The following resources are designed to be integrated into established schemes of learning.

The 'Decades' context sheets are intended to provide the following:

- a brief summary of how gender norms changed during a particular historical period
- 5 minute quickfire research into 'Historical' events - these tasks can be used as starter, development or plenary tasks
- 10 minute 'Cultural Context' tasks - finding out what non-set products were also popular at the time (good for independent/home learning activities)
- extension activities that develop the above and form links to audience, gender norm and wider contexts.

The 'Deep Analysis Sheets' are designed to use over a whole lesson and could be used to analyse the set products or students' own choice. They support students in:

- identifying and articulating ideas about character behaviour - and linking to media language (using the 'Gender Vocabulary' sheet)
- linking these representations to traditional and progressive gender norms (using the 'Traditional Gender Norms' sheet)
- linking these to historical, social and cultural, economic and political contexts .

The teacher copy of the 'Deep Analysis' sheet uses a clip from *E.T. the Extra-terrestrial* and the decade of the 1980s to model exemplar responses to the above.

## Using Ideology As A 'Doorway'

Contrasting the values and beliefs of people from other historical periods is a good way to introduce that period and to show how ideologies have developed (or not) over time. This can also be helpful in looking at **why** people are represented in a particular way at that time.



## Why gender?

As they begin to develop their identities, issues surrounding gender and sexuality become extremely relevant to young people. Plus, more obviously it's one of the key areas of representation to study in the specification.

A good starting point might be this:

*The World Health Organization (WHO) defines **gender norms** as “socially-constructed **roles**, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women”*

- What does WHO mean by the term “socially-constructed”?
- How does this definition differ from views on gender in the early 20th century?
- (or - what assumptions persist today about how men and women ‘naturally’ behave?)
- What does WHO mean by a “given society”?
- Can you think of different ways men and women behave in different societies? (e.g. the rights of women in Saudi Arabia compared to Western Europe)

**5 Minute Task** - Look at the ‘Gender Vocabulary’ sheet. Which of these would you class as masculine or feminine behaviours? Label them ‘f’ or ‘m’. What influenced your decisions?

**10 Minute Task** - watch this clip from the TV show *Mad Men*. Though made recently, it portrays American society in the early 1960s.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVI7-ufWR6I&t=1s> (from 1:02 - end)

- What strikes you as old-fashioned about the way (most) of the men and women behave?
- Why would this be considered inappropriate in today's workplace?

*(Note: if students are struggling with this, a focusing question like “How would you feel if your mother was treated this way at work?” may help make the issues more relevant)*

- How do you think the way men and women behave (or are expected to behave) has changed in the West since the early 1960s?