

1. Select

One character or topic / idea from the drama text you are studying. Choose several episodes from throughout the text which illustrate ways that the playwright presents this character or engages with this topic. See past papers for examples.

2. Context

AO3 requires you to “Demonstrate the significance and influence of the contexts in which texts are produced and received” and at Band 5 this means a “confident evaluation of impact of contextual factors in shaping the production and reception of key text and wider reading and a confident grasp of overview.”

Relevancy

When evaluating contextual factors, you must make sure that they are relevant not just to the text you are writing about, but to the question you are answering. Bland paragraphs detailing the biography of the playwright might be broadly relevant to a study of the whole text, but are rarely wholly relevant to the question focus. It is far better to focus on specific contextual details that have had a key role in shaping the treatment of that topic / character / idea in the text.

Range

You should try and discuss a wide range of contextual factors when considering the production of a drama text. It may be useful to consider the mnemonic PERSIA when preparing contextual material before an examination. P – Political. E – Economic. R – Religious. S – Society / Social attitudes. I – Individual (biographical). A – Artistic (literary genre). Biographical information is one feature of context, but you should look beyond just the life of the playwright when considering context.

Quality

A key aspect of the assessment objective descriptor for context is the need to consider how contextual factors have shaped the drama text. Comments on context should not then float freely around your essay – they need to be linked to and supported by quotations and evidence from the text itself. It is worth thinking of AO3 as wholly embedded to AO2 – analysis of writer’s techniques. Context should act like a mirror being held up to the text – it illuminates something within the text and reflects back on it.

Context for drama texts

Context can relate to factors in the making of a text, but it also can mean factors in the reception of a text. This gives you a great opportunity to engage with the drama text as a theatrical production. Stage history, directorial decisions on props and staging and costume, critical reception and audience reactions can all illuminate the contextual factors of how a text is or has been received. A word of caution, though: these comments on reception should still be relevant to the question and embedded within textual discussion.

3. Exercise

Try writing out some short paragraphs using context as the beginning of a response to your question. Write about your chosen character, topic / idea, also taking careful note of literary and linguistic features and their impact when looking at the drama text.

Do

- Give a very concise and brief summary of the key action in your extract, outlining the key contextual issues of production and reception.
- Use close linguistic analysis, using terms to show your understanding of the playwright’s style and techniques, making sure you use terms accurately and sensitively.
- Remember that this is a drama text which means it is for performance, so take account of staging.
- Select relevant contextual factors according to your chosen character, topic / idea.
- Attempt to use a range from PERSIA when considering context.
- Embed your contextual comments within close linguistic analysis.
- Take care with the quality of your written expression.

Don’t

- Present lengthy or redundant chunks of biographical context.
- Include irrelevant contextual information which does not shine a light on the idea / topic in focus.
- Make bland or sweeping generalisations about context. Comments like ‘it was very religious at the time’ or ‘women were victims’ are too broad and uninformed and need to be more specific and detailed.
- Just write about the text as if it is narrative prose – remember it is a text designed to be spoken and performed.
- Use terminology for the sake of it or descriptively. Always link it to meaning and inferences.