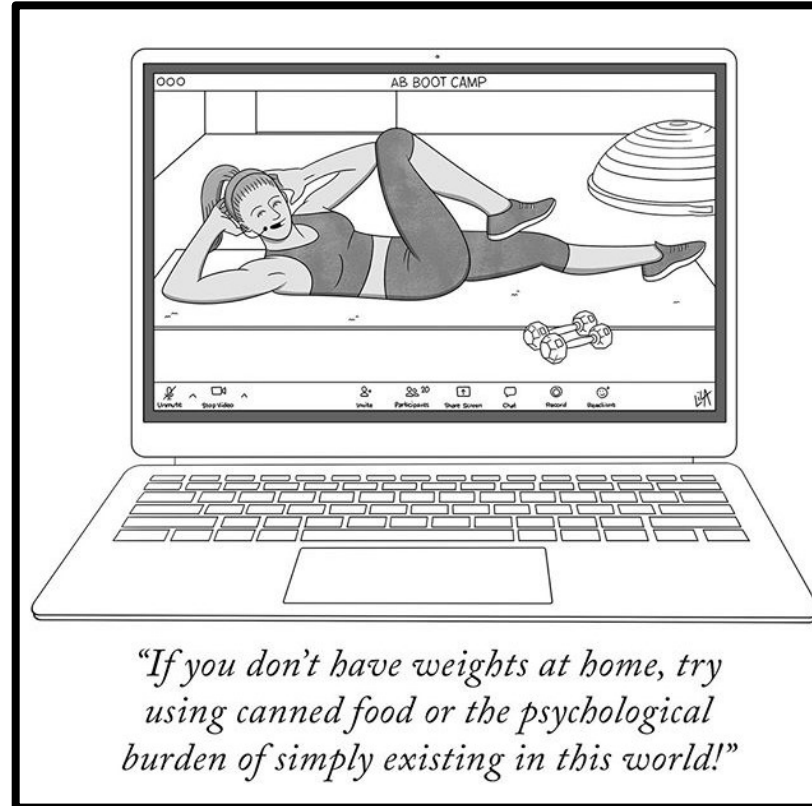


The REAL reason context is important

LO: Exploring the relevance of context and its impact on texts

Consider this cartoon taken out of *The New Yorker* in the April 2020 issue.

How does this cartoon reflect our world? What is the artist trying to show us about life in April 2020?



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At GCSE, you did examine the context surrounding the texts and it would even appear in your writing at times. (Lady Macbeth does indeed step out of her prescribed gender norm when she asks the spirit to 'take her milk for gall'. However, she certainly wasn't the first Shakespearean character to do so and women *did* hold positions of power in the 16th century eg Queen Elizabeth I, so perhaps her behaviour wasn't shocking; just atypical). **At A-Level, context is much more important.** There are papers where you almost exclusively discuss context. Say goodbye to analysing key quotes and say hello to exploring how texts are a reflection of the time periods in which they were written!



The REAL reason context is important

LO: Exploring the relevance of context and its impact on texts

Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,
To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.

Read the extract from *The Wasteland*. What are we meant to 'see'? What emotions seem to come out of the text? What is the tone?

from 'The Wasteland' by TS Eliot

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If you said that we're meant to 'see' a bunch of exhausted people, listlessly making their way through London, feeling a sense of despair and dissoluteness as they quietly shuffle their way along William Street to arrive at a church where they will inevitably find the absence of God, **then you are correct.**

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Now, though, let's consider some contextual information.

TS Eliot is a modernist and the poem you just read was written in 1922 London. Victorian England is now over. WWI is now over. London is in physical ruin. Thousands of people have died. Men have returned home to a place they barely recognise, to wives they haven't seen in years, and potentially to children they have never met. Many never returned at all. Mental and physical health have deteriorated due to the war. The economy is in ruin. The wealth gap is severe.

Industry continues to boom during this time period with more factories sprouting up, bringing along pollution; an increasing disconnection amongst mankind; and between man and his work.

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In what way(s) is this poem a reflection of its time period?

Why does Eliot present us with the images he does?

What insight does Eliot give us about his world?

from 'The Wasteland' by TS Eliot

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At A-Level, you will be asked to write about literature and NOT explore metaphors, semantic fields and verb clusters and similes. Instead, you will be asked to explore how a piece of writing is a reflection of its time. Try doing that now with this poem. Write a paragraph analysing this poem. Try to write 200-300 words. You should quote from the poem, of course, but do not analyse key quotes. Talk instead about what image(s) we're presented with and why Eliot presents us with those images.