

## Noticing Context in Your Texts

What do you notice about \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_?

- E.g. What do you notice about Christmas in *A Christmas Carol*?  
What do you notice about the portrayal of gentlemen in *Jekyll + Hyde*?  
What do you notice about the theme of power and democracy in *Lord of the Flies*?  
What do you notice about the portrayal of social class in *An Inspector Calls*?

You can use these question to help you explore your noticing task in depth:

What happens?
Who is involved?
What different perspectives are offered?
How is this aspect of the novel presented overall?
What morals or messages does the writer get across?
What themes or motifs attach to it?

## Noticing Context: Matching the Text to the Wider World

### What do you notice about Christmas in *A Christmas Carol*?

*How does the contextual information about Christmas that you have learned from Dickens' novel relate to any of the historical and social points below?*

By 1843, when the novel was published, the Industrial Revolution had transformed British society, breaking down old social structures, as people moved on a massive scale from the countryside to urban areas.

The first commercially available Christmas card was produced in 1843. It depicts three generations of a family sitting at a table and raising a toast. On either side it shows acts of charity, with food and clothing being given to the poor. Noticeably absent is any reference to Christianity.

With no safety net (social security, NHS) for those without money, many people relied on charity.

Working conditions in factories and mines were often very poor for workers, including children.

There were extremes of poverty and wealth in society; industrialisation led to a growing, prosperous middle class, living alongside the urban poor.

In 1798 economist Thomas Malthus published his theory that England would soon become overpopulated and unable to feed its people. He called the poor 'surplus' and believed that if people could not support themselves then they should be left to die. His theory was still taken seriously by some in 1843.

Many Christmas traditions that are still central to the festival today (gift-giving, tree, cards, turkey etc.) developed in the Victorian period. Dickens played a key role in popularising some of these traditions and Christmas as a whole.

Christmas had been an established part of the calendar in much of Europe long before the Victorian period. It marked the birth of Christ, but also drew on ancient pagan rituals. In medieval times it was celebrated over 12 days in the household of the local lord, bringing relief from the hardships of winter.

## Noticing Context: Matching the Text to the Wider World

### What do you notice about the portrayal of gentlemen in *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*?

*How does the contextual information about gentlemen that you have noticed in Stevenson's novel relate to any of the historical and social points below?*

The Victorian period was a time of great social change, with a new middle class who owed their wealth and power to success in business rather than through being born into the aristocracy. This led to debates about whether you could only be a 'gentleman' by birth, or whether you could become one by behaving in a certain way.

The period in which the novel was published saw a proliferation of guides about appropriate behaviour, suggesting people were anxious about appearing in the right way.

There were no safety nets (social services, NHS etc.) for people without money and class divisions in this period were clearly demarcated.

In 1886 the right to vote was still linked to property. Only men could vote and they had to either pay an annual rent of £10 or hold land valued at £10. This sounds like a tiny amount now, but millions of people would not qualify through this measure.

Gentlemen were, among other things, expected to be honest and dependable, to be restrained in their desires (emotional and sexual), financially secure, free from gossip and either aristocratic by birth or in a 'good' job (e.g. vicar, lawyer, doctor).

Sex was not spoken about openly; however, prostitution and pornography were still readily available in London when the novel was published, much of it based around Soho, in Central London.

Homosexuality was deeply disapproved of at the time, and became illegal in the year Stevenson was writing the novel. The law used to prosecute men engaging in homosexual activity was commonly referred to as the 'Blackmailer's Charter' because very little evidence was needed for a prosecution, so it was easy to extort money from people by threatening to 'out' them.

## Noticing Context: Matching the Text to the Wider World

### What do you notice about the theme of power and democracy in *Lord of the Flies*?

*How does the contextual information about the theme of power and democracy that you have noticed in Golding's novel relate to any of the historical and social points below?*

World War Two ended only a few years before the novel was published. This was a fight portrayed as being between the forces of democracy and of fascism.

In the West's narrative, the war was won by the forces of democracy. However, Russian Communist forces also played a huge part in this victory.

The use of the nuclear bomb by the United States against Japan played a part in the final victory.

Following World War Two there was a great deal of pride in British values and characteristics – seen at the time as things like quiet determination, rooting for the underdog and giving everyone a fair chance. There was also a great deal of pride in British Parliamentary democracy.

Some of the terrible things that happened during World War Two, particularly the Holocaust, led people to think about the human capacity for pure evil.

Schools in the 1950s were often run on harsh disciplinarian lines, with corporal punishment common.

Nuclear weapons were developing rapidly in the 1950s, leading to fears about the total destruction of the world.

The 1950s saw the start of the Cold War, with countries around the world broadly gathering in support of either America, or Russia, with their two very different systems of power: Capitalism and Communism.

## Noticing Context: Matching the Text to the Wider World

### What do you notice about the portrayal of social class in *An Inspector Calls*?

*How does the contextual information about the portrayal of social class that you have noticed in Priestley's play relate to any of the historical and social points below?*

*An Inspector Calls* was first performed in England in 1946, just after the end of World War Two. The war saw social class boundaries weaken as people from all backgrounds mixed in the armed forces and the rich saw much of their wealth eaten away by the war effort.

The play was set in 1912 towards the end of the Edwardian period, when there was a greater gap between the rich and poor than at any time in modern history.

There was a great deal of industrial unrest at the time when the play was set, with many strikes over low wages and rising prices.

Women did not have the vote at the time when the play was set.

Marriage between people from different social classes was frowned upon at the time when the play was set.

In 1946, just after the war, there was a strong feeling that the country needed to be restructured in a way that benefited everybody, rather than just the few. This period, for example, saw the introduction of the National Health Service and the beginning of the welfare state.

Working conditions were poor in many factories in 1912. Hundreds of people lost their lives in industrial accidents and there were few punishments under law for neglectful factory owners. Workers were expected to work much longer hours than they are today.

Most middle class households employed servants.