

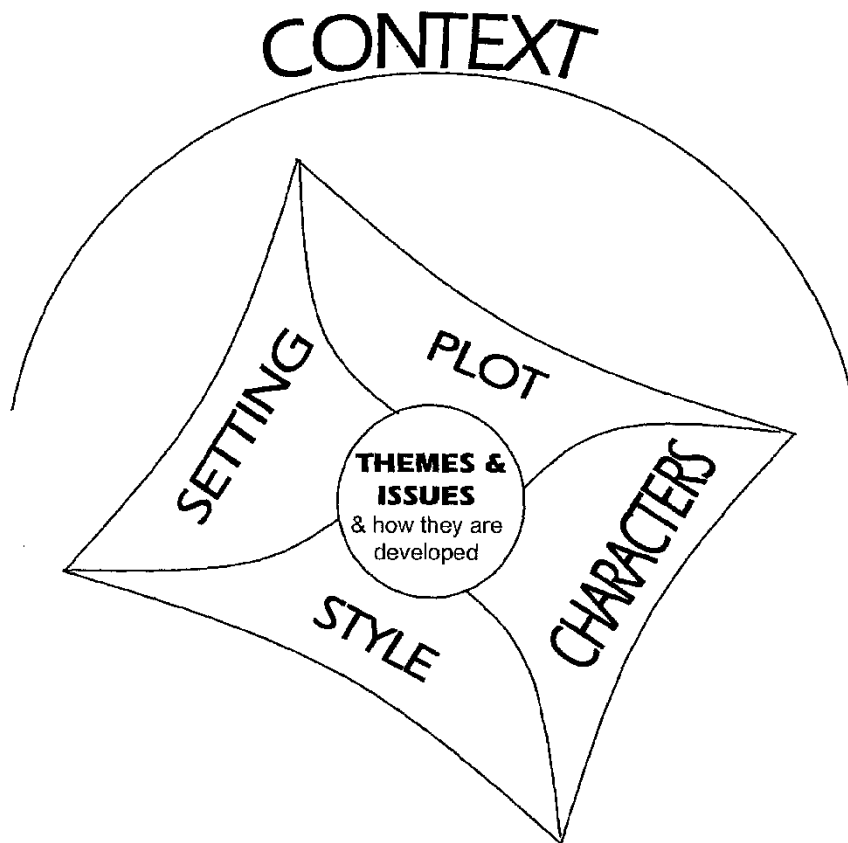
TEXT ELEMENTS

There are 5 key areas you need to consider when studying most literary texts. Understanding these areas; themes and issues, setting, plot, character, style and how they influence one another in the construction of the text helps develop your knowledge and appreciation of the text.

You need to be able to write about your text using these terms. The context acts like an umbrella over the key areas. Setting, plot, character and style all help to develop and explore theme. Not all these areas are always covered in every literary text e.g. a poem, unless it is a ballad might not necessarily contain plot.

Film as text section requires you to know: CINEMATIC TECHNIQUES & TERMS.

FIVE KEY AREAS + CONTEXT



These circumstances include:

- Political
- Social
- Educational
- Religious
- Family
- Cultural
- Influential people
- Work and travel experiences
- Economic factors

Knowing the context of a set text and the author before you read it provides you with an insight into:

- The background of the texts and the factors that influenced the construction of the text.
- Views and values of the author.

You also need to consider the actual context within the text.

Geographical location of story/cultural, political and social setting and how it affects the issues and development of the text.

For example:

The War Poems by Wilfred Owen were written as a result of the English poet's experiences of trench warfare in France between 1915 and 1918. Many of Owen's poems reflect the desolation and destruction of the French landscape with which he was so familiar as well as the carnage of war.

Brooklyn is a novel set in the 1950s. It contrasts two settings; a small town in Ireland and Brooklyn in the USA. It presents two different cultures.

THEMES AND ISSUES

The themes, issues and messages of a text are central to the purpose of the text. The writer, film-maker, playwright or poet selects and arranges material in the text to support and develop their themes. They can refer to the subject of the work.

These themes may be stated directly by a character or in the author's introduction or title. The film, *Gattaca*, explores issues of genetic perfection and conformity in a sterile futuristic setting.

Because readers have a variety of experiences and therefore interpret texts differently two people can read the same text and elicit different themes. Knowing the context of the text and the issues the author is interested in can provide the reader with central themes beforehand. You need to read the text closely in order to identify and track the development of themes. See next page for list of themes/issues.

THEMES/ISSUES IN TEXTS

Betrayal of friends and/or family.

Change vs continuity

Commitment

Conformity and individuality – one character standing alone.

Cultural conflict

God-made Vs man-made

Role of women in society

Effect of death on characters

Dependence vs independence

Family relationships – destruction of or building of

Fantasy vs reality

Gender

Honour among friends

Discovering identity of self

Jealousy vs trust

Man's justice vs god's justice

Loneliness

Power and politics

Racial prejudice

Religion effects family

Sexual Harassment in the workplace

SETTING

SETTING = TIME + PLACE

Setting refers to the time and the place including cultural, geographical and historical in which the text is set eg *All About Eve* is set in the socially conservative America in the 1950s.

The setting helps the reader visualise the characters in their environment and can create expectations and understanding about why characters behave as they do.

This is done more easily in plays and films where you can actually see the setting. When studying novels it is a good idea to draw labelled sketches of written, physical settings or arrange your classroom furniture where possible if the text is set indoors. The setting influences the characters and plot.

PLOT

The plot refers to the events of a text and their order. A plot usually contains some basic elements and these elements can occur in a variety of structures.

BASIC ELEMENTS OF PLOT

Action:	Introduction of key characters.
Exposition:	Background material provided so that reader feels knowledgeable about what is happening in text.
Conflict:	Argument, fight, dissatisfaction, unhappiness etc with another character. It can also be internal, e.g. character arguing with his conscience about something he has done or likely to do.
Complication:	When a character is suddenly confronted by an unexpected problem or unfortunate turn of events, e.g. sudden illness.
Resolution:	Coming to terms with problem either by self or with help of others, difficult choice has been made, e.g. friends helping you get over a death in the family.
Rising action:	Events that lead up to climax.
Climax:	The 'highest point' of a single action or story, the big moment preceding events seem to lead to, e.g. the death of a villain. There can be more than one climax in a plot.
Denouement:	The 'unknotting' – the events following the major climax. Sometimes this may occur only in the final scene.

STRUCTURE

The structure of the text is the order in which these events happen. This is deliberately planned to emphasise the message(s) in the most effective manner.

Possible structures include:

Chronological: Events arranged according to how they would occur in 'real time'.

Retrospective: Events arranged so story begins with final moment.

Flashbacks: Providing background information where necessary.

Traditional linear: Beginning, middle and end.

Complex/non-linear: Doesn't follow traditional linear.

Subplots may be parallel stories. They involve secondary characters and contain the same basic elements of plot that the main plot does.

CHARACTERS

Characters are persons or creatures that do and say things in text. They help communicate the author's messages and point of view and help develop themes through their actions, thoughts, feelings, descriptions and dialogue.

Character types you should know include:

Protagonist: Most important character, usually hero, in a drama (play, film) or narrative (story).

Antagonist: Name given to describe character that is in opposition to hero (protagonist) in a drama or narrative.

For the difference between **Characterisation** and **Character development** see the Film section.

STYLE

Style is made up of the following elements and they all influence one another.

- Language.
- Tone.
- Form and genre.
- Point of view = Whose voice? Narrator. Authorial voice.

LANGUAGE

The intended audience and purpose of the text influence the author's style by determining the choice of language needed to suit the audience so that it understands the purpose and messages conveyed.

Authors can choose to use colloquial, jargon, personal, formal language depending on their audience and purpose. To make their characters convincing they choose language people from that time would have spoken. They incorporate symbols.

Wuthering Heights

'Mr. Heathcliff?' I said.
A nod was the answer.

'Mr. Lockwood, your new tenant, sir. I do myself the honour of calling as soon as possible after my arrival, to express the hope that I have not inconvenienced you by my perseverance in soliciting the occupation of Thrushcross Grange: I heard yesterday you had had some thoughts—

'Thrushcross Grange is my own, sir,' he interrupted, wincing. 'I should not allow any one to inconvenience me, if I could hinder it—walk in!'

The 'walk in' was uttered with closed teeth, and expressed the sentiment, 'Go to the Deuce:' even the gate over which he leant manifested no sympathising movement to the words; and I think that circumstance determined me to accept the invitation: I felt interested in a man who seemed more exaggeratedly reserved than myself.

TONE

Tone indicates the author's attitude towards his subject matter including characters, themes, institutions, etc. Tone is a characteristic of voice. In plays and films this can be demonstrated by changes in an actor's voice and manner. In writing the author uses language to indicate tone.

Adjectives to describe tone:

Curious, joyful, cautious, regretful, guilty, thoughtful, aggressive,
positive, negative, fearful, bored, shocked.

POINT OF VIEW

Point of view is the perspective from which a text is seen or told. You need to ask yourself, 'who is telling the story?'

Three principal points of view most commonly used are:

- The first person narrator in which the point of view is solely that of the character telling the story.

They may be a central or minor character who either observes or participates in the action.

A first person narrator cannot see into the minds of the other characters. This device significantly reduces the reader's sense of author's presence in the text.

- The point of view of a single character who is used by the author as a central observer or participant in the action (third person narrative).
- The omniscient (godlike) point of view enables the writer to present the inner thoughts and feelings of his characters. The narrator has no part in story e.g. *Ransom*.

CONVENTIONS, TERMS AND FEATURES

Conventions are the customary practices concerning form, structure and language that people expect when reading or watching a text.

For example:

A play will be structured using scenes and stage directions and when it is performed there will also be dramatic features like projected voices of actors, asides in Shakespeare when one character speaks and the other characters act as if they don't hear him.

Knowing the guidelines for conventions makes it easier to follow and understand a text.

NOVELS

Novels are written in prose and are narratives (tell a story). They are usually divided into parts and/or chapters. Novels can be structured in a variety of ways and be told from different points of view.

PLAYS

Plays are no more difficult or easy to study than novels, poems etc. As long as you realise that a play needs to be studied as both an aural and visual form, and are familiar with dramatic conventions used in plays you will have no trouble.

One of the most important things to remember when you are studying a play is the form and staging devices that are part of style. You need to pay attention to discussing the **form** (dramatic techniques) and not just the **narrative** (story).

KEY FEATURES AND TERMS OF PLAYS

FEATURES

Set:	Stage on which play is performed featuring furniture, etc., real or imaginary walls.
Stage picture:	How set plus actors look at any one instant, e.g. like a photograph at a point in the play.
Stage action:	Where and how characters move around and on and off set, how they move in relation to one another.
Stage directions:	Directions for actors, written italics and often in brackets.
Dialogue:	Words spoken by actors.
Stage property:	Large objects like furniture that remain where they are for a scene or whole play.
Hand props:	Items used by actors in performance that can be carried around, e.g. hairbrush, gun, glass etc.
Lighting:	Highlighting used to focus attention on one character, stage feature or even help scene changes by darkening all or part of set.
Costume:	Clothing worn by actors.
Sound effects:	Pre-recorded (e.g. traffic noise) or immediate (e.g. glass breaking).
Voice:	Volume, Intonation, Pausing, Pace, Pitch, Emphasis/repetition.