

# Macbeth: William Shakespeare

## The Context

Are my actions disrupting 'The Great Chain of Being'?

What would the audience expect from me as a king?

Would King James I enjoyed my downfall?

Which circumstances led to my rise in power?

How would a typical hero be expected to behave?

Why did I follow the witches instead of my conscience?

Could different members of the audience view my decisions differently?



# **‘Questions of the Day’**

**By the end of this lesson, you should be able to answer the following questions:**

**QOTD1: What is context?**

**QOTD2: What context is relevant when analysing ‘Macbeth’?**

**QOTD3: How do I discuss context in an exam answer?**

What is context?

M A C B E T H



**Which of the following is a definition of the word 'context'? Write the correct definition.**

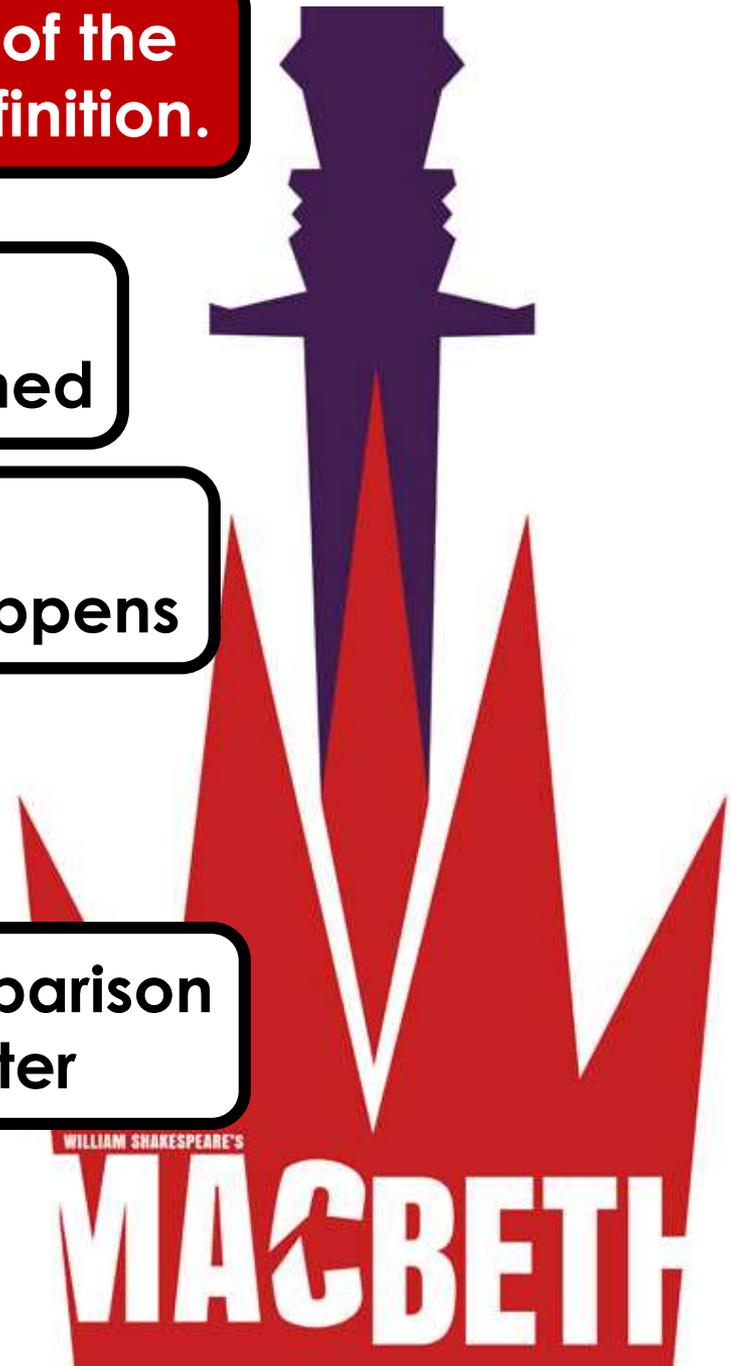
**Context is a synonym of history – it means to look back at what happened**

**Context helps us to understand the circumstances of something that happens**

**Context is related to the structure of an entire text**

**Context can be defined as the comparison of two or more texts by the same writer**

**Context is when someone collects a range of evidence for analysis**



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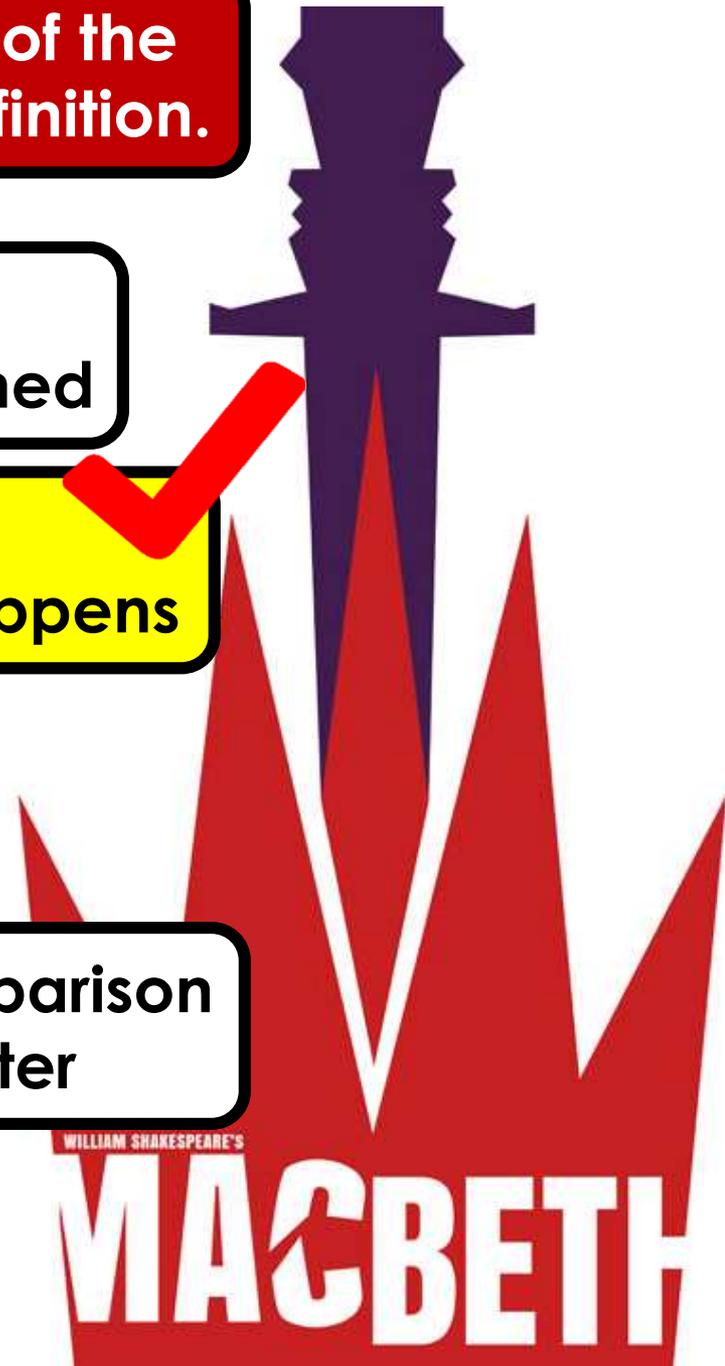
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About 1,180,000,000 results (0.35 seconds)

## Dictionary



# context

*/ˈkɒntɛkst/*

*noun*

the circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood.

"the proposals need to be considered in the context of new European directives"

Similar:

circumstances

conditions

surroundings

factors

state of affairs



- the parts of something written or spoken that immediately precede and follow a word or passage and clarify its meaning.

"skilled readers use context to construct meaning from words as they are read"



Translations, word origin and more definitions



**WHAT THE EXAMINERS SAY**



# This is what AQA would like to see from students that get the highest grades!

<b>Level 6</b>  <b>Convincing, critical analysis and exploration</b>  <b>26–30 marks</b>	<b>Critical, exploratory, conceptualised response to task and whole text</b>
	<b>Judicious use of precise references to support interpretation(s)</b>
	<b>Analysis of writer's methods with subject terminology used judiciously</b>
	<b>Exploration of effects of writer's methods to create meanings</b>
	<b>Exploration of ideas/perspectives/contextual factors shown by specific, detailed links between context/text/task</b>



# This is how AQA would mark the work of students in terms of context...

Level 6 Context	<b><u>Exploration</u> of ideas/perspectives/contextual factors shown by specific, detailed links between context/text/task</b>
Level 5 Context	<b><u>Thoughtful consideration</u> of ideas/perspectives/contextual factors shown by examination of detailed links between context/text/task</b>
Level 4 Context	<b><u>Clear understanding</u> of ideas/perspectives/contextual factors shown by specific links between context/text/task</b>
Level 3 Context	<b><u>Some understanding</u> of implicit ideas/perspectives/contextual factors shown by links between context/text/task</b>
Level 2 Context	<b><u>Some awareness</u> of implicit ideas/contextual factors</b>
Level 1 Context	<b><u>Simple comment</u> on explicit ideas/contextual factors</b>



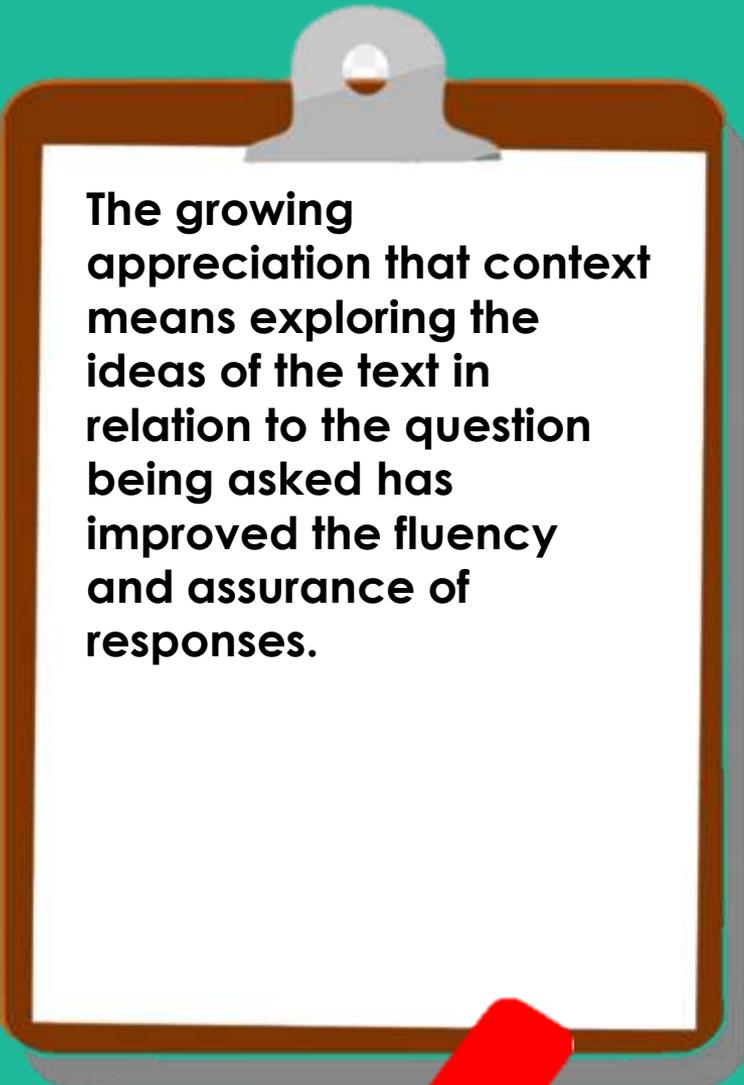
**“The idea of context as a relationship between the text and the reader remains a relevant way of considering context.” AQA**

**“Demonstrate understanding of context through the text itself rather than ‘bolting-on’ social and historical factors from the period in which the text was written.” AQA**

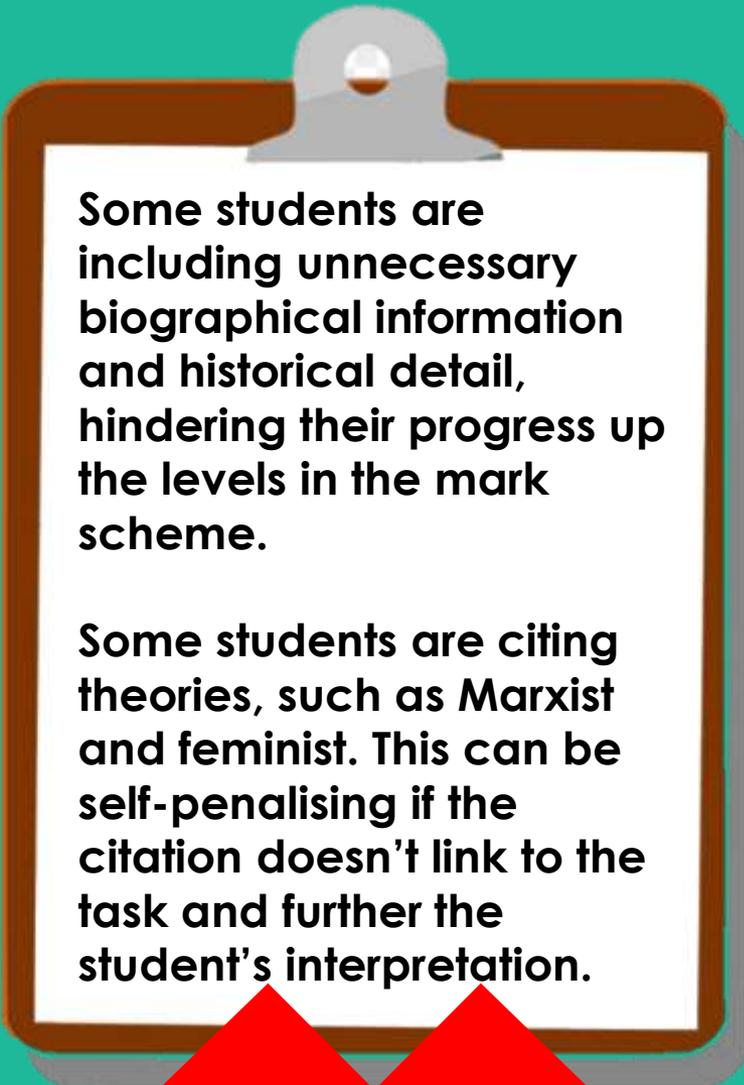
**“The mark scheme highlights the need for students to relate their comments on context to the text.” AQA**

**“Avoid making generalised comments about ‘all people in that time’, ‘everyone believed in’, and so on.” AQA**



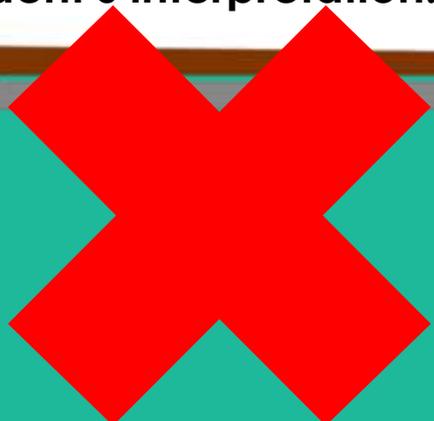


The growing appreciation that context means exploring the ideas of the text in relation to the question being asked has improved the fluency and assurance of responses.



Some students are including unnecessary biographical information and historical detail, hindering their progress up the levels in the mark scheme.

Some students are citing theories, such as Marxist and feminist. This can be self-penalising if the citation doesn't link to the task and further the student's interpretation.



What context is relevant when analysing 'Macbeth'?

M A C B E T H



**SOCIAL**

**HISTORICAL**

**BIOGRAPHICAL**

**TEXTUAL**

# **SOCIAL**

## **'The Great Chain of Being'**

It was believed that God had set out an order for everything in the universe. This was a social order where God chose where you belonged in the chain. From God at the top to plants and minerals at the bottom, this was seen as the natural order.

This order was also related to spirits, and so humans were seen as in the middle of the chain. The human order was therefore ordered, from Kings and Queens at the top to peasants at the bottom.



Answer the questions below after reading the social context on the left.

1. What is 'The Great Chain of Being'?
2. Does it exist in the play 'Macbeth'?
3. Is there anyone or anything that disrupts this in the play?
4. Are there any moments in the play that seem relevant to The Great Chain of Being?

# HISTORICAL

## King James I

- Play was staged during the Jacobean era (when King James I was the king of England)
- The 'Gunpowder Plot' aimed to kill King James I – he felt vulnerable as a king
- Many questioned his legitimacy to be the king – he was the first king to reign over the whole of the British Isles
- He was a patron for Shakespeare's theatre company, meaning he would have influenced the play
- He tried to prove witchcraft existed and even wrote a book about it (Daemonologie)



Answer the questions below after reading the historical context on the left.

1. Are there any similarities between King James I and Macbeth?
2. What messages and ideas from the play would have pleased King James I?
3. What would King James I have felt about the Three Witches?
4. Are there any moments from the play where it might be useful to discuss King James I?

# BIOGRAPHICAL

## William Shakespeare



- Some of the most dominant themes in his plays were war, love, madness and power
- His early plays were mainly comedies and histories, before moving into the 17<sup>th</sup> Century by writing tragedies: Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Othello and King Lear
- Often used blank verse in his plays (unrhymed lines but following a pattern of syllables per line) – this was almost always in iambic pentameter (five pairs of syllables per line, where every second syllable would be stressed)

Answer the questions below after reading the biographical context on the left.

1. Does the play 'Macbeth' seem to link with his other plays in terms of the dominant themes in his work?
2. Why is 'Macbeth' seen as a tragedy and not a comedy?
3. What do you think the characters Macbeth, Othello, King Lear and Hamlet all have in common?
4. Why do you think Shakespeare wanted to write in blank verse?

# TEXTUAL

## Macbeth – The Play

This is not about the external contexts of the play (Shakespeare as a playwright, King James I, etc.) – textual contexts are in the play.

Remember – context means the circumstances that lead to something happening and help us to understand why it happens.

For this, you will need to discuss the play itself: what led to key situations in the play and how they influence other moments...



Answer the questions below about some of the textual contexts in the play:

1. What can be argued as the main catalyst for Macbeth's desire to become king?
2. Would the character of Macbeth be classed as a hero, a tragic hero or a villain?
3. Why would different members of the audience view Macbeth's decisions in different ways?
4. Why does Macbeth choose to have Banquo murdered?

How do I discuss  
context in an  
exam answer?

M A C B E T H



Which of the following uses the word 'context' correctly in a sentence? Write the correct ones.

In the context of Macbeth's actions throughout the play, we are perhaps more sympathetic to Lady Macbeth.

An audience in a modern context may view Lady Macbeth's character differently to an audience of the Jacobean era when Macbeth was staged as a play.

It is relevant to context Macbeth with other plays by Shakespeare, such as 'Hamlet' and 'Othello'.

Shakespeare's close friendship with King James I provides context for the way in which Macbeth is portrayed.

Shakespeare uses context as a language feature to describe the inevitable downfall of power in the play.

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# FINAL TIPS ABOUT CONTEXT

ONLY IF IT IS RELEVANT

DISCUSS CONTEXT IN THE PLAY

DISCUSS THE EXTERNAL CONTEXTS

EXPLAIN WHY IT IS RELEVANT

# Practice Question

M A C B E T H



Read the following extract from Act 3, Scene 1 and answer the coloured questions.

In this scene, Macbeth is alone on stage. He is now king and thinking about the witches, their prophecies and Banquo.



*He chid the sisters  
When first they put the name of king upon me  
And bade them speak to him. Then, prophetlike,  
They hailed him father to a line of kings.  
Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown  
And put a barren scepter in my grip,  
Thence to be wrenched with an unlineal hand,  
No son of mine succeeding. If 't be so,  
For Banquo's issue have I filed my mind;  
For them the gracious Duncan have I murdered;  
Put rancors in the vessel of my peace  
Only for them; and mine eternal jewel  
Given to the common enemy of man,  
To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings!  
Rather than so, come fate into the list,  
And champion me to th' utterance.*

How does Shakespeare present ambition in this scene?

Which evidence from this scene is relevant to your argument?

What methods have been used by Shakespeare in this scene?

What does the evidence suggest about ambition in this scene?

What context is relevant when considering this scene and why?

What were the

**You should now be able to answer the 'Questions of the Day'!**

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How would a typical hero be seen?

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