EXPLORING CONTEXT: POST READING ACTIVITY

In your formative essay, you are being asked to explore how context influences the reception of a text. Read over this information, to have a clear understanding of the ways context may be applied to a text. Only use the questions or suggestions that relate to your specific essay.

PERSONAL CONTEXT

**Personal context** is derived from an individual's understanding of him/herself and his/her environment. This understanding is influenced by gender, values, beliefs, cultural background, life experiences or state of mind. Good readers apply personal context when reading in order to gain a deeper understanding of an author’s connotative messages. So, readers connect elements of the text (imagery, symbols, characters, setting, allusions, etc) to elements of themselves and their life experiences in order to better understand and relate to the author’s messages.

Questions you might consider asking to help you apply personal context to a text:

- What personal connections do you have with the author’s theme (has this theme or elements of this theme arisen in your personal life - how did this make your feel - why)?
- In what ways are the author’s literary references clearer because of personal (text to self) connections you are able to make? Does this personal connection make the symbol, character, or allusion more impactful and therefore make the theme clear and valuable?
- Are there any elements of the text which challenged you? Were you forced outside your comfort zone? How did this influence the text’s value and your understanding of the theme?
- What do you like/dislike about how the composer affirms or challenges personal assumptions about cultures, politics, society? Why does your personal context influence your perception of the text’s value?

AUTHORIAL CONTEXT

In **understanding the author's biography**, especially the life experiences and context surrounding the writing of the text in question, a reader can gain a deeper understanding of the author’s intended theme and the various connotative messages found in symbolism, allusions, characterisation, etc. Please read over the authorial context from the pre-reading activities in your notebook and on the class website, and read the email below that was written by Mary Rachel Brown regarding *Australian Gothic*. Reflect on how knowing this information influenced your ability to make inferences about symbols, characters, allusions and theme.

“Thank you for choosing to look at *Australia Gothic*. Unlike my other plays 'Australia Gothic' was never produced, which is when plays usually gather and generate resources. [ However, it was the winner of the 2006 Griffin Theatre Award and winner of the 2006 Max Afford Award and is included as a reading at the National Play Festival Showcase 2018].

I wrote the play in response to Australia's changing National security laws and events such as the wrongful arrest of Mohamed Haneef. There are no easy answers on how to navigate the balance between National security and civil liberties, and this is what prompted me to write the play. I was also living in Berlin at the time I wrote the play, and from memory I drew some parallels with the Satsi. I remember being inspired by Anna Funda's book 'Satsiland'. In terms of the content that relates to the Stasi, the film 'The lives of Others' and 'Goodbye Lenin' might be interesting for your students to look at.
I am sorry I have no resources to offer you. My play 'The Dapto Chaser' has an education pack and is about to have a cinema release, on the 28th of August. It is about gambling and generational poverty.

The title was a nod East Germany and the meaning of the word gothic - ‘Germanic people. Goths or Gothic people, the ethnonym of a group of East Germanic tribes. Gothic language, an extinct East Germanic language, spoken by the Goths. Crimean Gothic, the Gothic language spoken by the Crimean Goths. Gothic alphabet, one of the alphabets used to write the Gothic language’.

Possibly a bit of a stretch but Gothic congers up dark and old imagery to me, it seems both an old and dark place we return to every time we sideswipe civil liberties in the name of national security.

For me Gothic congers up what hides in the shadows, which I thought was a nice metaphoric fit for the play.

In terms of titles, I love a contradiction, Australian and gothic seem contradictory and a curious match, I liked that.

I hope this assists.

Cheers, Mary”

CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

As a class, we researched the time in which (and about which) the play was written. Since this is a contemporary text, there are many contemporary allusions made. Making connections between the allusions, characters, symbols, etc. and current events, beliefs, values in contemporary society helps a reader gain a deeper understanding of the author’s message (theme). Consider the following questions to understand how contemporary context is explored:

- How does the composer affirm or challenge modern cultural, political, social assumptions?
- How is the text received by a modern audience? (For example, Australian Gothic won awards for literary merit but has not been produced on stage for a live audience - what does this tell a reader about its reception and literary value?)
- How does the composer give insight into a contemporary worldview? How could this new insight influence a contemporary audience’s appreciation of the text?
- How does knowing the above information help a reader better understand the author’s connotative messages?

HISTORIC CONTEXT

There are many historic allusions made throughout Australian Gothic. Researching these allusions to understand the historic context deepens a reader’s understanding of the theme and connotations in the symbols and characters.