Context Changes Meaning

Use setting, history, and values to interpret a letter.

12.P.ST.1 "Context: Develop and apply knowledge of key components of context such as background information, geographic location, cultural influences, time period, and contemporary events when interpreting and constructing texts."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details that establish place or time, circle references to public events, and write 1 beside a family or cultural value. Use your marks to track how context changes the letter's meaning.

A Letter from the Dust Bowl

1. In April 1935, Elena Ruiz writes in her family's kitchen near Boise City, Oklahoma, after another black dust storm. Wheat once supported many farms on the southern Plains, but drought and loose, heavily plowed soil now blow across fields and roads. Her father folds a newspaper report about federal soil-conservation projects. Elena's description of dust "finding every crack" is not simply dramatic weather. It records how environmental damage has entered ordinary domestic life.

2. Her letter is addressed to an aunt in Los Angeles, where jobs in film studios and factories seem imaginable from afar. Elena does not promise that her family will leave. Instead, she notes that neighbors debate heading west, while her grandmother insists that land carries family memory. This disagreement reflects more than a practical choice. Migration during the Depression could offer work, yet it could also challenge attachments to place, kinship, and a farming identity.

3. Elena closes with a request: send a map showing the route to California and news of relatives there. For a modern reader, the request may sound like a travel plan. In 1935, however, it suggests limited information, uncertain employment, and a decision shaped by national economic crisis. The letter's setting, date, public events, and family values change its meaning. Reading those details together prevents us from treating Elena's words as private feelings alone.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What place and time frame Elena's letter?

2. Which background conditions make Elena's description of dust more than dramatic weather?

3. What family value shapes the grandmother's view of leaving?

4. Why does Elena's request for a map mean more than planning a trip?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write exactly three sentences introducing a fictional letter from a historical moment other than the Dust Bowl. Include a date and place, a contemporary event or background condition, and a family or cultural influence, then explain how one detail changes the letter's meaning.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 12 · 12.P.ST.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline details that establish place or time, circle references to public events, and write 1 beside a family or cultural value. Use your marks to track how context changes the letter's meaning. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What place and time frame Elena's letter?	**Near Boise City, Oklahoma, on the southern Plains, in April 1935.**
2	Which background conditions make Elena's description of dust more than dramatic weather?	**Drought and loose, heavily plowed soil caused dust to blow across farms, roads, and homes.**
3	What family value shapes the grandmother's view of leaving?	**She believes the land carries family memory, showing attachment to place and kinship.**
4	Why does Elena's request for a map mean more than planning a trip?	**It reflects limited information, uncertain jobs, and choices shaped by the Great Depression.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

On June 25, 1948, Mara writes from West Berlin, a city surrounded by the Soviet occupation zone. As the Berlin Blockade begins, her family's custom of sharing food with neighbors shapes her worry about supplies. Knowing the city's isolation shows that her request for flour responds to an international crisis.

Accept equivalent evidence-based wording for the four questions. For the open task, look for all required context elements and a clear explanation of how context affects interpretation.