Messages in Motion

Track how time, place, and audience shape a text's meaning.

8.P.ST.1.c "Explore how context shapes the author's decisions and the audience's responses during the interpretation and construction of texts. (I/C)"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details about the poster's original 1943 context, circle two design choices Miller made, and number two details that show how later viewers responded. These marks will help you connect context to an author's choices and an audience's interpretation.

A Poster Changes Meaning

1 In 1943, artist J. Howard Miller designed the "We Can Do It!" poster for Westinghouse Electric. The United States was fighting in World War II, and factories needed steady production. Westinghouse displayed the poster for about two weeks inside some of its plants. Its first audience was company workers, including many women doing industrial jobs while many men served in the military. The poster was not a national campaign to recruit women. It was a workplace message meant to support morale and output.

2 Miller's choices fit that setting. He used a brief command that workers could read quickly, along with a figure in a work shirt raising her arm. Her rolled sleeve suggests strength and readiness for factory work. The red, white, and blue colors connect the message to wartime patriotism. These choices could help workers see their labor as important to the war effort. Because the poster hung at work, its direct tone also matched a company's goal of keeping production moving.

3 Decades later, the poster reached a different audience. It was widely reproduced during the 1980s and became associated with feminist activism and women's empowerment. Many later viewers focused on the worker's confident pose and read "We Can Do It!" as a message that women could claim power in many parts of life. That response differs from the poster's original workplace purpose. The words and image stayed the same, but a new historical context led audiences to give them a broader meaning.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Who was the poster's original audience, and what was its immediate purpose?

2. Identify two choices Miller made in the poster. Explain how each choice fit the 1943 workplace context.

3. How did many viewers in the 1980s interpret the poster differently from its original workplace audience?

4. Use evidence from the passage to explain how the poster could have the same words and image but a broader meaning later.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Plan a poster for a real school situation, such as a heat wave, a book drive, or a new-student orientation. Write 3 to 5 sentences that name your audience and context, describe two design or word choices, and predict how that audience will respond.

ANSWER KEY

Messages in Motion

GRADE 8 · 8.P.ST.1.c

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline details about the poster's original 1943 context, circle two design choices Miller made, and number two details that show how later viewers responded. These marks will help you connect context to an author's choices and an audience's interpretation. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Who was the poster's original audience, and what was its immediate purpose?	**Its original audience was Westinghouse plant workers. Its purpose was to support morale and keep wartime factory production moving.**
2	Identify two choices Miller made in the poster. Explain how each choice fit the 1943 workplace context.	**He used a short command so workers could read it quickly, and he showed a worker with a rolled sleeve and raised arm to suggest strength and readiness for factory work. The patriotic colors also connected factory labor to the war effort.**
3	How did many viewers in the 1980s interpret the poster differently from its original workplace audience?	**Many 1980s viewers saw it as a feminist message about women claiming power, rather than as a company message meant to support workers and production.**
4	Use evidence from the passage to explain how the poster could have the same words and image but a broader meaning later.	**The poster was first displayed briefly inside Westinghouse plants during World War II, but it was widely reproduced in the 1980s for a different audience. Later viewers focused on the confident worker and connected the image to women's empowerment.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At the start of a heat wave, I would make a poster for students who walk home. It would say "Fill Your Bottle Before the Bell" in large blue letters. I would add a picture of a water bottle beside a shaded tree to make the advice quick to notice. Students would understand that the poster is about staying safe in hot weather and may bring water or use a refill station.

Accept equivalent evidence-based explanations that connect the original wartime workplace context to Miller's choices and contrast it with the later feminist interpretation. For Part 3, accept varied school situations if the response clearly names an audience, context, two choices, and a likely response.