Context Shapes Voice

How time, place, and events guide a narrator's account.

8.T.C.2.c "Analyze the impact of background information and context (e.g., geography, location, era, historical happenings) on text development. (I)"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details that reveal the place, time, or historical events in the passage. In the margin, number three places where that background changes what the narrator notices, says, or includes.

A Marcher's Account

(1) On August 28, 1963, I stepped off the bus near the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. Our group had traveled overnight from Birmingham, Alabama, where segregation controlled many public places. Around us, people carried signs asking for jobs and freedom. The wide lawn filled with families, students, clergy members, and workers. Because the march took place at the nation's capital, I kept looking from the memorial toward the Capitol dome. The buildings made our request feel like a message aimed at the federal government.

(2) Earlier that year, television viewers had seen Birmingham police use dogs and high-pressure fire hoses against civil rights demonstrators. That recent violence shaped the mood of our day. Volunteers passed out water and asked everyone to stay calm as the August heat rose. When singers and speakers began, I noticed how often they used the words "freedom" and "dignity." Their repeated language answered the injustice we had witnessed. I wrote down those words instead of describing the food stands or bus ride, because the march's urgent history guided what seemed important.

(3) When Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke from the memorial steps, the crowd listened closely. His call for equal rights connected the speakers' hopes to the laws and decisions made in Washington. I did not know how quickly change would come, but I believed the day could press leaders to act. On the bus home, I began my account with the Capitol and ended with the crowd's quiet determination. The location and the moment in the civil rights movement shaped my account into a public appeal, not a private travel story.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the narrator's background in Birmingham affect the meaning of the march's signs?

2. Why does the narrator focus on the Capitol dome and the federal government?

3. How do the earlier events in Birmingham affect what the narrator includes in the second paragraph?

4. How do the location and historical moment shape the way the narrator organizes the account?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 3- to 4-sentence first-person account of a different historical event. Include at least two details about the place, era, or event, and show how those details shape what the speaker notices or wants readers to understand.

ANSWER KEY

Context Shapes Voice

GRADE 8 · 8.T.C.2.c

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline details that reveal the place, time, or historical events in the passage. In the margin, number three places where that background changes what the narrator notices, says, or includes. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the narrator's background in Birmingham affect the meaning of the march's signs?	**Because the narrator has lived where segregation controlled public places, the signs asking for jobs and freedom seem like an urgent response to injustice.**
2	Why does the narrator focus on the Capitol dome and the federal government?	**The march is taking place in Washington, D.C., the nation's capital, so the narrator sees the protest as a message to national leaders.**
3	How do the earlier events in Birmingham affect what the narrator includes in the second paragraph?	**The violence against demonstrators makes the narrator emphasize calm, dignity, freedom, and the urgent purpose of the march instead of smaller travel details.**
4	How do the location and historical moment shape the way the narrator organizes the account?	**The narrator begins with the Capitol and ends with the crowd's determination to present the march as a public appeal for action, not as a personal trip.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

On July 20, 1969, I watched a small television in my Chicago apartment as Apollo 11 neared the Moon. Because the United States and Soviet Union were competing in the Space Race, I listened for every update and wrote about the mission as a national test. When Neil Armstrong stepped onto the lunar surface, my account focused on the shared silence in the room rather than my usual evening plans.

Accept responses that connect a specific context detail to a change in the narrator's focus, tone, purpose, or organization. For the open task, accept historically plausible accounts that include at least two context details and clearly explain their impact.