Letters Change Lives

Compare how context and form shape two literary works.

10.RL.3 "Integration of Concepts Explain and analyze the influence of the historical and cultural context of a text on its form, style, characters, and point of view. Compare and contrast character development, dramatic plot structure..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details that show historical or cultural pressure, circle each form or point-of-view convention, and number the two late letter revelations 1 and 2.

Two Stories, Two Forms

(1) Henrik Ibsen's 1879 play A Doll's House unfolds in a middle-class Norwegian home. In Ibsen's society, married women had limited legal and financial independence. Nora Helmer secretly borrowed money and forged her father's signature to save her husband, Torvald, during an illness. The play's dialogue and stage directions show Torvald treating Nora as a child, calling her pet names and controlling money. When Nora sees that Torvald values his reputation above her sacrifice, she leaves. The social limits of her time make her choice startling and shape her development from a sheltered wife into a person demanding self-respect.

(2) Ken Liu's 2011 short story "The Paper Menagerie" follows Jack, the U.S.-born son of a Chinese immigrant mother and an American father. Jack narrates in first person as an adult remembering childhood. At school, he is embarrassed by his mother's accent, food, and paper animals, so he rejects the Chinese language and objects that once comforted him. This point of view lets readers hear his later regret. The story reflects pressures that some children of immigrants face when they feel pushed to fit a dominant culture. Jack's growth begins only after he reads his mother's letter and recognizes the love behind the traditions he dismissed.

(3) Although the works use different forms, each saves a letter for a late turning point. Krogstad's letter exposes Nora's secret loan and forces her to judge Torvald's response. In Jack's story, his mother's letter reveals experiences he did not understand, changing how he sees her after her death. A Doll's House moves through spoken scenes and visible actions in a short span of time, a convention of drama. The prose story can enter Jack's memories and cover years, creating a reflective style. Thus, both plots use a written revelation, but the play stages an immediate conflict while the story uses retrospective narration.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the historical context of A Doll's House make Nora's final decision meaningful? Use one detail from the passage.

2. How do Jack's cultural pressures and first-person point of view shape his character development in "The Paper Menagerie"?

3. Compare one convention of drama in A Doll's House with one convention of prose fiction in "The Paper Menagerie."

4. What structural convention do both works use, and how does each work handle time differently?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Choose one play and one prose work you have read. In 3 to 4 sentences, explain one context influence, compare one form or point-of-view convention, and identify one shared structural convention plus one structural difference.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 10 · 10.RL.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline details that show historical or cultural pressure, circle each form or point-of-view convention, and number the two late letter revelations 1 and 2. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the historical context of A Doll's House make Nora's final decision meaningful? Use one detail from the passage.	**Married women had limited legal and financial independence, so Nora's decision to leave Torvald is a striking rejection of the restricted role expected of her.**
2	How do Jack's cultural pressures and first-person point of view shape his character development in "The Paper Menagerie"?	**Pressure to fit into the dominant culture leads Jack to reject his mother's language and traditions. His adult first-person narration reveals his later regret and understanding.**
3	Compare one convention of drama in A Doll's House with one convention of prose fiction in "The Paper Menagerie."	**The play uses dialogue, stage directions, and visible action, while the short story uses first-person retrospective narration that can enter Jack's memories.**
4	What structural convention do both works use, and how does each work handle time differently?	**Both use a late letter revelation as a turning point. The play presents an immediate conflict over a short time through scenes, while the story covers years through Jack's memories.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Set in 1950s Chicago, A Raisin in the Sun shows how housing discrimination limits the Younger family's choices, while "Everyday Use" explores disagreements about African American heritage. The play uses dialogue and stage action, but the story uses Mama's first-person narration, so readers receive her judgments of Dee. Both works build toward a confrontation about a valued family possession or opportunity, but the play develops its conflict across several scenes while the story centers on one visit.

Accept equivalent explanations that connect context to character choices, point of view, style, or form. For structural comparisons, students must name a shared plot method and a genuine difference in how the two works organize or present events.