

SMART™ Lesson

Literature: Examining Historical and Cultural Contexts

Introduction

Examining historical and cultural contexts is an important aspect of literary analysis. Understanding the time period, social, cultural and political climate, and other contextual factors can help readers comprehend the author's message and themes more fully. In this lesson, we will explore how to examine historical and cultural contexts in literature.

Time Period

The time period in which a piece of literature is written can have a significant impact on its themes and message. Historical events, trends, and social customs can all be reflected in literature. For example, a work of literature written during the Great Depression might be more likely to address themes of poverty and struggle than a work written in a more prosperous era.

Task 1: Answer the following questions

1. Why is examining the time period important in analyzing literature?
2. How might the themes in a work of literature be impacted by the time period in which it was written?

Social and Cultural Climate

The social and cultural climate of the time period can also impact the themes and message of literature. Social attitudes towards race, gender, and other issues can be reflected in literature. For example, a work of literature written during the Civil Rights movement might be more likely to address themes of racial inequality and discrimination.

Task 2: Answer the following questions

1. What impact does the social and cultural climate of the time period have on literature?
2. How might social attitudes towards race and gender be reflected in literature?

Political Climate

The political climate of the time period can also be reflected in literature. Works of literature can address political issues and events or reflect the political beliefs of the author. For example, a work of literature written during the Vietnam War might be more likely to address themes of war and peace.

Task 3: Answer the following questions

1. What is the impact of the political climate of the time period on literature?
2. How might the political beliefs of an author be reflected in their work?

Conclusion

Examining historical and cultural contexts is essential in analyzing literature. By understanding the time period, social, cultural, and political climate, readers can gain a deeper understanding of the author's message and themes.