Timeline of Significant Contextual Influences on Western Literature

Ancient civilisations

- Absence of widespread written language
- No formal schooling but education still valued
- Ritual and ceremony formed part of important cultural practices
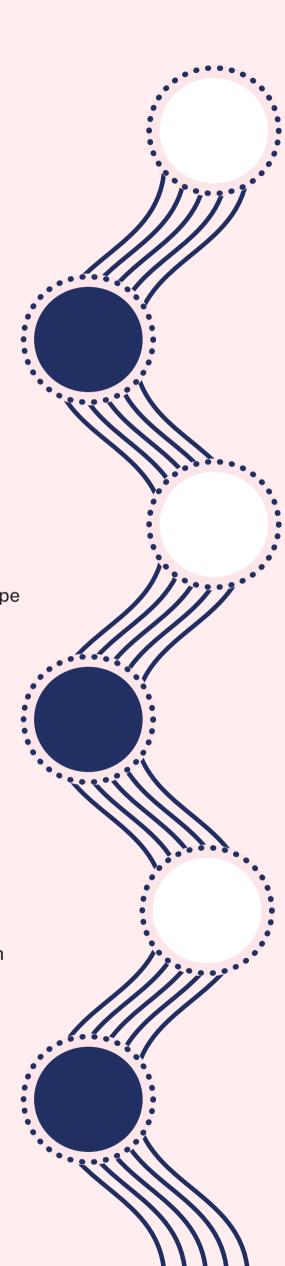
The Renaissance – 15th–16th centuries

- The rise of humanism
- Renewed interest in Greek and Roman literature, philosophy and art
- Characterised by immense social and cultural change with advancements in science and exploration
- A time of social and cultural upheaval – war, poverty and colonial expansion were prevalent

The Enlightenment – 17th–18th centuries

- Preceded by the Scientific Revolution
- Values included human happiness, scientific inquiry, reason and rationality
- Romantic and Gothic literary traditions – emphasis on emotion, imagination and individual experience
- French Revolution – when people are treated poorly, they rebel

Early 20th Century – 1900–1950

- WW1 – 1914–1918
- Rise of totalitarian dictatorships in Europe
- WW2 – 1939–1945
- The Great Depression
- Post-WW2 security measures included censorship and increased surveillance of citizens
- Devastating consequences of the dropping of the atomic bomb

Second half of the 20th Century 1951–1999

- Cold War between the USA and USSR – atmosphere of distrust and paranoia
- Superpowers (USA and USSR) competing in a Space and Arms race
- Decolonisation and Civil Rights Movement emphasise values of equality, independence and cultural identity
- Threat of nuclear war
- Scientific advancements in the area of genetics including cloning
- Technological advancements – artificial intelligence, computers in most homes, robotics
- Growing awareness of environmental degradation

2000 and beyond – in the Western world

- Continued development of and research into biotechnology and genetic engineering
- Post 9/11 concerns about the threat of terrorism
- Information technology plays an increasing role in society
- The Western world is characterised by globalisation and capitalism
- Rise of social media, as entertainment
- Several global pandemics such as COVID-19, bird flu and Ebola

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