 Resource 2

TS Eliot’s background and context

Biographical context

Complete the following:

* When and where Eliot was born:
* Locations where he lived:
* Significant relationships, including family, other writers and poets:
* Education – school, university:
* Honours and awards

Beliefs

Research and create notes considering what Eliot’s beliefs were on:

* Religion:
* Culture:
* Society:
* Philosophy:

Eliot’s poetry

Create a timeline of his poems and when they were written. Map on the timeline any other significant elements of his life.

Guided contextual research

Early influences

* Research the American Civil War. What possibly impact would the civil war have had on Eliot as an early influence?
* How did Eliot’s early views change on entering Harvard?

France

* Eliot was influenced by Charles Baudelaire and Jules Laforgue – research these figures and consider how this could have changed Eliot’s self-awareness.
* How would Eliot’s time spent living in France influence his poetry?

England

* Consider the impact of Eliot’s travel to England at the start of World War I and have it may have influenced his thinking.
* Explain Eliot’s relationship with Ezra Pound – how might this have expanded Eliot’s understanding of the literary scene?

Religion

* After publication of The Waste Land in 1922, a new significance of religion (specifically Christianity) was gradually seen. What movements away from secularism and materialism are seen in Eliot's work?
* While the Church provided the basis for Eliot’s intellectual development, his societal and cultural views saw little change. How would his changing beliefs manifest in his work? Consider the titles of poems written by Eliot.
* Eliot’s influence by British philosopher, F.H. Bradley, is noted in his works although much is debated about its lasting influence. What other thinkers became important influential figures for Eliot and why is it suggested that Bradley’s influence, while noted, eventually waned?

Philosophy

* Many significant philosophical thinkers became important figures for Eliot. Consider the influence of Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Ellery Channing, Herbert Spencer and Friedrich Schleiermacher.
* Some critics and scholars argue that poetry was not Eliot’s preferred style of expressing his philosophical ideas. What other outlets do you believe encapsulated his thinking?

Culture and society

* Eliot believed in stabilising society through supporting the hierarchy, specifically returning to society of 17th and 18th centuries. Explain this hierarchal structure and consider how this could have an impact on his work.
* Some of Eliot’s poetry emphasises the disintegration of society due to racial or ethnic heterogeneity. Explain how this could be shown.

Romanticism and Classicism

* Explain Eliot’s connection with Romanticism.
* How did Eliot view the works of John Donne and John Milton?
* What were Eliot’s views on Shakespeare?

Context and understanding

* Briefly explain Eliot’s views on modernism.
* Eliot contemplated contextual issues and contributed to literary criticisms. What has been the lasting impact of this?