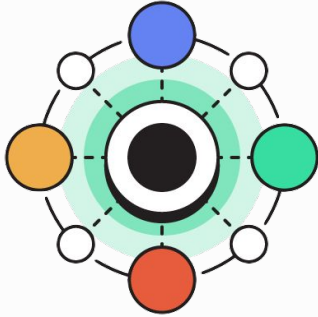


## Formative Assessment: Contextualization and Sourcing



**Thinking historically means interpreting historical events, developments, or processes in light of the surrounding historical context. It also means understanding key information about a historical source, such as its purpose, perspective, and reliability as a piece of evidence.**

**Directions:** Read the following primary source. Then, answer the questions on contextualization that follow. The multiple choice questions for this formative assessment are Weighted Multiple Choice (WMC) questions. This means that there is only one *incorrect* answer, but the other 3 choices are weighted. The *best* answer is 3 points, the *second-best* answer is 2 points, and the *third-best* answer is 1 point. The *incorrect* answer is 0 points.

# Formative Assessment: Contextualization and Sourcing

Source: Homer, *The Odyssey*, c. 725–675 B.C.E. Translated by Samuel Butler, 1900.

Note: Homer's *The Odyssey* is one of the oldest surviving works of literature. It follows a king, Odysseus, and his homecoming journey after the Trojan War. His journey lasts ten years, during which time he encounters many perils and all of his crewmates are killed. This excerpt describes his encounter with one of his crewmates that was killed, Elpenor, when he visits Hades, or the underworld.

The first ghost that came was that of my comrade Elpenor, for he had not yet been laid beneath the earth. We had left his body unwaked and unburied in Circe's house, for we had had too much else to do. I was very sorry for him, and cried when I saw him: "Elpenor," said I, "how did you come down here into this gloom and darkness? You have got here on foot quicker than I have with my ship."

"Sir," he answered with a groan, "it was all bad luck, and my own unspeakable drunkenness. I was lying asleep on the top of Circe's house, and never thought of coming down again by the great staircase but fell right off the roof and broke my neck, so my soul came down to the house of Hades. And now I beseech you by all those whom you have left behind you, though they are not here, by your wife, by the father who brought you up when you were a child, and by Telemachus who is the one hope of your house, do what I shall now ask you. I know that when you leave this limbo you will again hold your ship for the Aeaeon island. Do not go thence leaving me unwaked and unburied behind you, or I may bring heaven's anger upon you; but burn me with whatever armour I have, build a barrow for me on the sea shore, that may tell people in days to come what a poor unlucky fellow I was, and plant over my grave the oar I used to row with when I was yet alive and with my messmates." And I said, "My poor fellow, I will do all that you have asked of me."

' And first came the soul of Elpenor, my companion, that had not yet been buried beneath the wide-wayed earth; for we left the corpse behind us in the hall of Circe, unwept and unburied, seeing that another task was instant on us. At the sight of him I wept and had compassion on him, and uttering my voice spake to him winged words: "Elpenor,

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ODYSSEY XI, 57–86.

how hast thou come beneath the darkness and the shadow? Thou hast come fleeter on foot than I in my black ship."

' So spake I, and with a moan he answered me, saying: "Son of Laertes, of the seed of Zeus, Odysseus of many devices, an evil doom of some god was my bane and wine out of measure. When I laid me down on the house-top of Circe I minded me not to descend again by the way of the tall ladder, but fell right down from the roof, and my neck was broken off from the bones of the spine, and my spirit went down to the house of Hades. And now I pray thee in the name of those whom we left, who are no more with us, thy wife, and thy sire who cherished thee when as yet thou wert a little one, and Telemachus, whom thou didst leave in thy halls alone; forasmuch as I know that on thy way hence from out the dwelling of Hades, thou wilt stay thy well-wrought ship at the isle Aeaeon, even then, my lord, I charge thee to think on me. Leave me not unwept and unburied as thou goest hence, nor turn thy back upon me, lest haply I bring on thee the anger of the gods. Nay, burn me there with mine armour, all that is mine, and pile me a barrow on the shore of the grey sea, the grave of a luckless man, that even men unborn may hear my story. Fulfil me this and plant upon the barrow mine oar, wherewith I rowed in the days of my life, while yet I was among my fellows."

' Even so he spake, and I answered him saying: "All this, luckless man, will I perform for thee and do."

Image of Odysseus' encounter with Elpenor in Hades (the underworld) taken from *The Odyssey*, translated by Samuel Henry Butcher, 1921. [Library of Congress](https://www.loc.gov/rr/holdings/descriptions.html).



1. Each of the following statements is a historical fact that is related to the above document. Which historical fact *best* helps to contextualize the purpose of the above document? In other words, which fact *best* helps us understand why this document was written?
  - A. Ancient Greeks placed great importance on loyalty and friendship, considering the bonds between companions a core social value.
  - B. A deeply held belief by ancient Greeks about the relationship between the living and the dead was that, without proper burial, a soul could not fully enter the underworld and would wander restlessly.
  - C. The Odyssey became one of the most influential works in Western literature, shaping the storytelling traditions of ancient Rome and the European Renaissance.
  - D. Ancient Greeks considered the burial of the dead a sacred religious obligation that was not just an act of kindness but a divine duty.

2. Justify your choice in the space below.



1. Each of the following statements is a historical fact that is related to the above document. Which historical fact *best* helps to contextualize the purpose of the above document? In other words, which fact *best* helps us understand why this document was written?
  - A. Ancient Greeks placed great importance on loyalty and friendship, considering the bonds between companions a core social value. **(1 point)**
  - B. A deeply held belief by ancient Greeks about the relationship between the living and the dead was that, without proper burial, a soul could not fully enter the underworld and would wander restlessly. **(3 points)**
  - C. The Odyssey became one of the most influential works in Western literature, shaping the storytelling traditions of ancient Rome and the European Renaissance. **(0 points)**
  - D. Ancient Greeks considered the burial of the dead a sacred religious obligation that was not just an act of kindness but a divine duty. **(2 points)**

2. Justify your choice in the space below.

**Choice B, worth 3 points, best contextualizes why Homer included the Elpenor exchange, as it identifies the specific Greek belief that an unburied soul could not fully enter the underworld, explaining both the urgency of Elpenor's plea and the cultural weight this scene would have carried for a Greek audience. Choice D is also supported by Greek cultural practice, as burial was indeed a religious obligation, but it does not explain the specific consequence of failing to bury the dead, making it worth 2 points. Choice A is relevant to the excerpt, as Odysseus and Elpenor's bond as companions underlies the emotional power of the scene, but loyalty and friendship do not directly explain why proper burial mattered to Greeks, worth 1 point. Choice C, worth 0 points, describes the Odyssey's historical legacy rather than the cultural context in which it was written.**



### 1. Weighted Multiple Choice

3 points (Choice B)	2 points (Choice D)	1 point (Choice A)	0 points (Choice C)
			<b>Subtotal: _____ / 3</b>

### 2. Short Answer: Justify Your Answer

3 points	2 points	1 point	0 points
Student thoroughly justifies their choice of the <i>best</i> fact—which was worth three points as shown on the teacher key—that would help contextualize the purpose of the source.	Student thoroughly justifies their choice of either the 1 or 2 point option from the WMC question. OR Student’s justification of the 3 point option needs deeper analysis.	Student’s justification of their choice (either the 1 or 2 point option) lacks deep analysis.	Student either makes no attempt to justify their choice OR tries to justify the 0 point option.
			<b>Subtotal: _____ / 3</b>

**Total: \_\_\_\_\_ / 6**

