

Context cards

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1. The *Lyrical Ballads* were published anonymously in 1798.
2. In 1792 the Convention declared France to be a republic.
3. The Enlightenment saw nature as something to be dominated, tamed and regularised.
4. The period in which the *Lyrical Ballads* was published was a great time for debate and discussion – despite the government’s attempt to repress public meetings and discussion. It was also a period in which the number of periodicals, publishing and reviewing poetry increased dramatically. The literary reviews often reflected the political sympathies of the periodical as a whole.
5. In the early 1790s Coleridge planned with Robert Southey to establish a utopian society in America – a Pantisocracy – based on the ‘best’ ideas and beliefs of William Godwin, the radical philosopher.
6. The growth of urban populations, the increase in the amount of printed material readily (and cheaply) available, the rise of circulating libraries all led to rising levels of literacy.
7. In 1791 Wordsworth travelled to the newly republican France. Here he met and fell in love with Annette Vallon, with whom he had a daughter. His return in 1792 led to a period of sadness and loss of youthfulness.
8. During the second half of the 18th century there emerged in the middle classes of a radical new political spirit, led by activists such as Tom Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, who argued for social justice, human rights and equality for all men and women and against repression and against institutions such as the law, government, marriage.
9. Many poets in the 18th century believed that poetry required its own specially elevated language to do justice to the elevated sentiments they believed were the proper subject of poetry. This language became known as poetic diction.
10. In 1789 the French Revolution began with the call of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. By 1791 a Constitution, including a Declaration of the Rights of Man had been published.

11. John Hutton's (1726-1797) geological discoveries and his theory of fluvial erosion revealed that the earth was in a state of flux, changed by time and the natural elements. Nature could no longer be regarded as a constant.
12. In the latter half of the 18th century, technological developments (printing press, improved communications) and the fact that periodicals, unlike newspapers, were not subject to tax, led to a rise in the number of periodicals being printed.
13. Increased mechanisation of traditionally rural occupations (for example spinning) and the loss of common land through the Enclosure Acts and new opportunities in the towns (for example, cotton mills) led to mass emigration from the countryside.
14. In art the work of Constable, Turner and Friedrich challenged conventional, 18th century notions of good taste in art.
15. In 1776 the radical English philosopher Tom Paine declared 'The cause of America is 'the cause of all mankind'.
16. Wordsworth and Coleridge met in 1795. In 1797 William and his sister Dorothy moved to Somerset to be near Coleridge.
17. Jean Jacques Rousseau challenged John Locke's 18th-century Enlightenment ideas about childhood, arguing that childhood is a distinct and precious period of life, functioning according to its own laws and developmental stages. He said that children should learn from nature, not teachers.
18. The theory of association developed by the psychologist David Hartley explains the way in which we store up and later recall impressions of things or experience through the process of linking one impression with another. Hartley's philosophy influenced Wordsworth and Coleridge.
19. The period *before* Romanticism came to be known as the Enlightenment, a period characterized by a spirit of rational, scientific enquiry and believed humanity could realistically aspire to an ideal of peace and harmony.
20. Following the French Revolution, its degeneration into the Terror and France's declaration of War on England, William Pitt's increasingly repressive measures in England, for example: a Royal Proclamation against seditious writing, the suspension of Habeas Corpus (the right to a trial) in 1794. In 1800 200 crimes were punishable by death.
21. Literature in the 18th century was shaped by the values and characteristics of neoclassicism: emotional restraint, order, logic, technical precision, balance, elegance of diction, an emphasis of form over content, clarity, dignity, decorum; it sought to appeal to the intellect rather than the emotions and considered wit more important than imagination.

22. Since the beginning of the 18th century, technological developments, scientific discoveries and the enclosure of the countryside (both farm and common land) had begun to revolutionise traditional industries such as farming, spinning and weaving, producing great poverty and suffering amongst the working classes, particularly the rural poor.
23. The French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau challenged traditional moral and religious teaching by arguing against the doctrine of original sin and claiming 'man is naturally good, loving justice and order; that there is absolutely no original perversity in the human heart, and that the first movements of nature are always right.' He also argued that the ills of society and man would be cured with a return to nature, which he believed had been imprisoned – or rationalized – for too long.
24. The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature . . . is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other.”
Edmund Burke
25. In 1723 an act of government had outlawed the practice of 'outdoor relief' requiring every parish to build a workhouse to keep its poor. Even where parishes continued to provide outdoor relief, ownership of goods, animals meant that a family was not entitled to any help. 1794 the magistrates of Speen established an allowance scale whereby a labourer would have his income supplemented to subsistence level by the parish, according to the price of bread and the number of children in his family.
26. On January 21 1793 Louis XVI was executed and the 'Reign of Terror' began. The 'Terror' is the name given to the period in which the revolutionary leaders (Danton, Marat and Robespierre) authorised the guillotining of many thousands of the French aristocracy.
27. In the 18th century a gentleman travelling through the countryside to admire the view would take with him a 'Claude glass' – an apparatus which enabled a person to view in nature the idealised landscape expected from having looked at Claude's paintings. The idea of the 'picturesque' came from this.
28. The ballad is one of the most basic, ancient forms of storytelling with dramatic narratives enacting extraordinary events in the lives of ordinary people inspiring wonder in the potential for the strange, the dangerous, and the supernatural within the humdrum.
29. In 1791 Thomas Paine, a supporter of both the American and French Revolutions, published *The Rights of Man*, a defence of the values of the French Revolution, and embodying the values of liberty and equality. It reached 100s of 1000s of readers, resulted in Paine being prosecuted and provoked the government into passing a Bill against seditious writing.
30. The atheist Enlightenment philosopher William Godwin believed that institutions such as law, government, marriage and property were unnecessary and the cause of unequal and corrupt relations between people.

31. In 1783, 7 years after the first battles against the British and 6 years after their declaration of Independence, the independence of the American Colonies was officially recognised. The successful establishment of the Republic with a Bill of Rights was seen by many radicals in Britain as a sign of great optimism.
32. Early reviewers drew attention to the declared 'experimental' intent of the poems, the focus on 'low' characters and the 'unpoetic' use of language.
33. According to the critic John Blades, 'for Wordsworth nature is teacher, nurse, friend, muse, goddess, therapy, moral counsellor and regenerator...'
34. A lyric is a short poem expressing the feelings and thoughts of a single speaker.