

History and contextualization: seminar worksheet

Please refer carefully to your lecture notes and the powerpoint slides from the lecture as you prepare this worksheet.

1. Identify a 'timeless' cultural object / work and analyze in exactly what sense(s) it can be said to be 'timeless'.
2. Do you consider *Candide* to be a 'timeless classic'?
3. Read the article 'Teaching *Candide*: A Debate', *The French Review*, vol. 61 (March 1988), pp. 569 – 577 (article available on the *Candide* section of the Strategies pages and at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/393842>). Think about the following questions:
 - In what ways does this article echo the debates about history and context set out in the lecture?
 - How far do you agree with the following statements from the article:
 - 'A minute of background is all that is needed, and this is to be found in every school edition of [*Candide*].'
 - 'The reader's success in resolving the ambiguities in *Candide* depends on the texts he/she chooses to read.' (576)
 - In what ways does the article express the limitations of each statement (give one or two examples)?
4. What do we learn (and what do we not learn) from *Candide* about eighteenth-century French society? Consider, in particular, the following areas:
 - the world of work
 - the army as an institution
 - social stratification (by class and other factors)
5. In what sense can historical writing be said to be narrative? What follows from recognizing the narrative quality of historical writing? What does not follow?
6. In light of the lecture's treatment of critic and theorist Roland Barthes's discussion of the contemporaneity of Jules Michelet, critique the account of *Candide*'s contemporary relevance given in the Introduction to your edition (pp. 12-18). What are the presuppositions underlying that account and how can they be questioned?
7. Using any of the texts covered in the module so far, draw up an essay plan for the following question, taken from the 2013 Strategies exam paper. Work in groups of 2 or 3. Post your plan on your group's forum in advance of the class.
 - *How important is it for a reader / viewer / listener to understand the society and culture from which a text emerged? Justify your answer.*

