



## A Level preparation Equus

### Information: Social, Historical, Cultural and Political Context

In the exam, you will need to refer to the historical context of the play. It is important you research the play and its original performance conditions.

Key Facts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Written by Peter Shaffer</li><li>• Written in 1973</li><li>• Original production ran at The National Theatre, London between 1973 and 1975</li><li>• Original production directed by John Dexter</li><li>• Shaffer was inspired to write the play when he heard the true story of a 17 year old boy who blinded six horses in a town near Suffolk</li></ul>
Life in 1970's England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A time of austerity; people thought Britain had no future</li><li>• High rates of inflation, which resulted in the government capping pay rises</li><li>• A number of riots and strikes by unions which brought about a three day working week in 1974, aimed at preserving dwindling fuel supplies</li><li>• IRA planted a number of bombs in the 1970's, killing many innocent civilians</li><li>• High manufacturing costs and international competition resulted in the decline of many industries, such as coal mining</li><li>• Racist tensions towards blacks and immigrants was high</li><li>• The rise of British Punk culture. This wasn't just about music and clothes, it reflected people's dissatisfaction with their lives</li><li>• High levels of unemployment and collapsing public services</li><li>• In 1979, Margaret Thatcher became the first female Prime Minister</li></ul> <p><u>More about the 1970's here:</u></p> <p><a href="https://www.tes.com/lessons/cXUT_8sRRilioQ/edit">https://www.tes.com/lessons/cXUT_8sRRilioQ/edit</a></p>

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Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Religion and worship</li><li>• Ritual sacrifice</li><li>• Personal and social values</li><li>• Passion</li><li>• Sex and Sexuality</li><li>• Modern Society and Normality</li><li>• Psychiatry and Mental Illness Rehabilitation</li><li>• Justice</li></ul>
Style	The play uses <u>Psychological realism</u> combined with <u>expressionistic</u> theatrical techniques, such as the use of mask, mime, and stylised movement.

### Research tasks:

Research the following genres and then provide, in your own words, a definition for each genre using no more than two sentences:

Psychological realism (in theatre)	
Expressionism (in theatre)	

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(a) What can you find out about Shaffer's style of writing/performance?

(b) What influenced Shaffer to write Equus?

(c) Other works by Shaffer (similarities/differences to Equus)

(d) The first performance of Equus (can you find original reviews?)