

CONTEXTUALIZATION: INTRODUCTION

Purpose

Contextualization—exploring the specific time and place in which an event happened—helps you better understand what caused something and why it matters.

Key information

Greenhouse gas emissions are heat-trapping gases—such as carbon dioxide and methane—released into the atmosphere, primarily from burning fossil fuels like coal, oil, and natural gas.

Contextualization involves connecting events and processes to the specific circumstances of time and place.

- *Broad context* represents broader themes, trends, or events that are related to the event. Broad context helps us understand long-term causes of an event.
- *Narrow context* refers to the themes, trends, or events that are more closely tied in time or place to the event. Narrow context helps us see the short-term causes of an event.

Process

1. Review the chart below and answer the questions that follow:

Global greenhouse gas emissions	
2019	37.1 billion tons
2020	35.1 billion tons

- What do you notice about the chart above?

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- What could this data suggest about our progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions?

2. Read the news headline below and answer the questions that follow:

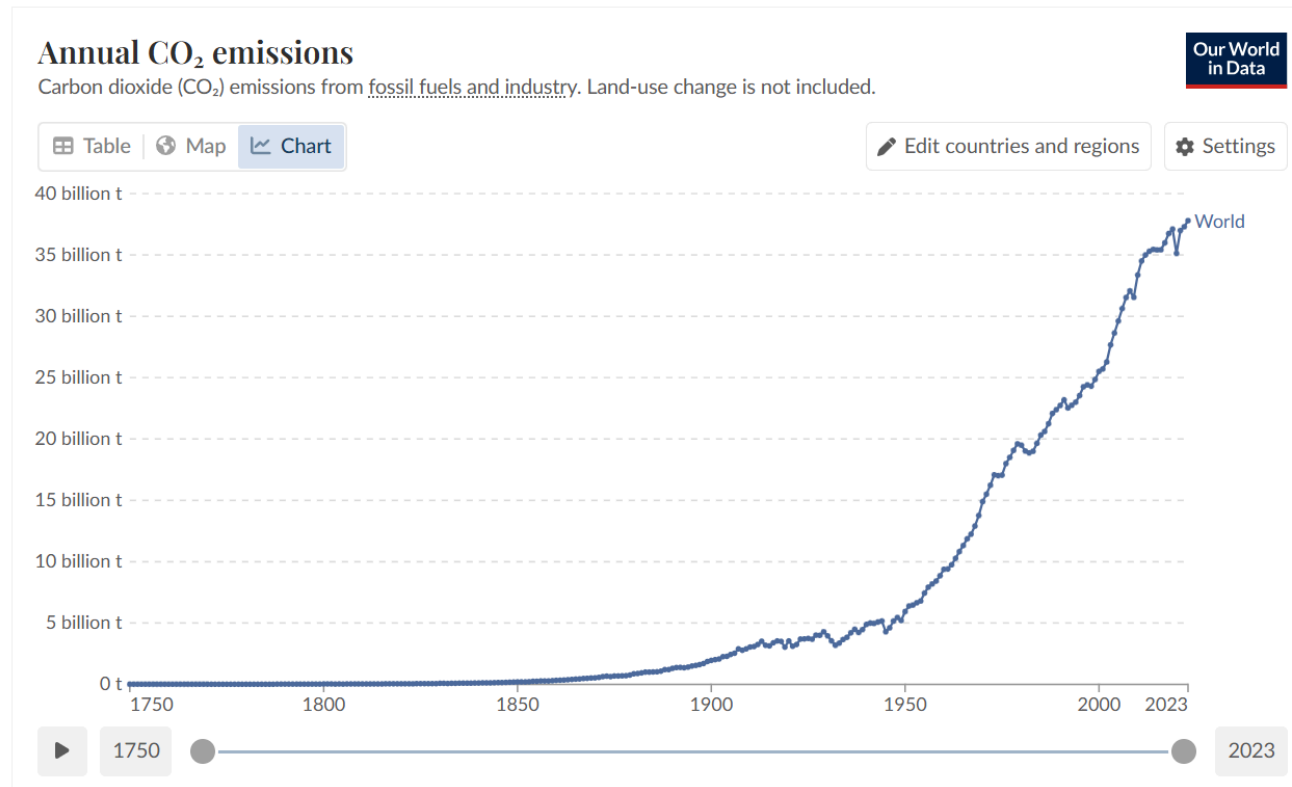


- How does this new information change your understanding of the drop in emissions between 2019 and 2020?

- Do you think the 2020 drop in emissions is a sign of lasting change? Why or why not?

3. Now, look at the chart below and answer the questions that follow:

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- What does this chart tell you about overall trends in annual greenhouse gas emissions?

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4. Categorize the following statements as either broad or narrow context by checking the appropriate box. Then, place these statements in order, with 1 representing the broadest context and 5 as the narrowest.

Statements	Broad context	Narrow context	Order (1–5)
For over two centuries, industrialized countries have depended on fossil fuels to power their economies and daily life.			
In 2020, major global events—including the Olympics and international summits—were canceled or delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.			
The global economy depends heavily on international travel, trade, and commuting.			
The COVID-19 pandemic led to global lockdowns, travel restrictions, and commuting limitations for the many people who worked and studied from home.			
As cities expanded in the twentieth century, many places built roads and neighborhoods in ways that made people rely on cars to get around.			

5. Write one or two sentences to answer this question: Why does context matter when interpreting an event?