

Welcome to English Literature A Level.

Here you will find some information about the course you will be studying and some tasks which you MUST complete by the start of the Autumn Term.

Information about the course

AQA English Literature A-level – Specification B

<https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/english/as-and-a-level/english-literature-b-7716-7717/specification-at-a-glance>

English Literature is a two year A-level course with no external AS-level examinations at the end of Year 12. There will be internal examinations throughout Year 12 designed to help you understand your progress through the course and identify any gaps that need to be addressed in order to move onto year 13.

The subject content of the course has been selected in order to expose the students to a range of challenging but enjoyable texts throughout the course. Whilst AQA has no requirement for specific texts to be studied for the NEA component of the course, we have made the choice to explore a selection of prose and poetry texts with students at the start of the course, in order to provide students with a structured and firm base of understanding before they begin studying the core texts and drafting their independent essays.

Core Texts

Aspects of Tragedy – Paper 1A

Students will study:

- Othello by William Shakespeare
- Richard II by William Shakespeare
- The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald

Elements of Crime Writing – Paper 2A

Students will study:

- The Rime of the Ancient Mariner by Samuel Taylor Coleridge
- Atonement by Ian McEwan
- Oliver Twist by Charles Dickens

Non Exam Assessment (NEA) – Theory and Independence

Students will explore a range of texts independently and in class. They will become familiar with a range of critical perspectives and critical texts starting with the AQA Critical Anthology. You should try to read as widely as possible to prepare for this. Read poems, plays and novels. The reading list will help you get started.

Preparing for A-Level

Preparation Tasks

All four of the below tasks MUST be completed by the 7th September.

Students should come to their first English Literature class with these tasks ready to hand in/share.

1. **Purchase** your own copies of the core texts and **research them** – find summaries and context.

Start with Othello as that's the first text you will study.

Create a **folder** for each text in which you can store your revision notes as you go through the course. You do not need to bring these in to school, but take a photo and show us you are all set!

2. Look at the wider reading list below and **read at least three** of the novel texts and as much poetry as you can.

Keep a reading journal in which you explore aspects of narrative within each poem and novel you read.

Use the questions on the **aspects of narrative bookmark** to help you complete this.

You will be expected to hand in your reading journal in the first English Literature lesson in September.

3. Carefully **read** the 'Literary Value and the Canon' section. **Respond** to the questions after the article.

You will be asked to create a speech/presentation applying the theory to one of the novels or poems you read for your journal as one of our first tasks in lessons in September.

4. **Read** the three extracts (Beowulf, The Knight's Tale, The Miller's Tale) and **answer ONE** of the exam-style questions *for submission in the first lesson back in September.*

TASK 2

Suggested Reading List for Year 12

This list is by no means exhaustive, but it does contain a selection of classic novelists, Man-Booker prize winners and previous A-level texts. Feel free to explore other titles by the same authors.

Read at least three of the novel texts and as much poetry as you can.

Keep a reading journal using the bookmark which appears after the lists to help you record your observations.

Author	Title
Achebe, Chinua	Things Fall Apart
Adiga, Avarind	The White Tiger
Atwood, Margaret	Oryx and Crake, The Handmaid's Tale
Austen, Jane	Pride and Prejudice
Barker, Pat	The Regeneration Trilogy
Barnes, Julian	The Sense of an Ending
Burgess, Anthony	A Clockwork Orange
Bronte, Charlotte	Jane Eyre
Bronte, Emily	Wuthering Heights
Cain, James M.	Double Indemnity
Carter, Angela	Wise Children
Chandler, Raymond	The Long Goodbye
Christie, Agatha	The Murder of Roger Ackroyd, And Then There Were None
Conan Doyle, Arthur	The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes
Crace, Jim	Harvest, Quarantine
Dickens, Charles	Bleak House, Great Expectations
Dostoyevsky, Fyodor	Crime and Punishment
Ellroy, James	L.A Confidential
Faulks, Sebastian	Birdsong
Fitzgerald, F. Scott	The Great Gatsby
Forster, E.M.	A Room with a View
Garland, Alex	The Beach
Gordimer, Nadine	The Conservationist
Hammett, Dashiell	The Maltese Falcon
Hardy, Thomas	Jude the Obscure
Heller, Joseph	Catch 22
Highsmith, Patricia	Strangers on a Train
Huxley, Aldous	Brave New World
Ishiguro, Kazuo	Remains of the Day
Jacobsen, Howard	The Finkler Question
Joyce, James	Dubliners
Kesey, Ken	One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest
Lawrence, D.H.	Sons and Lovers
Lee, Harper	To Kill a Mockingbird
Mantell, Hillary	Wolf Hall
Martell, Yann	Life of Pi
McCarthy, Cormac	The Road
McEwan, Ian	Enduring Love
Mitchell, David	Cloud Atlas

Morisson, Toni	Beloved
Nabokov, Vladimir	Lolita
Nesbit, E	The Railway Children
Okri, Ben	The Famished Road
Orwell, George	Nineteen Eighty-Four
Pierre, DBC	Vernon God Little
Plath, Sylvia	The Bell Jar
Poe, Edgar Allen	Tales of Mystery and Imagination
Remarque, Erich Maria	All Quiet on the Western Front
Roy, Arundhati	The God of Small Things
Rushdie, Salman	The Satanic Verses
Salinger, J.D	The Catcher in the Rye
Shelley, Mary	Frankenstein
Shakespeare, William	King Lear, Hamlet, or Richard III
Smith, Ali	The Accidental
Smith, Zadie	White Teeth
Gertrude Stein	Blood on the Dining-Room Floor
Stoker, Bram	Dracula
Swift, Jonathan	Gulliver's Travels
Syal, Meera	Anita and Me
Tolkein, JRR	Lord of the Rings
Walker, Alice	The Colour Purple
Wells, H.G	The Time Machine, The War of The Worlds
Wilde, Oscar	The Picture of Dorian Grey
Winterson, Jeanette	Oranges are Not the Only Fruit

Poetry Reading List (a starting point!) - find these poets and read some of their work. Or just go hang out in the poetry section of Waterstones for an afternoon and see what you find...

- Agard, John
- Duffy, Carol Ann
- Wordsworth, William
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor
- Dakhar, Imtiaz
- Angelou, Maya
- Blake, William
- Browning, Robert
- Harrison, Tony
- Frost, Robert
- Plath, Sylvia
- Hughes, Ted
- Larkin, Philip
- Zephaniah, Benjamin



Aspects of Narrative Bookmark

Narrative Settings:

- When is it set? Where? How many settings are there?
- Are the settings real or imagined?
- What do the settings represent, suggest or symbolise? What's the significance?
- Are journeys between places important in this text?
- What **imagery** is used in describing places?

Narrative Characterisation:

- Identify the characters: Which are major; which are minor?
- Are they realistic? Are any of them stereotypes, or symbolic? Do they work as individuals or do they represent a group or type of people?
- Are their names significant?
- How are they developed (through description, dialogue, action, employment, voice)?
- Does the author use imagery to build character?

Narrative voice and perspective:

- Who is the narrator? Is it the same all the way through?
- What voice do(es) the narrator(s) have?
- What do we know about the narrator?
- Whose point of view does the narrator represent? Do they take sides?
- Do you trust the narrator?
- Who is the narrator talking to?
- What kind of language does the narrator use?

Narrative Structure:

- What is the time and sequence of the narrative? (How much time elapses? Is it chronological? What is the pace like?)
- Is the narrative divided? If so, how? (chapters, scenes, stanzas...)
- How is tension created by the structure of the overall text?
- What links, patterns or echoes are there between parts of the text?
- How are the beginning and ending significant?

Narrative Destination:

- What might the overall meanings/messages be within the narrative?
- Is the title important?
- How much ambiguity or room for interpretation is there? Are we led to particular conclusions or presented with choices?

TASK 3

Literary value and the canon

The literary canon is often understood to mean the group of authors or works that a consensus of academics, historians and teachers recognise as worthy of study: these are the texts that are regularly in print, are studied for school examinations and in universities and which have 'status'. The apparently 'accepted texts' that appear on your English Literature exam papers, for example, are regarded as belonging to the literary canon.

The canon is often accused by its critics of representing the values of the ruling educated classes. Writers who question the canon often do so because of its association with privilege. In this section you will see writers questioning who makes decisions about what makes certain literary texts more valuable or worthy than others and why they do so. In reading this criticism you will be able to think for yourselves about what makes a text valuable.

Many kinds of writing might be designated as 'literature'. In the past, definitions of what counts as literature have been much broader than our present definitions, at times taking in non-fictional works, travel writing, essays, political and religious texts, and so on. However, not all literature excites critical interest and comment. Literary critics have usually assumed that the texts which seem to repay special attention, by many readers over a long period of time, thereby gaining the status of 'classics', do so because they are somehow intrinsically valuable. And it is these classic texts which – by virtue of their special value and the amount of criticism and commentary which they generate – come to comprise the 'canon' of Great Literature. This canon tends to form the core of syllabuses in schools, colleges and universities. Judgements about the value of texts, therefore, can clearly be seen to be at the heart of literary studies.

Also, for many critics, assessing the value of a text is also seen to be a crucial part of the role of the critic. Modern literary theorists have professed much less certainty about questions of literary value. While many of them have considered that certain texts do seem to be better than others, others have considered that value is simply a means of excluding certain texts. A range of differing views on questions of judgement and value now exists.

Roland Barthes, for example, was innovatory in analysing not only texts which are canonical, but also texts drawn from popular literature, like Ian Fleming's *Goldfinger* (1959). Barthes does consider, however, that there are important differences among texts; and he is concerned in much of his writing to describe those differences. But rather than assuming that value resides within the text, he shifts attention to the 'pleasure of the text'; instead of being a scholarly enjoyment of the seeming control of the writer over her or his material, the process of reading, for Barthes, involves a more sexualised pleasure. In particular, Barthes identifies the different types of pleasure to be gained from reading realist texts compared with other texts. He calls realist texts 'readerly', because in reading such texts the reader begins not to be aware of the fact that he or she is reading, and starts to get caught up in the pleasure of narrative.

But Barthes prefers 'writerly' texts, which are those texts (such as experimental and avant-garde texts) which force the reader to 'work' (and 'play') more in order to make sense of them. With writerly texts, attention is drawn to the process of writing; we are unable to become 'lost' in the narrative in the same unthinking way as with readerly texts. Thus, although Barthes claims to be opposed to constructing hierarchies, there does seem to be a value judgement made between readerly and writerly texts.

Despite this, his writing on the pleasure of the text does question the traditional notion of canonical texts as somehow intrinsically more valuable than others, and suggests that the reader plays an important role in attributing value to a text.

Marxist critics are often much less clear about whether the notions of value and evaluation are useful. Terry Eagleton, for example, attacks the concept of the canon, arguing that texts become canonical precisely because they serve to support the ruling ideology. He does not want to dispense, however, with the notion of value completely, since he also thinks that there are literary texts which question or 'escape' ideology, and so force the reader to consider her or his position and perhaps lead to a form of consciousness-raising. Within the Women's Movement, for example, feminist novels written by Fay Weldon, Jeanette Winterson, Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood and Angela Carter have been very important in bringing about changes in women's thinking. These literary texts have brought about a questioning of certain ideological assumptions about the position of women, and could therefore be considered valuable for that reason.

Michel Foucault takes a more sceptical position, questioning the idea of attributing value to texts at all. He argues that literary texts are really empty texts, containing less rather than more than other texts. They display, as he puts it, 'enunciative poverty'. With literary texts, critics have to work hardest, in order to fill gaps which the text leaves gaping open. It is critics themselves, writing scholarly articles and books on canonical writers, who repeat over and over the message which the text itself failed to tell. Foucault also questions the notion that the writer is totally in control of what is written. He draws attention to the importance of other factors in the writing process, such as the common-sense knowledge of the time, literary traditions, and the economic and literary pressures which led the writer to write within certain genres or styles, and on certain subjects.

Task:

Consider one of the texts you read for Task 2:

- *What 'value' did the text have?*
- *Do you think it was a 'readerly' or 'writerly' text, as Barthes discusses?*
- *Does that text support or challenge the ruling or dominant ideology (as Eagleton discusses)?*
- *Do you agree with Foucault's idea that those texts lack any meaning until critically studied?*
- *Do you think those texts are deserving of a place in the literary 'canon'?*

TASK 4: Choose one of the texts below and answer the question that goes with it.

Text 1: Extract from 'Beowulf' (modern translation)

In this extract, Hrothgar is 'sermonising' to Beowulf about the dangers of hubris. Whilst Beowulf has proved his strength, courage and aggression by twice defending Heorot from catastrophe, Hrothgar is aware that such strength and power is not only fleeting, that is to say man is mortal, but also that such strength can lead to hubris.

Question: "Hrothgar's speech to Beowulf could be interpreted as a clear warning for all leaders to avoid the pitfalls of hubris." To what extent do you agree?

"Heremod became not Such to the Scyldings,
successors of Ecgwela;
He grew not to please them, but grievous
destruction,
And dire some death-woes to Danemen attracted;
He slew in anger his table-companions,
From world-joys away, wide-famous ruler:
Though high-ruling heaven in hero-strength raised
him,
In might exalted him, o'er men of all nations
Made him supreme, yet a murderous spirit
Grew in his bosom: he gave then no ring-gems
To the Danes after custom; endured he unjoyful
Standing the straits from strife that was raging,
Longsome folk-sorrow. Learn then from this,
Lay hold of virtue! Though laden with winters,
I have sung thee these measures. 'Tis a marvel to
tell it,
How all-ruling God from greatness of spirit
Giveth wisdom to children of men,
Manor and earlship: all things He ruleth.
He often permitteth the mood-thought of man of
The illustrious lineage to lean to possessions,
Allows him earthly delights at his manor,
A high-burg of heroes to hold in his keeping,
Maketh portions of earth-folk hear him,
And a wide-reaching kingdom so that, wisdom
failing him,
He himself is unable to reckon its boundaries;
He liveth in luxury, little debars him,
Nor sickness nor age, no treachery-sorrow
Becloudeth his spirit, conflict nowhere,
No sword-hate, appeareth, but all of the world
doth
Wend as he wisheth; the worse he knoweth not,
Till arrant arrogance inward pervading,

Waxeth and springeth, when the warder is
sleeping,
The guard of the soul: with sorrows encompassed,
Too sound is his slumber, the slayer is near him,
Who with bow and arrow aimeth in malice.
"Then bruised in his bosom he with bitter-toothed
missile
Is hurt 'neath his helmet: from harmful pollution
He is powerless to shield him by the wonderful
mandates
Of the loath-cursèd spirit; what too long he hath
holden
Him seemeth too small, savage he hoardeth,
Nor boastfully giveth gold-plated rings,
The fate of the future flouts and forgetteth
Since God had erst given him greatness no little,
Wielder of Glory. His end-day anear,
It afterward happens that the bodily-dwelling
Fleetingly fadeth, falls into ruins;
Another lays hold who doleth the ornaments,
The nobleman's jewels, nothing lamenting,
Heedeth no terror. Oh, Beowulf dear,
Best of the heroes, from bale-strife defend thee,
And choose thee the better, counsels eternal;
Beware of arrogance, world-famous champion!
But a little-while lasts thy life-vigor's fulness;
'Twill after hap early, that illness or sword-edge
Shall part thee from strength, or the grasp of the
fire,
Or the wave of the current, or clutch of the edges,
Or flight of the war-spear, or age with its horrors,
Or thine eyes' bright flashing shall fade into
darkness:
'Twill happen full early, excellent hero,
That death shall subdue thee.

Text 2: The Opening to 'The Knight's Tale' from 'The Canterbury Tales' by Geoffrey Chaucer

Question: "Men can only be seen as successful if they are war-like and subjugate women." How far do you agree with this view?

Once on a time, as old stories tell us,
There was a Duke whose name was Theseus.
Of Athens he was lord and governor,
And in his time so great a conqueror
Mightier was there none under the sun.
Full many a rich land had he won,
What with his wisdom and his chivalry.
He conquered all the Amazon country,
That long ago was known as Scythia,
And wedded its queen Hippolyta,
And brought her home to his own country
With much glory and great festivity,
And also her young sister Emily.
And so with victory and melody
I'll let this noble Duke to Athens ride
And all his host in arms him beside.
And were it not indeed too long to hear,
I would have told you fully of the manner
In which the Amazon kingdom was seized
By Theseus and by his chivalry,
And of the great battle on occasion
Twixt the Athenian and the Amazon,
And how he besieged Hippolyta,
The brave and lovely queen of Scythia,
And of the feast they had at their wedding
And of the tempest at their home-coming;
But all of that I must omit for now.
I have, God knows, a large field to plough,
Weak oxen pull my blade, the field is rough.
The remnant of my tale is long enough.

Text 3: An extract from 'The Miller's Tale' from 'The Canterbury Tales' by Geoffrey Chaucer

Question: **Examine the view that Chaucer presents his reader with an unrealistic and idealised representation of women.**

The carpenter had recently married a woman
Which he loved more than his life;
Eighteen years old she was.
Jealous he was, and held her narrowly caged,
For she was wild and young, and he was old,
And feared he might become a cuckold.
He knew not Cato (for his wit was rude)
Who advised that men should marry their
own age.
Men should wed their own type,
For youth and age is often at debate.
But since he was fallen in the snare,
He had to endure, like everyone else, his
problem.
Fair was this young woman, and
As graceful as a weasel was her small body.
A belt she wore, with bars of silk,
An apron also as white as morning milk
And upon her loins many a piece of cloth.
White was her smock, and embroidered in the
front
And also behind. Her collar
Was of coal-black silk, both within and
without.
The ribbons of her white cap matched her
collar;
Her broad headband was of silk, and set high.
And for a fact she had a lecherous eye.
Very daintily were her eyebrows plucked,
And those were angled and as black as any
sloe.
She was much more fun to look at
Than is the early-ripe pear tree,
And softer than the wool of a sheep.
And by her belt hung a purse of leather,
Tasseled with silk, and pearled with metal.
In all this world, to seek up and down,
There is not a man so wise that he could
imagine
So happy a darling or such a wench.
Brighter was the shining of her complexion
Than in the Tower the newly minted coins.

To speak of her song, it was as loud and lively
As any swallow sitting on a barn.
Also she could skip and make game
Like any kid or calf following his mother.
Her mouth was as sweet as honeyed drinks,
Or a hoard of apples laid in hay or heath.
Winsome she was, as is a jolly colt,
Long as a mast, and upright as a bolt.
A brooch she wore upon her low collar,
As brood as is the boss of a shield.
Her shoes were laced high on her legs.
She was a primrose, a little pig's eye,
For any lord to lay in his bed,
Or yet for any good yeoman to wed.