

# IB English Literature

Thank you for your interest in IB English Literature. You will find that IB English is an engaging and interesting course which will require you to study a range of genres, forms and authors. Selection of texts varies from teacher to teacher and class to class. Teachers will inform you on the day you start lessons which specific authors and texts you will study. This is done to ensure that the right text is selected for the correct class.

Nevertheless, as IB English Literature is a challenging and engaging course, you will still need to sharpen your reading and analytical skills. In this document you will find the following resources:

- A task asking you to read a poetry anthology and dystopian text.
- A Selection of activities for the play Othello (Othello is very popular at the school)
- Tips for studying a novel
- A 1984 task (1984 is very popular at the school)
- A List of authors to study and read

## Poetry and Dystopian Literature

- 1) Read an anthology of poems by a poet either translated in English or written in English.
- 2) Select one of the poems and prepare a presentation to give to your class in September exploring the reasons why you selected it and the way in which the poet has written the poem. The oral component of the course is a large percentage, so this task will prepare you for the rigours of the IB.
- 3) Select one of the dystopian texts below to read. All are popular on the course and you may be studying it on class:
  - *1984* by George Orwell
  - *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood
  - *A Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess
  - *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy
- 4) Once you have read it, create a reflection pack including research into what makes a dystopian novel; research into the novelist and their era; your reflections on the main characters, the plot and how the novel was written.

## Othello by Shakespeare: a Critical Study

Othello is a recurring play taught by IB English teachers. Students considering IB English should

- Read the play and the introduction (make sure you buy a good quality text with a detailed introduction eg The Arden Shakespeare or The Oxford Shakespeare are good editions)
- watch an online version of the play – keep a short reflections journal as you watch, make observations about the characters, questions raised, key points in the drama etc (there are also clips from a wide selection of productions listed in the ‘Going Further’ section below).
- Investigate the following key online resources to understand:
  - a) Shakespeare’s life and times
  - b) The origins of the play
  - c) The main themes and characters\_

### Overview of the Play:

Below are study guides, lectures and other resources to provide you with detailed knowledge on the play.

- You can use the No Fear Shakespeare Guide to help you with a word to word interpretation of challenging passages: <https://www.sparknotes.com/nofear/shakespeare/othello/>
- You may find it helpful to have gather some tips about how to study Shakespeare from the following site: <http://www.shakespearehigh.com/classroom/guide/>
- Harvard University full lecture on the play (1 hour +) – long but worth watching
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IN4Kpj1PFKM&t=2332s>
- British Library: pages on ‘Othello’ (overview and several very good articles) <https://www.bl.uk/works/othello>
- National Theatre director – on ‘Othello’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h2UNH8aSLDQ&list=PLJgBmjHpqgs5wXwlfECRu-9bcLtoYSPKI&index=5>
- Tragedy: ‘In Our Time’ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p005464v>
- RSC workshop Iago and Roderigo <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lsxttoN1r9Q&t=35s>

## Characterisation

Locate the passages in the play and watch the differing adaptations of *Othello*.

Make notes on: 1) The different presentations of the characters; 2) Which presentation you find most engaging; 3) Why you enjoy those presentations; 4) Different justifications actors might have for the interpretations of key scenes in *Othello*.

- RSC 1.1 Iago and Roderigo  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=32XqR9TMjx0&list=PLoIOYEplfPsnVjKUjcerHE8fBFFwv04u-&index=6>
- RSC Iago's first soliloquy  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a3uHWy5ZOZM>
- Mckellan as Iago – 'Put money in thy purse' and Iago's first soliloquy <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUBc8ydhbSM>
- Quarshie (RSC) discusses Othello  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1cNOd1tUaaw>
- RSC workshop Iago and Roderigo <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IsxttoN1r9Q&t=35s>
- Branagh: 'Put money in thy purse' and Iago's first soliloquy  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NQw4GzBG7yY>
- National Theatre cast discuss Iago and Othello:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jyoClwJn9Ic>
- Msamati (RSC) discusses Iago  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JcCzk8aT8H8>
- McGregor discusses Iago  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0dF921GLI7g>
- RSC 3.3 Iago persuades Othello  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W1c\\_HQijEBo&t=13s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W1c_HQijEBo&t=13s)
- RSC workshop Emilia and Desdemona 4.3  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A8sPJ\\_al0Ic](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A8sPJ_al0Ic)
- RSC Emilia and Desdemona 4.3  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EMcKXq2W6bk>
- RSC the murder 5.2

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ro39irooxgc&list=PLolOYEplfPsnVjKUjcerHE8fBFFwv04u-&index=9&t=0s>

## Race, Women and the military in Othello

Watch these videos and make detailed notes on how the different actors and directors interpret and understand the way themes such as race, women and military are presented in *Othello*. Try and find one passage of each of these themes.

- National Theatre: 'Othello' stage history  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wrlvq1EcRH0&list=PLJgBmjHpggs5wXwlfECRu-9bcLtoYSPKI&index=9>
- RSC: Quarshie – Othello and race  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_es\\_tmOYY5I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_es_tmOYY5I)
- National Theatre: 'Othello' and race  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KkdBNETIOM&list=PLJgBmjHpggs5wXwlfECRu-9bcLtoYSPKI&index=3>
- Professor on line mini introductory lecture on race in 'Othello' (try to ignore the earring!)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O0xIDTCVUSw>
- RSC panel discussions: Othello and race  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bIUfuBLgZgo>  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H\\_wlczuHH6Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H_wlczuHH6Q)
- National Theatre: women in 'Othello'  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TByESOrK1RA&list=PLJgBmjHpggs5wXwlfECRu-9bcLtoYSPKI&index=8>
- National Theatre: 'Othello' and the military  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qHsaO2lpTYg&list=PLJgBmjHpggs5wXwlfECRu-9bcLtoYSPKI&index=2>

## Studying a Novel

After studying this section you should be able to:

- understand ways of thinking about a novel
- understand some different aspects of study
- have some ideas of ways of studying your text

The first thing to note is that novels, like other forms of writing, come in many forms and you need to adapt your approach to suit the kind of text it is. For example, you might be studying a pre-1900 work by someone like Dickens or Hardy, where for the most part, the writers portray life-like characters in realistic settings. On the other hand, you might be studying a twentieth-century novel which does not follow realistic conventions of plot or character.

One thing that you can do to help yourself undertake and make sense of your novel is to develop strategies for approaching them and identify the most important things to pay attention to.

There are two main ways of looking at the novel:

- You can look at the 'content' of the book – the world that the novel describes and creates – almost as if it were a real world. You may feel you can enter into this world and see the characters and events as real and find that you develop feelings about them such as liking or pity or hatred. Looking at your novel from this position you are likely to discuss the characters as if they were real people able to choose their actions and words for themselves.
- The second way that you can look at your novel is to see it as a 'text' – as a creation of the author. The characters are not real people but they are creations of the author designed to perform specific functions in the text. The author uses them and manipulates them to create particular effects and they only exist through the words on the page.

The first of these attitudes may be how you approach a novel when reading purely for pleasure and this may well be the attitude that you begin with when studying a novel. As your study increases in depth, however, you will move much more towards the second attitude. This requires the much more detached and analytic approach that examiners look for at A Level. This analytic viewpoint is essential.

**Remember: you always need to know how the text is written as well as what it says.**

When studying your novel there are a number of aspects that you need to know well. In one way or another most of the exam questions you encounter will be linked to one or other of them:

- **An overview:** You need a clear understanding of the plot and how it is structured.
- **Narrative viewpoint:** who tells the story? This then leads to the question, WHY? Why has the writer chosen to use this viewpoint?
- **Character:** questions sometimes focus on the ways in which writers create and present their characters and the functions they perform in the text • language and

style: the distinctive qualities in the writer's choice of language and the ways in which they use it to create their effects.

- **The setting of the novel:** questions can relate to the kind of setting the novel has and the ways in which the writer uses language to create a sense of setting and atmosphere.
- **The context in which the novel was written:** questions could focus on the historical context, the social and political context or the personal context of the writer and the ways in which these factors influenced the shaping of the novel.
- **The kind of novelist that you are studying:** knowing something about the writer might help with your understanding of the text.

KEY POINT - You need to examine the novel you are studying analytically as a 'text' created by the writer.

### Progress check

Think about the above list of features in relation to the novel you are studying. Make brief notes on each point.

Novels, especially of the kind set for A Level study, are usually substantial texts and it is important that you become very familiar with the one you are studying. You need to know what happens and where to find the details that you might want to locate quickly. Here are some ways that will help you become familiar with your novel.

- **Read the novel through quickly** before you begin to study it. This will give you an overview of what it is about and help you to see the details of plot, structure and character.
- **Do some research on the novel.** Find out about the author, where he or she lived, the historical context in which they wrote. Knowing something about the historical and social conventions of the time can help with your understanding of the text. Also, some boards focus on the prose text to test knowledge of context.
- **Keep a notebook** or file for your work on each text. Keep separate sections for aspects such as character, setting, themes, narrative viewpoint. As you study the book write down your observations on each of these aspects making a note of important quotations, etc.
- If you are studying the text for a closed book exam it can be useful to **annotate your text** using marginal notes or underlining or side-lining important sections.

<https://revisionworld.com/a2-level-level-revision/english-literature-gcse-level/prose/studying-novel>

## 1984 by George Orwell

*1984* by George Orwell is a famous dystopian novel, which you might be studying in either lower or upper sixth. Again, this would depend on your teacher. If you have any questions about the texts which you are studying, please contact your English teacher.

In order to gain a good to in-depth knowledge of '1984', which will get Year 12 off to a flying start:

- read the novel and the introduction (make sure you buy a good quality text with a detailed introduction). A full online text is available at <http://www.george-orwell.org/1984/0.html> but you will need a printed version.
- Annotate the text and keep a short reflections journal as you read: make observations about the characters, settings and themes; questions raised; key points in the narrative etc
- Investigate the following key online resources:
- <https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/videos/george-orwells-nineteen-eighty-four#>
- <https://www.bl.uk/works/nineteen-eighty-four#>
- <https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/nineteen-eighty-four-and-the-politics-of-dystopia>
- <https://www.bl.uk/people/george-orwell#>
- <https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/freedom-or-oppression-the-fear-of-dystopia#>

## **Other writers you could read**

- Shakespeare (many teachers select 'Othello' to study, ideally watch a version of the play performed. This is difficult in lockdown but there are some versions on YouTube. Ideally watch some of the clips from the National Theatre or Royal Shakespeare Company).
- Ted Hughes
- Sylvia Plath
- Henrik Ibsen
- Tennessee Williams
- Arthur Miller
- Charlotte or Emily Bronte
- Toni Morrison
- Thomas Hardy
- Arundhati Roy
- Robert Frost

- Seamus Heaney
- Primo Levi
- Sophocles
- William Golding