

AQA A Level English Literature A

Welcome to English A-level Literature. We study AQA's A Level A specification. Much of AQA's website is publicly accessible, so you may want to have a look online over the summer. We are glad you wish to study this course for your A-level. Over the summer we would like you to complete the following tasks before you return to school in September.

- Task 1, requiring you to read two novels
- Task 2, requiring you to read poetry
- Task 3, requiring you to read a play
- Task 4: reading an appendix

As you can see, there is quite a lot of reading. If you do not like reading, the English Department strongly recommends that you reconsider your choice of A Level, as you will be reading a great deal over the next two years.

Please bring your summer work to class for your first lesson. Your teacher will expect to see your written work and will expect to hear your presentations.

We look forward to meeting you!

The English Department

Task 1: Novels

Read **two of the novels listed below**. At least one of these texts will be used during your course. All of the texts will offer you useful wider reading to inform your understanding of the core texts.

- *The Great Gatsby* by F Scott Fitzgerald
- *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood
- *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker
- *Room with a View* by E.M Forester

Afterwards, pick **one of the texts and answer one of the following questions**. Your response should be 600-800 words long:

- In literature, romantic love is passionate and all consuming. Explore this view.
- The tragedy of dreams is that they fail. Explore this view.
- A rebel is a character who challenges the status quo. Explore this view.
- To what extent is *The Handmaid's Tale* a dystopian novel?
- An engaging novel is an original work. Discuss this view.
- In an engaging romance novel, there is a struggle between lovers and social conventions. Discuss this view.

Task 2: Poems.

Pick **one of the poets listed below**. Select **one of their poems**. You will find poems by all of these writers easily accessible online. You will study poems by all of these poets during your A Level course. Study your chosen poem and **create a five-minute PowerPoint presentation in which you teach this poem to your classmates**. Be prepared to give this presentation in one of the early lessons in September.

- Andrew Marvell
- John Donne
- William Blake
- Thomas Hardy
- Richard Lovelace

- John Wilmot
- Ben Jonson
- Ted Hughes
- Ezra Pound
- T.S Elliot

Task 3: Plays.

Pick one text from either group A or group B. Then complete the relevant work. At least one of these texts will be used during your course. All of the texts will offer you useful wider reading to inform your understanding of the core texts.

Group A

Read one of the following plays:

- *A Streetcar Named Desire*
- *A View from a Bridge*
- *A Long Day's Journey into the Night*
- *Death of a Salesman*

Answer one of the following questions about your play. Your response should be 600-800 words long

- A tragic hero's path is destined for destruction. Explore this view.
- A modern tragedy is really a commentary about society and its faults. Explore this view.
- Modern tragedy often presents the American dream as dead. Discuss this view.

OR

Group B

Read *Othello* by William Shakespeare. **Pick one of the questions and write a response** about 600-800 words.

- What makes *Othello* really engaging is Iago. Discuss this view.
- It is possible to love too well but not too wisely? Discuss this view in light of *Othello's* relationship with Desdemona.
- To what extent does the character *Othello* conform with the conventions of a tragic hero?
- Really the play ought to be called *Iago*. Discuss this view.

Appendix: Studying a literary text

This section is to help you think about how to study a literary text. Although the text refers to novels, many of the points will apply to poetry and drama. This appendix is required to support you with your studies. Your teacher will not need to see anything specific in terms of written work. You are advised to add this guidance to your English folder.

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 this world and see the characters and events as real and find that you develop feelings about them like liking, 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 be the attitude 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 several aspects 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 texts you are reading over the summer. Make brief notes on each point and add them to your English folder.

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.