

# 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:

- Task 1: asking you to read two of the following dystopian texts: *1984*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *The Road* or *Brave New World*.
- Task 2: asking you to read one of the following drama texts: *Antigone*, *Oedipus Rex*, *Hedda Gabler*, *A Streetcar Named Desire* or *Blood Wedding*.
- Task 3: read the appendix about studying a novel and add it into your new English folder.

Please bring your summer work to your first English class. We look forward to meeting you!

The English Department

## Dystopian Literature: task 1

- 1) **Select two of the dystopian texts below to read.** All are popular on the course, and you may be studying at least one of these texts in class.
- 2) Once you have read each novel, **select one and create a reflection pack** which includes the following items about that novel:
  - a. A biography about the author (in your own words, based on research).
  - b. Answer one of the following questions by comparing your two dystopian texts. Your response should be about 500 - 800 words.
    - i. Explore how love is presented in a dystopian world.
    - ii. In a dystopian story the rebel is often the hero. To what extent is this true?
    - iii. A critic claimed that "dystopian literature tends to be nihilistic." Explore this view.
    - iv. "In dystopian literature the anti-hero is often a weak and useless character." Explore this view.

## Drama: task 2

1. **Read one of the drama texts.** Again, these are all texts which are popular as core texts on the course and will inform your general understanding of the genre.

2. Once you have read your text:

- **Research** the question: 'In drama, what is 'Tragedy'?'.
- Consider your drama text and **write a 500-800 word essay** answering the following question: 'Why is your text considered a tragedy?'

## Task 3

### Appendix: Studying a Novel

Although this section is about novels, many of these points will apply to one of the other genres you may study: poetry, drama or non-fiction prose. 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.

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 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 IB or A Level standard. 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 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 novels you are studying. Try to make brief notes on each point and add these to your collection of notes.

Novels 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.