

A-Level Language and Literature

The exact course list will depend on your teacher(s).

Task: Select a novel from below.

Once you have read it, create a reflection pack including research into what makes a novel; research into the novelist and their era; your reflections on the main characters, the plot and how the novel was written.

The Great Gatsby by F Scott Fitzgerald

Dracula by Bram Stoker

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood

Task: This course studies language, so read a range of non-fiction and select two pieces to compare. They should be literary non-fiction so you could use a speech, broadsheet newspaper article, travel writing, memoir, autobiography editorial etc.

Prepare a comparison of the way the writer uses language in two of the extracts you select.

Background Reading: A large part this course will require you to understand the historical and literary contextual features of different texts. To further your understanding of the different periods, you ought to look at some of the following themes and make an oral presentation about them:

- The Gothic: What is the romantic and gothic movement? What are key features of gothic art and literature? What is the sublime? Look at the following texts and painters. How do they fit within the gothic and romantic movement?
 - *The Monk* by Mathew Lewis
 - *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelly
 - Caspar David Friedrich, a German Romantic Painter
- Plastic Theatre and Tennessee Williams: Who was Tennessee Williams? How did his life influence his plays? What is plastic theatre? How Williams use this in his plays? Read at least two plays by Williams:
 - *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*
 - *A Streetcar Named Desire* (we will study this in lesson)
 - *The Glass Menagerie*
- Dystopian literature: What is dystopian literature? Be familiar with two dystopian novels:
 - *A Handmaid's Tale*
 - *1984*
- What makes these novels dystopian? Prepare a 10 minute presentation responding to this question.

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>