

A Level English Literature at Beths



Transition Booklet from GCSE English Literature to A Level English Literature

This booklet aims to:

- Inform you about the A Level English Literature course
- Help you with the transition from GCSE to A Level
- Provide you with activities to familiarise you with the skills and required approach for studying English Literature at A Level
- Provide you with information about the core texts on the course
- Provide you with a wider reading list

A Level English Literature – Edexcel

Course Outline

DRAMA 2hrs 15 mins	60 marks 30% weighting
Section A: Shakespeare (35 marks)	<i>Othello</i> – essay question from choice of two
Section B: Other Drama (25 marks)	<i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i> Tennessee Williams – essay question from choice of two

PROSE 1 hour 15 mins	40 marks 20% weighting
<i>Frankenstein</i> – Mary Shelley <i>The Handmaid’s Tale</i>– Margaret Atwood (40 marks)	One comparative essay from choice of two

POETRY 2hrs 15 mins	60 marks 30% weighting
Section A: Contemporary Poetry (30 marks)	<i>Poems from Decade</i> compared to unseen – choice of two
Section B: Romantics (30 marks)	One essay from choice of two

Coursework:

60 marks 20% weighting 2500-3000 words

One extended comparative essay referring to two texts of your choice

What are the aims and objectives of the course?

Whilst completing the A Level English Literature course you will:

- read widely and independently – this includes set texts and texts that you choose
- engage critically and creatively with a substantial number of texts
- develop and effectively apply your knowledge of literary analysis and evaluation to the texts that you study
- explore the contexts of the texts you are reading and others' interpretations of them
- undertake independent and sustained studies to deepen your appreciation and understanding of English Literature, including its changing traditions.

How to complete this booklet:

We have selected a range of activities for you to complete: some will ask you to take a step back and think about what it means to study literature, whilst others will allow you to be more active in your own approach to examples of literature and develop your skills of analysis and evaluation.

We would like you to complete the 5 tasks below so that you get an overall understanding of the skills and various approaches to literature that the A Level English Literature course will present to you. Look at all of the tasks first before you start to complete them so that you can organise and manage your time effectively (some will take longer than others!).

You must then complete the reading and research tasks based on the core texts of the course. Please bring all completed work to your first English lesson next academic year.

We hope that you enjoy immersing yourself in the world of English literature and are looking forward to discussing your ideas and looking at what you produce when the course begins!

1. Let a Poem Brew Over Time

Choose a poem. Look at the links below to help you find a poem that interests and intrigues you.

[Online poetry libraries](#)

[Poetry Foundation](#)

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/>

[The Saturday Poem](#)

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/series/saturdaypoem>

[National Poetry Library](#)

<https://www.nationalpoetrylibrary.org.uk/online-poetry/poems>

[Poem Hunter](#)

<https://www.poemhunter.com/>

[Poetry by Heart anthology](#)

<https://www.poetrybyheart.org.uk/anthology/>

[Scottish Poetry Library](#)

<https://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/>

[Library of Congress Archive](#)

<https://www.loc.gov/collections/archive-of-recorded-poetry-and-literature/about-this-collection/>

<https://poets.org/>

<https://poets.org/>

- Set a timer for 10 seconds.
- Do a 'snap shot' look at the poem for 10 seconds – don't try to read it – and jot down anything you notice about it.
- Do the same again, but this time for 30 seconds.
- Now put the poem to one side.
- On three different days over the next week, spend about 10 minutes reading the poem and writing about it in anyway you want. You might write about what you like or you are puzzled by or you might just ask questions.
- On the last day, read the poem again, read what you have written and then make notes on how your thoughts and feelings about the poem have changed over the last week. What do you feel are the most important aspects of the poem? Which parts stand out the most? Are there any patterns of language or repeated ideas that strike you?

2. Dive into the World of Short Stories

The sequence of activities below are based on a short story from the collection 'Heads of the Colored People' by the African American writer Nafissa Thompson-Spires. It is a challenging and controversial read, but is exciting, modern and powerful! It is also very different to the texts that you will have done at GCSE and deliberately pushes you out of your comfort zone. Complete the activities in the order set out below so that you understand the context of the story before you read it.

- **Task 1:** Listen to the interview in the link below. The author discusses her first collection of short stories 'Heads of the Colored People.'

[Listen to the interview.](#)

<https://www.npr.org/2018/04/10/601184986/heads-of-the-colored-people-takes-on-the-pressures-of-being-the-only-one>

- In May 2019 the collection of stories was chosen as Washington DC's 'DC Reads' book of the month and Nafissa Thompson- Spires took part in book clubs, interviews and discussions.
- The story from the collection that we are going to focus on is 'Heads of the Colored People: Four Fancy Sketches, Two Chalk Outlines and No Apology.'
- **Task 2 :** Before you read the story, write down your initial thoughts and feelings about the title.
- **Task 3:** Listen to the reading and interview in the link below (from 25 seconds to 7 minutes 30 seconds). What do you expect the story will be about?

<https://www.kcrw.com/culture/shows/bookworm/nafissa-thompson-spires-heads-of-the-colored-people>

- **Task 4:** Read the story itself (see the link below). It is written in a meta-narrative style which means that it is a story about storytelling and acknowledges that it is a story whilst being narrated. This is a controversial style, so take your time reading it and thinking about how it makes you feel.

<https://www.npr.org/books/titles/601183690/heads-of-the-colored-people-stories#excerpt>

- **Task 5:** As soon as you have read the story, write down your initial thoughts and reactions. Start by crystallising what the story is about for you by completing this sentence: ‘Heads of Colored People is about... and... But...’. Now write down your ideas in an exploratory way – remember, this is about your reaction to the story, so do not worry about getting it right or wrong! We will be sharing these thoughts when we start the course together.

Exploring more short stories

Short stories are a great way of immersing yourself in a really wide range of narrative texts. If you have enjoyed this task, explore the websites below and read more short stories!

[A Personal Anthology](https://apersonalanthology.com/)

<https://apersonalanthology.com/>

[Granta](https://granta.com/discoveries-24/)

<https://granta.com/discoveries-24/>

[New Yorker](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/fiction) (limited number of articles/stories per month before subscribing)

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/fiction>

[Electric Literature](https://electricliterature.com/)

<https://electricliterature.com/>

[Selected Shorts: Let Us Tell You Story](https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/selected-shorts/id253191824)

<https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/selected-shorts/id253191824>

3. Watch an Online Play

During your A Level English Literature course you will study a range of literary forms: prose, poetry and plays. It is important to remember that each of these have unique techniques that writers deploy to prompt their readers and audiences to think. In plays, playwrights use a range of dramatic techniques to engage and communicate with their audience. The best way to understand the effects of these techniques is to watch a play. Of course reading it is important, but you can only truly understand and appreciate the writer's craft when you watch a piece of drama in performance.

To help you do this, we would like you to watch two plays online. One must be a Shakespearean play and the other should be a play of your choice – explore the resources below and see what you can find!

- Digital Theatre offers a wide range of plays to watch on-demand (including the Royal Shakespeare Company). Although this is a subscription site, some of their plays are available on their YouTube site. They are also currently offering a 30-day free trial.
<https://www.youtube.com/user/digitaltheatre>
<https://www.digitaltheatre.com/consumer/productions>
- Shakespeare's Globe have a wide range of plays which can be rented or bought at <https://globeplayer.tv/all>

When you have watched the performance, complete the tasks below:

For the Shakespearean play:

- Write a brief review (half a page of A4, typed).
 - What did you enjoy the most about the play?
 - Which aspects of the play did you find most intriguing?
 - Do you have any questions now that you have watched the play?

- What kind of dramatic devices were used to engage you and make you think? Consider the staging, props, entrances/exits, scenery, costume, music, stage directions, symbols or motifs.
- Can you think of any other ways in which the play could have been performed to help enhance its themes/ ideas?

For the non-Shakespearean play:

- Write the script for a podcast or online discussion between a critic and the director of the play.
 - You can see examples of these kind of discussions below:
1. [National Theatre YouTube channel](http://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLIgbmjHpqgs7citDojiasj-nMABL_DXku)
http://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLIgbmjHpqgs7citDojiasj-nMABL_DXku
 2. [National Theatre podcasts](https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/nt-talks/id486761654?mt=2)
https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/nt-talks/id486761654?mt=2
 3. [Young Vic](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLqth0oZ0oHJJYftVHd2ZHwaKQ_shhRGhf)
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLqth0oZ0oHJJYftVHd2ZHwaKQ_shhRGhf
 4. [Shakespeare's Globe](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjz6LNDQOWaCkQegAHxyo2g)
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjz6LNDQOWaCkQegAHxyo2g
 5. [RSC](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjz6LNDQOWaCkQegAHxyo2g)
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjz6LNDQOWaCkQegAHxyo2g

4. Exploring Emagazine and Emag Clips

emagazine is a magazine and website for A Level students with articles written by academics, critics, writers, teachers and students on texts and topics set for A Level – and on literature more generally. During your English Literature A Level you will be expected to read a range of critical opinions about texts and use them in your own essays.

We have a subscription to the magazine that you can access by following the link and entering the details below:

<https://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/e-magazine>

Username: Beths2020

Password: Wednesday

- Dip into the openings of several articles, and choose the one that most immediately grabs your attention. You could choose one about a novel, author or genre that you read for your GCSE or just something that grabs your attention.

Here are some suggestions:

1. Adapting Literature for Film
2. Crossover Fiction
3. Openings in Contemporary Fiction – Questions, Challenges and Surprises
4. Dickens and Realism
5. Comedy in Shakespeare’s Tragedies
6. William Blake: The Tyger
7. William Wordsworth: A Poet of the Ordinary
8. Michael Rosen: Defining Poetry
9. Bloodlust, Savagery, Obsession and Excess – Gothic *Macbeth*
10. Navigating Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde’s London
11. Structures of Innocence – Alice Sebold’s *The Lovely Bones*
12. *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* – A Question of Trust (don’t read this article until you have read the novel – it’s a quick and enjoyable read, so if you haven’t, give it a go).

- You could also read about one of the set texts that you will be studying at A Level (*Othello*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Color Purple*, *Hard Times*, *Romantic Poetry*, or *Poems of the Decade*).
- Read the article and pick out three significant points that stand out to you. These could be ideas that you find interesting, that you want to question (perhaps because you disagree or because you want to find out more), a point you don't understand.
- Take one of the points and add your own ideas to it or write a new point of your own.

Extra Challenge: Why not try writing your own emag-style article? This could be about one of your GCSE texts or something completely different; a novel that you have enjoyed, a poem or short story that you have explored in the previous tasks or a broader literary topic.

Another area to explore on the English and Media Centre website is the video clips area.

- <https://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/video-clips/clip-listing>
- On this page you will find short discussions on a wide range of literary texts and topics including: how to read 19th Century novels (and how to read poems), *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, why George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* continues to be important, William Blake's poem 'London' (along with a reading of it), the difference between horror and terror, and dialogue in novels.
- Dip into a variety of these clips. Make a note of new ideas that you come across. Has the clip taught you anything new? Has the clip consolidated any knowledge that you already have? Has the clip made you question anything?

5. Take a Risk With Your Reading

What sort of books do you usually read for pleasure? We often find ourselves reading the same sort of novel or the same author, but it is important that we sometimes move away from our comfort zone, challenge ourselves and explore a range of genres, writers and texts.

- Chose a new type of book to read (this will take you a few weeks, so don't leave it until the last minute!).
 - Once you have read your new book, write a review (3/4 to 1 page of A4 – typed). This should be informative, but also opinionated. Have a look at examples of book reviews online to help you if you are not sure how to start. www.goodreads.com is a good place to start.
 - Below are some ways in which you can find a new type of book to read.
-
- [Look at EMC's list of great 21st-century reads for 6th formers.](https://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/blog/50-great-21st-century-novels-for-6th-formers) (<https://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/blog/50-great-21st-century-novels-for-6th-formers>)
 - Ask friends. Ask the people you know have really different tastes to you.
 - Follow writers, book clubs and book podcasts on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.
 - Read book reviews.
 - Look at lists of 100 best books, for example, the [Guardian 100 Best Novels](https://www.theguardian.com/books/series/the-100-best-novels) (<https://www.theguardian.com/books/series/the-100-best-novels>) and [Guardian Best Books of the 21st Century](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/sep/21/best-books-of-the-21st-century) (<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/sep/21/best-books-of-the-21st-century>).
 - [Read a book in translation](https://www.theguardian.com/books/fiction-in-translation) (<https://www.theguardian.com/books/fiction-in-translation>).

Reading of Core Texts:

Before you officially start your English Literature A Level course in September, we would like you to read the core texts listed below. For the two plays you could watch them instead of just reading them, but do this with a copy of the text alongside you to help with your understanding (and see if the director makes any changes to the playscript!).

Being familiar with the core texts will enable you to dive straight into studying them when the course starts and provide you with your own initial interpretations and reactions to the text.

You should also complete some initial research on the context of these texts to help you interpret and understand them.

- ***The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood**
- ***Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley**
- ***Othello* by William Shakespeare**
- ***A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams**

N.B. When you are buying copies of these texts, make sure that they are a suitable size for annotating. Additionally, it is a good idea to buy a copy of *Othello* that is made for A Level study such as:

- Cambridge School Shakespeare, *Othello*
- Arden Shakespeare, *Othello*
- Heinemann Advanced Shakespeare, *Othello*

Further Wider Reading to Stretch and Challenge You:

1. 1984	George Orwell
2. The Color Purple	Alice Walker
3. One Hundred Years of Solitude	Gabriel Garcia Marquez
4. Hard Times	Charles Dicks
5. Wuthering Heights	Emily Bronte
6. Pride and Prejudice	Jane Austen
7. Atonement	Ian McEwan
8. A Thousand Splendid Suns	Khaled Hosseini
9. Catcher in the Rye	JD Salinger
10.The Great Gatsby	F. Scott Fitzgerald
11.The Road	Cormac McCarthy
12.Dracula	Bram Stoker
13.Beloved	Toni Morrison
14.Jane Eyre	Charlotte Bronte
15.Fahrenheit 451	Ray Bradbury
16.The Drowned World	JG Ballard
17.Brave New World	Aldous Huxley

Websites/ resources for extra research and reading:

- The British Library Website
- English and Media Centre website
 - Username: Beths2020
 - Password: Wednesday
- To truly stretch and challenge yourself before you start your course, dip into some of the books below which are books about books! They are examples of critical theory about literature. Start by reading the opening few paragraphs and then pages before deciding which of the books below intrigues you the most.

On novels:

John Mullan: *How Novels Work* (<https://tinyurl.com/hownovels>)

David Lodge: *The Art of Fiction* (<https://tinyurl.com/lodgefiction>)

Francine Prose: *Reading Like a Writer* (<https://tinyurl.com/prosereadwrite>)

On poetry

James Fenton: *An Introduction to English Poetry* (<https://tinyurl.com/fentonpoetry>)

Ruth Padel: *The Poem and the Journey* (<https://tinyurl.com/padelpoetry>)

Mark Yakich: *Poetry – A Survivor’s Guide* (<https://tinyurl.com/yackichpoetry>)

On Shakespeare

Bill Bryson: *Shakespeare – The World as a Stage* (<https://tinyurl.com/brysonshakes>)

Emma Smith: *This is Shakespeare* (<https://tinyurl.com/smithshakes>)

On Drama

David Edgar: *How Plays Work* (<https://tinyurl.com/playswork>)

Richard Eyre: *Interviews with Theatre People* (<https://tinyurl.com/talktheatre>)

Steve Waters: *The Secret Life of Plays* (<https://tinyurl.com/lifeplays>)

On English in general

Robert Eaglestone: *Doing English* (<https://tinyurl.com/doingenglish>)