

# A-level English Literature

– information and bridging work for those interesting in taking this course 2020-2022

## **BACKGROUND: SHOULD I TAKE ENGLISH LITERATURE AT A-LEVEL?**

**For the right student, English Literature brings both enjoyment and prestige...**

- improve your skills as a reader, communicator, writer and thinker
- learn through discussion and argument
- develop your ideas about the world and its ideas
- It's a long-established and highly respected subject at A-level. Universities and employers love this 'facilitating' subject...

**What's a 'facilitating' subject?**

- English Literature is one of the most frequently requested subjects by universities for their degree courses.
- English Literature is referred to by the 'Russell Group' universities as a 'facilitating' A-level.
- The general truth is: doing an English Literature A-level improves your chances of getting a university place.
- Employers and workplaces offering higher level apprenticeships also place a high premium on the skill sets you will gain from studying an English A-level.

**It opens up a wide variety of career prospects**

- English and other Humanities degrees can open up careers in law, writing and journalism, politics, advertising, research and development, counselling and therapy, teaching, PR, human resources, and much more...

**What do I need to take English Literature A-level and what subjects would it go well with?**

- We accept students with a grade 7 or more in English Literature GCSE. You must also have grade 5 or above in English Language GCSE.
- English Literature A-level combines well with other arts subjects (Art, Music, Drama) and other humanities subjects (History, Drama, Sociology, R.E. Psychology). However, some students have successfully combined English Literature A-level with Maths and Science so don't feel too limited!

## **OK, SO YOU'VE DECIDED YOU'D LIKE TO TAKE ENGLISH LITERATURE! WHAT SHOULD YOU DO BETWEEN NOW AND SEPTEMBER?**

**Suggested reading to get ahead**

### **Poetry**

It would be worth getting hold of the Forward anthology, 'Poems of the Decade':

[https://www.amazon.co.uk/Poems-Decade-Anthology-Forward-Poetry/dp/0571325408/ref=tmm\\_pap\\_swatch\\_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=&sr=](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Poems-Decade-Anthology-Forward-Poetry/dp/0571325408/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=&sr=)

The poems we study from the Forward anthology are below, plus reading the contemporary poems generally from the collection would be useful. You'll find a wealth of comments on, and reviews of, the poems online:

'Eat Me' by Patience Agbabi  
'Chainsaw Versus the Pampas Grass' by Simon Armitage  
'Material' by Ros Barber 'History' by John Burnside  
'History, by John Burnside  
'An Easy Passage' by Julia Copus  
'The Deliverer' by Tishani Doshi  
'The Lammas Hireling' by Ian Duhig  
'To My Nine-Year-Old Self' by Helen Dunmore  
'A Minor Role' by U A Fanthorpe  
'The Gun' by Vicki Feaver  
'The Furthest Distances I've Travelled' by Leontia Flynn  
'Giuseppe' by Roderick Ford  
'Out of the Bag' by Seamus Heaney  
'Effects' by Alan Jenkins  
'Genetics' by Sinéad Morrissey  
'From the Journal of a Disappointed Man' by Andrew Motion  
'Look We Have Coming to Dover!' by Daljit Nagra  
'Please Hold' by Ciaran O'Driscoll  
'On Her Blindness' by Adam Thorpe  
'Ode on a Grayson Perry Urn' by Tim Turnbull

### **Plays**

We also study the play '**Doctor Faustus**' – a wonderfully interesting play, but not an easy read for the uninitiated!

[Doctor Faustus \(Thrift Editions\) : Marlowe, Christopher: Amazon.co.uk: Books](#)

The Shakespeare play you will study in Year 13 is '**Othello**' – you could get ahead by reading and/or watching this now:

[https://www.amazon.co.uk/Othello-Revised-Arden-Shakespeare-Third/dp/1472571762/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?dchild=1&keywords=othello+arden&qid=1590141929&s=books&sr=1-1](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Othello-Revised-Arden-Shakespeare-Third/dp/1472571762/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=othello+arden&qid=1590141929&s=books&sr=1-1)

And for a good film version: [https://www.amazon.co.uk/Othello-Laurence-Fishburne/dp/B000CCRCFM/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?adgrpid=60137288064&dchild=1&gclid=CjwKCAjw8J32BRBCEiwApQEKgVrCqdr2y8LiKWqb6lepbcCqeYigDupJyCcEwtXKLOEZGtSJBmdymxoCmOEQAvD\\_BwE&hvadid=259069521004&hvdev=c&hvllocphy=1006656&hvnetw=g&hvqmt=e&hvrnd=5540860007069700440&hvtargid=kwd-299115205126&hydadcr=23520\\_1727917&keywords=kenneth+branagh+othello&qid=1590142010&s=dvd&sr=1-2](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Othello-Laurence-Fishburne/dp/B000CCRCFM/ref=sr_1_2?adgrpid=60137288064&dchild=1&gclid=CjwKCAjw8J32BRBCEiwApQEKgVrCqdr2y8LiKWqb6lepbcCqeYigDupJyCcEwtXKLOEZGtSJBmdymxoCmOEQAvD_BwE&hvadid=259069521004&hvdev=c&hvllocphy=1006656&hvnetw=g&hvqmt=e&hvrnd=5540860007069700440&hvtargid=kwd-299115205126&hydadcr=23520_1727917&keywords=kenneth+branagh+othello&qid=1590142010&s=dvd&sr=1-2)

### **Prose**

It is not certain which novels you'll be studying next year, but the following texts would be worth reading in any case because your coursework gives you a wide choice so wide reading now will help:

**'Never Let Me Go' by Kazuo Ishiguro**

[Never Let Me Go: Amazon.co.uk: Ishiguro, Kazuo: 9780571258093: Books](#)

**'Frankenstein' by Mary Shelley**

[Frankenstein \(Wordsworth Classics\): Amazon.co.uk: Shelley, Mary, Jansson, Dr Siv, Carabine, Dr Keith: 9781853260230: Books](#)

### **‘The Little Stranger’ by Sarah Waters**

[https://www.amazon.co.uk/Little-Stranger-Sarah-Waters/dp/1844086062/ref=tmm\\_pap\\_swatch\\_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=&sr=](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Little-Stranger-Sarah-Waters/dp/1844086062/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=&sr=)

### **‘The Picture of Dorian Gray’ by Oscar Wilde**

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Picture-Dorian-Gray-Wordsworth-Classics/dp/1853260150>

## **Research activities to complete for September**

If you REALLY want to get ahead, you could start to think about some reading towards the **coursework element** of A-level English Literature.

- You are asked to write a 2500–3000 word essay (the word count is advisory, not mandatory, but it’s best to stick to it) on two texts of your choice.
- The texts can be any genre (prose, poetry or drama) but there are some guidelines as follows:
  - they must be of ‘literary quality’ (so not the kind of pop paperbacks you might read on the beach)
  - they must have been written in English as their original language (so no *War and Peace* or *Crime and Punishment* – sadly, as they’re wonderful!)
  - avoid established GCSE texts (e.g. *Animal Farm*, *An Inspector Calls* etc.) regardless of whether you yourself studied them at GCSE
  - avoid children’s literature (e.g. *Alice in Wonderland*) or youth literature (e.g. *The Hunger Games*)
  - if you choose poetry as one or both of your set texts, it must be a published collection not just a single poem (unless it’s a long poem such as *Paradise Lost*!)
  - most people choose two prose texts (usually novels) but don’t rule out plays or poetry – some students have written brilliantly about these over the years
  - it can be good to choose one text that is pre-20th century but that is by no means required
  - choose texts that sparks your interest – you’re going to spend a lot of time thinking and writing about them!
- The essay will be assessed on all five assessment objectives (AOs), evenly (20% for each). Let me remind you what they are:
  - AO1 – understanding of literary texts
  - AO2 – analysis of specific features of texts
  - AO3 – context
  - AO4 – comparison
  - AO5 – critical interpretation (referencing and interacting with what critics and others have said about the texts)
- You may find it challenging getting your head round these AOs right now – but don’t worry, at this stage any reading of potential coursework texts is very helpful.

So, what could you do now, over these next few weeks?

1. Start to think about what texts you’d like to read because you might be interested in exploring them for your coursework. If you have no idea at all, I’ve attached a reading list to get you started.
2. Read, read, read! It is unlikely that you will know instantly what texts you want to write about so use the time you now have to read several texts and see which spark interest.

3. Once you have read a text, Google/Wiki it and have a look at what others are saying about it in reviews and/or academic articles etc.

By the way, a note about cost – if we were in school, I may be able to lend certain books; as it is, you're probably going to have to buy them unless you have literary parents with a well-stocked bookshelf! Most books are reasonably cheap on Amazon or similar especially if you get them second-hand. If you do experience difficulties with the cost, get in touch with me and I'll see what I can do.

If you have any questions, email back and I'll help you out. Please make the best use of your time to get on with this – you are in the lovely position of reading (which some regard as a pleasure!) being your set work: so make the most of it!

### **Final thoughts...**

- The A-level English Literature Specification is included for students to view
- This includes details on the Assessment Objectives (see above) and how the course is assessed. The short version is that you have three exams – one on poetry, one on prose and one on plays – plus an extended essay for coursework.