

A guide to help you get ready for **A-level English Literature**

What do we do in A-Level English Literature?

This pack contains a range of resources to help you be fully prepared for when you start your English Literature A-Level. The pack is designed for you to use throughout the summer and has some great ideas on how to engage with the world of Literature as well as details about how to prepare for the specific texts we will be studying over the next two years. English Literature is an amazing subject and I hope this pack helps you become as enthused about the subject as I am!



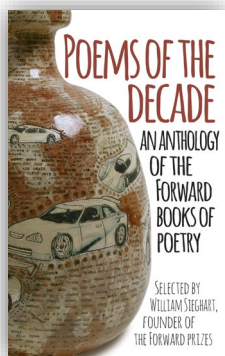
If you need any clarification or find another amazing resource, do get in touch!

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The books we are going to study...

Part of the preparation for English Literature is really quite simple... read! The more you can read over the summer the more you will expose yourself to the different writing styles, genres and forms of literature you will encounter on the A-Level course.

One thing to note is that you should try to get the copies of the text from the specific publishers mentioned in this pack. Even if the version or edition you find is an older one, as long as you purchase it from the publisher mentioned in the list it will help you stay on the same page (literally!) while we go through the texts in class.



Poems of the Decade - Publisher: Faber & Faber; Main edition (19 Mar. 2015)

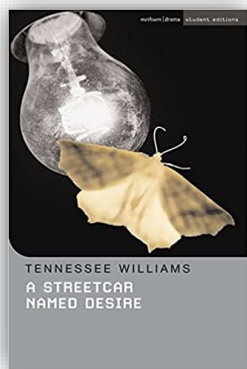
All the poems in the anthology were written this century giving the anthology a post-modern feel. We cover 20 poems from the collection and the subjects and themes range from adolescence, to guns, to infanticide, to parental relationships. The collection allows us to reflect deeply on issues we face in modern society with thought-provoking verse all of which are very different from one another. This is the first set of literary texts we cover on the course in Year 1, so get a head start by starting to analyse the poems over summer.

This website has a useful list of all the poems we will cover and has outlines of the key ideas in each of them ...

<https://awakenenglish.com/poems-of-the-decade/>

This quick YouTube clip is some advice on how to read poems and it's from one of the poets in our collection Tishan Doshi...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YTdQyTdUl2s>



A Streetcar Named Desire- Methuen Drama; Revised edition

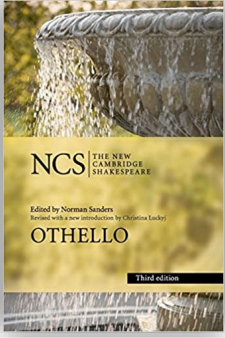
"A Streetcar Named Desire shows a turbulent confrontation between traditional values in the American South - an old-world graciousness and beauty running decoratively to seed - set against the rough-edged, aggressive materialism of the new world. Through the vividly characterised figures of Southern belle Blanche Dubois, seeking refuge from physical ugliness in decayed gentility, and her brutal brother-in-law Stanley Kowalski, Tennessee Williams dramatises his sense of the South's past as still active and often destructive in modern America."

This is the role and the play that made Marlon Brando famous (*The Godfather*, *Apocalypse Now* and ... errrr the *Superman* films!). There are various clips from the film adaptation on YouTube but the link below is to the most famous scene in the play...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V6TrgQxf3lk>

You can also take a look of a review of the play when it was first performed in 1947 and compare it to how you and modern audiences might see the play differently today...

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1947/12/13/lower-depths-southern-style>



Othello - The New Cambridge Shakespeare

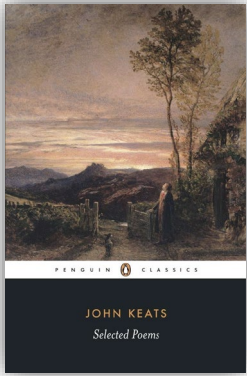
The story revolves around its two central characters: Othello, a Moorish general in the Venetian army, and his treacherous ensign, Iago. Given its varied and enduring themes of racism, love, jealousy, betrayal, revenge, and repentance, *Othello* is still often performed in professional and community theatre alike, and has been the source for numerous operatic, film, and literary adaptations. The tragedy unfolds painstakingly as the audience is placed in a compromised position; both as Iago's confidante and simultaneously witnesses to his cruel crimes.

The link below to the BBC iPlayer has a full showing of the critically acclaimed 2015 production of *Othello* by Iqbal Khan. The production follows in a long line of theatrical adaptations that tell us much about changing attitudes towards themes such as race, gender and religious tolerance...

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p089zj52/culture-in-quarantine-shakespeare-othello>

There are also some excellent commentaries on the play and its characters by critics, actors and historians on the National Theatre YouTube channel linked below...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KkdbNETIOM>



John Keats Selected Poems – Penguin Classics

John Keats was an English poet and one of the key figures in the 19th century Romantic Movement. Despite dying at the age of 25, his reputation and the appreciation of his work grew after his premature death and he has gone on to become one of the most celebrated figures in all of English Literature. Famous for his odes in particular, his work is characterised by a pure sense of the Imagination as well as having a distinct lyrical quality. He deals with matters not just of the heart but also of death, nature, ambition whilst sharing his fascination with the mythology of the Hellenic and Medieval worlds of the past. The defining quality of his poetry though is its direct and raw display of emotions, with all the intensity he feels consequently transmitted to the reader.

In the link below there is great analysis of one of his most famous poems *Bright Star* by hip-hop star Akala...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uSAiYNQfIXM>

There is also this fascinating article about Keats' premature death, his last words and his legacy written in the Paris Review...

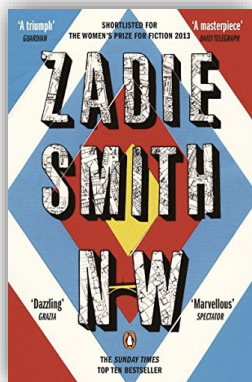
<https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2016/02/23/writ-in-water/>

Reading Novels

The remaining texts on the course are novels. I am sure you have already studied prose at GCSE level but the following TED talks reveal the power of reading and also what to look out for when analysing books at A-Level...

https://www.ted.com/talks/lisa_bu_how_books_can_open_your_mind?referrer=playlist-a_love_letter_to_libraries

https://www.ted.com/talks/elif_shafak_the_politics_of_fiction?referrer=playlist-talks_for_lifelong_readers



NW by Zadie Smith – Penguin Books Ltd

“NW follows four Londoners - Leah, Natalie, Felix and Nathan - after they've left their childhood council estate, grown up and moved on to different lives. From private houses to public parks, at work and at play, their city is brutal, beautiful and complicated. Yet after a chance encounter they each find that the choices they've made, the people they once were and are now, can suddenly, rapidly unravel. Funny, poignant and vividly contemporary, NW is as brimming with vitality as the city itself.”

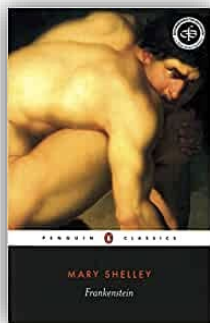
The novel is our set text for coursework and you will be expected to compare it to a piece of literature of your own choice at the end of Year 1.

You can read a review of the novel from the *The Independent* in the link. You will be expected to incorporate critical interpretations into your readings of the texts at A-Level...

<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/nw-by-zadie-smith-8096400.html>

Although the quality is not great, there is also a link below to a BBC dramatisation of the novel...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3mq5by9CS9I&t=303s>



Frankenstein: Or, the Modern Prometheus (Penguin Classics)

The tale of *Frankenstein* and his monster is one of the most famous in English Literary history. With its mix of Gothic, Romantic and early Sci-Fi, the novel has fascinated and horrified readers for generations. The story of overambition and overreaching and the dire consequences when human beings try to play God is one that is as relevant today as it was when Mary Shelley first penned the novel. When analysing the text we will be comparing its ideas, context and messages to the next novel on our list, *The Handmaid's Tale*.

The link below is a summary of the many interpretations over the years of Mary Shelley's most famous work ...

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-12711091>

There is also an interesting podcast from BBC Radio 4 on the significance of the novel and its key features...

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m00051n6>



The Handmaid's Tale – (Vintage Classics)

Now also a very popular T.V series, Atwood's original novel has long been a part of Literature syllabuses all over the world. Written in Reagan era America, the novel explores a dystopian future where a fundamentalist and misogynistic government takes over the U.S and leads to a complete and brutal regression of Women's Rights, as well as those of minorities and anyone deemed a threat to power. The novel looks at how troubling attitudes in society past and present can be sown together to create a nightmare world of oppression and abuse. The novel has risen to prominence again with recent political trends both in America and around the world.

To help think about comparisons with *Frankenstein*, this article writes about connections between the authors...

www.theguardian.com/books/2017/mar/25/dystopian-dreams-how-feminist-science-fiction-predicted-the-future

There is also a great TED Talks on why *The Handmaid's Tale* is such an important novel...

<https://www.ted.com/search?q=how+to+read+a+novel>

Transition Projects from GCSE to A-Level

This then leaves us with the Transition tasks you will be expected to complete before starting A-Level English Literature.

Task 1 - A response to the poem *Eat Me* by Patience Agbabi (the poem is on the next page) (500 words)

Taking into account AO1 for English Literature-

“Informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts with accurate written expression”

You will write an essay on the theme of **power and control** in the poem ***Eat Me***

Task 2 – Write a review of your favourite piece of literature (500 words)

This review should include:

- brief outline of the plot
- the main characters in the text and why they are interesting
- the key themes and how they are explored in the novel
- the key messages and ideas the writer is trying to get across to their audience
- the context and setting of the texts (e.g. World War 1 novel, dystopian future etc.)
- why it is your favourite piece of Literature

Hopefully the transition tasks and all the resources and the texts mentioned in this pack will keep you going over the summer... however if you do need any more suggestions for things to read, there is a link to *The Independent's* list of greatest books to read before you die...

<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/books-best-greatest-read-before-you-die-classic-novels-literature-austen-orwell-dickens-mantel-a9255191.html>

... as well as an alternative list of great books that you may not have come across...

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/sep/03/the-best-novels-in-english-readers-alternative-list>

So to finish I will go back to my message at the start of the pack... the best way to prepare for an A-Level in English Literature is... READ!

I look forward to seeing you all in the new academic year!

Abdul Malik

Lecturer in English Literature



Eat Me

When I hit thirty, he brought me a cake,
three layers of icing, home-made,
a candle for each stone in weight.

The icing was white but the letters were pink,
they said, eat me. And I ate, did
what I was told. Didn't even taste it.

Then he asked me to get up and walk
round the bed so he could watch my broad
belly wobble, hips judder like a juggernaut.

The bigger the better, he'd say, I like
big girls, soft girls, girls I can burrow inside
with multiple chins, masses of cellulite.

I was his Jacuzzi. But he was my cook,
my only pleasure the rush of fast food,
his pleasure, to watch me swell like forbidden fruit.

His breadfruit. His desert island after shipwreck.

Or a beached whale on a king-size bed
craving a wave. I was a tidal wave of flesh
too fat to leave, too fat to buy a pint of full-fat milk,
too fat to use fat as an emotional shield,
too fat to be called chubby, cuddly, big-built.

The day I hit thirty-nine, I allowed him to stroke
my globe of a cheek. His flesh, my flesh flowed.
He said, Open wide, poured olive oil down my throat.

Soon you'll be forty... he whispered, and how
could I not roll over on top. I rolled and he drowned
in my flesh. I drowned his dying sentence out.

I left him there for six hours that felt like a week.
His mouth slightly open, his eyes bulging with greed.
There was nothing else left in the house to eat.

By Patience Agbabi