

English Literature AQA A Level (B specification)

The English Literature course aims to encourage students to develop their interest in and enjoyment of literature. Students will engage critically and creatively with a substantial and exciting body of texts which includes plays, poetry and prose by influential writers such as Ibsen, Shakespeare, Blake and Orwell. Over the two-year course, students immerse themselves in at least eight challenging texts, of various genres and from different periods, and it is expected that the process results in a deeper understanding of society, of oneself and of the human condition. Students are expected to read widely around the course so as to become more sophisticated, discerning and knowledgeable in their responses to literature. Each year the department runs a number of trips to theatres and lectures and is always looking for opportunities to enrich the students' cultural and literary experience. As well as studying texts for exams, students will have the opportunity to produce their own creative or analytical coursework based on texts of their choice. Students who enjoy literature and discussion will thrive on this course.

Course Content:

Paper 1(a): Literary genres – Aspects of Tragedy

Students will study three texts through the lens of tragedy. At the core of all the set texts is a tragic hero or heroine who is flawed in some way, who suffers and causes suffering to others. Some tragic features will be more in evidence in some texts than in others and students will need to understand how particular aspects of the tragic genre are used and how they work in the three chosen texts. Previous texts taught for this unit include: Othello, Richard II, The Great Gatsby, Death of a Salesman and a poetry collection by Keats.

Paper 2(b): Elements of Political and Social Protest Writing

Students will study three texts that explore themes of social and political protest. Although it could be claimed that all texts are political, what defines the texts here is that they have issues of power and powerlessness at their core. In addition to the set texts, students will explore a number of 'unseen' extracts which explore themes of power, oppression, rebellion, corruption, and issues of gender politics and social class. It is hoped that their understanding of wider texts from this genre will lead them to make informed comments about the way that political and social protest writing is used to comment on society and ultimately how political and social protest writing affects audiences and readers, inviting reflection on our own world. Previous texts taught for this unit include: The Kite Runner, A Doll's House, The Handmaid's Tale and a poetry collection by Keats.

Paper 3: Independent coursework

This unit requires students to independently research and write about two texts of their choice. One text must be prose and the other must be a poetry collection. This component is designed to allow students to read widely, to choose their own texts and to understand that contemporary study of literature needs to be informed by the fact that different theoretical and critical methods can be applied to the subject. Students will study an anthology of critical methods and ideas including feminist theory, Marxist theory, post-colonial theory, and literary value and the canon. They will then use these critical approaches to form readings of their chosen texts.

Beyond A Level study:

English Literature is a highly respected A Level and as such, is suitable for an incredibly broad range of university courses and career choices. Students who become successful in English Literature acquire both powers of analysis and an ability to write effectively; English Literature is therefore considered a 'facilitating' subject by Russell Group universities.