



richuish **HEADSTART**

ENGLISH LITERATURE 'A' LEVEL

INTRODUCTORY BOOKLET



The following short booklet is an introduction to the sort of things you will do at 'A' level. You will study the three genres and develop skills of analysis by means of discussion, research, putting text into context and finding out what other readers have thought of the texts.

YOUR responses are central, so here are a few extracts from prose, poetry and drama to think about.

You could write some responses, follow the links to further on-line resources, or develop your own reading from these starting points. All of this will be very useful for your 'A' level studies!

And if you have any questions please email the course manager for English Literature, Jill Burton:
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A. PROSE – the opening of short stories

At A level Literature you will study many different pieces of prose. This is to prepare you for an exam where you will be given two extracts that you have never seen before and you will have to analyse one.

You will also complete a comparative study of two novels (pre-2000 and post-2000) about which you will write a long essay: this essay will be internally assessed (a 'non-exam' assessment) and then moderated by the exam board. It will be up to you to form your own opinions on the texts, analyse key passages, consider the contexts of writing and reception, and to use critical opinions to develop your argument.

➤ **Here are the openings of some prose extracts –short stories and novels: can you identify the narrative techniques, and the effect they are intended to have on the reader? You might like to think about the following:**

- The **narrative viewpoint**: *Why has the writer chosen this perspective? How does it affect the language choices? What is the effect on the reader's response?*
- **Characters** – *how are characters used (or not) at the start of these stories: do they **dominate the tale** and perspective?*
- The **structure**– *can you tell if the beginning is being used to launch the reader straight in to the narrative or is it more to create a sense of mood or place?*

1. Enduring Love Ian McEwan (1997)

The beginning is simple to mark. We were in sunlight under a turkey oak, partly protected from a strong gusty wind. I was kneeling on the grass with a corkscrew in my hand, and Clarissa was passing me the bottle – a 1987 Daumas Gassac. This was the moment, this was the pinprick on the time map: I was stretching out my hand, and as the cool neck and the black foil touched my palm, we heard a man's shout. We turned to look across the field and saw the danger. Next thing, I was running towards it. The transformation was absolute; I don't recall dropping the corkscrew, or getting to my feet, or making a decision, or hearing the caution that Clarissa called after me. What idiocy, to be racing into this story and its labyrinths, sprinting away from our happiness among the fresh spring grasses by the oak. There was the shout again, and a child's cry, enfeebled by the wind that roared in the tall trees along the hedgerows

2. 'The Yellow Wallpaper' Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1892)

It is very seldom that mere ordinary people like John and myself secure ancestral halls for the summer.

A colonial mansion, a hereditary estate, I would say a haunted house, and reach the height of romantic felicity -- but that would be asking too much of fate!

Still I will proudly declare that there is something queer about it. Else, why should it be let so cheaply?

And why have stood so long untenanted? John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage.

John is practical in the extreme. He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and he scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures. John is a physician, and *perhaps* -- (I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind)

-- *perhaps* that is one reason I do not get well faster. You see he does not believe I am sick! And what can one do?

3. ***The Pedestrian*** Ray Bradbury (1951)

To enter out into that silence that was the city at eight o'clock of a misty evening in November, to put your feet upon that buckling concrete walk, to step over grassy seams and make your way, hands in pockets, through the silences, that was what Mr. Leonard Mead most dearly loved to do. He would stand upon the corner of an intersection and peer down long moonlit avenues of sidewalk in four directions, deciding which way to go, but it really made no difference; he was alone in this world of A.D. 2053, or as good as alone, and with a final decision made, a path selected, he would stride off, sending patterns of frosty air before him like the smoke of a cigar.

Sometimes he would walk for hours and miles and return only at midnight to his house. And on his way he would see the cottages and homes with their dark windows, and it was not unequal to walking through a graveyard where only the faintest glimmers of firefly light appeared in flickers behind the windows. Sudden gray phantoms seemed to manifest upon inner room walls where a curtain was still undrawn against the night, or there were whisperings and murmurs where a window in a tomblike building was still open.

FURTHER THINKING

- *What predictions do you have about the narrative to follow? You could try writing the next paragraph or two in the same register, creating the same mood and developing character.*

FURTHER RESEARCH

You can **find out more about the texts** and read the rest by using the following links:

- **Read the whole of *The Pedestrian* online** (a very short story!)
<http://www.riversidelocalschools.com/Downloads/pedestrian%20short%20story.pdf>

Or watch a version on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KtpDc3ySSbw>

- **Find out more about *Enduring Love*** <https://www.theguardian.com/books/1999/sep/07/fiction.reviews>
<https://thesteelreview.wordpress.com/2012/11/25/book-vs-film-enduring-love/>
and watch the film adaptation trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EXiNVFmv0UU>

- **Read the whole of *The Yellow Wallpaper***

(This text is used during our Literature A level course as an introduction to your extended essay, and to develop understanding of the era, of women's writing, the gothic and unreliable narrative. It is a very unusual text and hard to believe it was written in 1892!) <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1952/1952-h/1952-h.htm>

(see the original printed version:

<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/theliteratureofprescription/exhibitionAssets/digitalDocs/The-Yellow-Wall-Paper.pdf>)

Read an article about how the story still inspires writers and artists:

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/feb/07/charlotte-perkins-gilman-yellow-wallpaper-strangeness-classic-short-story-exhibition>

<https://libguides.exeter.edu/gilman> (this includes a link to an animated version of the story)

- **Research the period in which Perkins Gilman was writing** (and its fascination with the gothic!) on **The British Library website** (which is a fantastic resource for articles, videos and facsimiles of original texts)
<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/themes/fin-de-siecle>

<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/videos/the-gothic>

A. POETRY

During the A Level course you will develop your skills by comparing and contrasting pieces of writing.

Read the poems below and see how many comparisons and contrasts you can find.

Begin with a broad overview of the *themes* and *tones* of the poems, then develop more detailed comparisons of *language choices, images and structure*.

Keep a record of your observations either in note form or as a table, perhaps drawing lines between the poems where you find detailed comparisons.

During Wind and Rain

They sing their dearest songs--
He, she, all of them--yea,
Treble and tenor and bass.
And one to play;
With the candles mooning each face....
Ah, no; the years O!
How the sick leaves reel down in throngs!

They clear the creeping moss--
Elders and juniors--aye,
Making the pathways neat
And the garden gay;
And they build a shady seat....
Ah, no; the years, the years;
See, the white storm-birds wing across!

They are blithely breakfasting all--
Men and maidens--yea,
Under the summer tree,
With a glimpse of the bay,
While pet fowl come to the knee....
Ah, no; the years O!
And the rotten rose is ripped from the wall.

They change to a high new house,
He, she, all of them--aye,
Clocks and carpets and chairs
On the lawn all day,
And brightest things that are theirs....
Ah, no; the years, the years;
Down their carved names the raindrop plows.

Thomas Hardy

Sometimes it happens

And sometimes it happens that you are friends and
then
You are not friends,
And friendship has passed.
And whole days are lost and among them
A fountain empties itself.

And sometimes it happens that you are loved and
then
You are not loved,
And love is past.
And whole days are lost and among them
A fountain empties itself into the grass.

And sometimes you want to speak to her and then
You do not want to speak,
Then the opportunity has passed.
Your dreams flare up, they suddenly vanish.

And also it happens that there is nowhere to go and
then
There is somewhere to go,
Then you have bypassed.
And the years flare up and are gone,
Quicker than a minute.

So you have nothing.
You wonder if these things matter and then
As soon you begin to wonder if these things matter
They cease to matter,
And caring is past.
And a fountain empties itself into the grass.

Brian Patten

C. DRAMA

One of the components of the 'A' level course will be dramas and includes the study of *The Tempest*, widely considered to be Shakespeare's last play.

[Here is an introduction to one of the most interesting characters in the play, Caliban, with some links to further research.](#)



The play can be interpreted as many things - perhaps reflecting Shakespeare's own 'farewell' to the theatre, or a depiction of the Jacobean world or the stage itself. There has always been much discussion of the strange character Caliban (he is described as 'a savage and deformed slave' in Shakespeare's cast list, but also as 'monster' by several characters.) Because the play is a comedy, Caliban may have been created for comic effect, but there is a lot that is very uncomfortable for the modern audience in his treatment by Prospero (the ex-duke of Milan, shipwrecked 'ruler' of the island and magician.)

One critic writes: 'The dominant theme in twentieth century productions was the exploration of the play as a colonial experience, even in 1838 when in Macready's version the modern Caliban, victim of oppression was born. Jonathan Bate.(2008)

Another critic suggests: "Prospero is often seen as a tyrant, bully, rampant colonialist or power-mad ruler." E E Stoll

- **Compare the similarities and differences in Shakespeare's depiction of Caliban in these two extracts:**

A. Act I. SCENE II. The island.

CALIBAN... I must eat my dinner.
This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother,
Which thou takest from me. When thou camest first,
Thou strokedst me and madest much of me, wouldst
give me
Water with berries in't, and teach me how
To name the bigger light, and how the less,
That burn by day and night: and then I loved thee
And show'd thee all the qualities o' the isle,
The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile:

Cursed be I that did so! All the charms
Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you!
For I am all the subjects that you have,
Which first was mine own king: and here you sty me
In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me
The rest o' the island.

PROSPERO Thou most lying slave,
Whom stripes may move, not kindness! ...

B. ACT II SCENE II. Another part of the island.

Enter CALIBAN with a burden of wood. A noise of thunder heard

CALIBAN

All the infections that the sun sucks up
From bogs, fens, flats, on Prosper fall and make him
By inch-meal a disease! His spirits hear me
And yet I needs must curse. But they'll nor pinch,
Fright me with urchin--shows, pitch me i' the mire,
Nor lead me, like a firebrand, in the dark
Out of my way, unless he bid 'em; but
For every trifle are they set upon me;
Sometime like apes that mow and chatter at me
And after bite me, then like hedgehogs which
Lie tumbling in my barefoot way and mount
Their pricks at my footfall; sometime am I
All wound with adders who with cloven tongues
Do hiss me into madness.

- **What do you notice about the language choices? Why do you think it is important for Caliban to be addressing the audience directly? Can you tell whether Shakespeare intends us to sympathise with him?**
- **You can do more research into the play on these websites:**

➤ The **RSC** site includes many pictures from previous productions as well as videos about the most recent, ground breaking 2016 production which we study in more depth during the A level course:

<https://www.rsc.org.uk/the-tempest/>

There are also some interesting articles on the **British Library website**, especially the second one below which explains the 'Post-Colonial' reading of the play more fully:

<https://www.bl.uk/works/the-tempest>

<https://www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/post-colonial-reading-of-the-tempest>

These websites include much more about many of Shakespeare's plays for you to investigate!