



A-Level English Literature

Exam Board: AQA – English Literature A

Entry Criteria: Grade 6 in GCSE English language and literature

Overview

English Literature A's historicist approach to the study of literature rests upon reading texts within a shared context. Working from the belief that no text exists in isolation but is the product of the time in which it was produced, English Literature A encourages students to explore the relationships that exist between texts and the contexts within which they are written, received and understood. Studying texts within a shared context enables students to investigate and connect them, drawing out patterns of similarity and difference using a variety of reading strategies and perspectives. English Literature A privileges the process of making autonomous meaning, encouraging students to debate and challenge the interpretations of other readers as they develop their own informed personal responses.

The specification encourages the exploration of texts in a number of different ways:

- the study of a literary theme over time
- the study of literature through engaging with two of the main historicist perspectives, the diachronic (reading texts written across widely different time periods that explore the same theme) and synchronic (reading texts written within a narrower and clearly defined time period)
- the study of various texts, both singly and comparatively, chosen from a list of core set texts and a list of chosen comparative set texts
- writing about texts in a number of different ways.

Working within historicist principles means students are required to read widely across a range of texts and connect them across time and topic. Working with texts over time involves looking at ways in which authors shape meanings within their texts. It also involves thinking about a wide range of relevant contexts, some of them to do with the production of the text at the time of its writing, some (where possible) to do with how the text has been received over time and, most of all in this specification, contexts to do with how the text can be interpreted by readers now. And finally, because texts and their meanings are not fixed, interpretation is not fixed, and multiple interpretations are possible.



How will I be assessed?

- **Paper 1: Love through the ages** (40%).
- **Paper 2: Texts in shared contexts** (40%).
- **Non-exam assessment: Independent critical study: texts across time** (20%).



Complementary Subjects

- Drama
- History



Career Progression

- Law
- Advertising
- Politics
- History
- Marketing
- The scope of writing professions
- Journalism
- Digital Media
- Publishing
- Public Relations



Recommended Reading

Classic Novels

1. **“Jane Eyre”** by Charlotte Brontë.
Identity, feminism, social criticism.
2. **“Wuthering Heights”** by Emily Brontë.
Love, revenge, nature vs. nurture.
3. **“1984”** by George Orwell.
Totalitarianism, surveillance, individuality.
4. **“Crime and Punishment”** by Fyodor Dostoevsky.
Morality, redemption, the psychology of guilt.

Poetry Collections

1. **“The Complete Poems of W.B. Yeats”**
Myth, politics, love, and spirituality.
2. **“Selected Poems”** by Ted Hughes
Focus on nature, mythology, and human experience.
3. **“The Collected Poems of Philip Larkin”**
Everyday life, death, and the passage of time.

Plays

1. **“Death of a Salesman”** by Arthur Miller
The American Dream, family dynamics, disillusionment.
2. **“Waiting for Godot”** by Samuel Beckett
Absurdism, existentialism, the passage of time.
3. **“The Crucible”** by Arthur Miller
Hysteria, reputation, moral conflict.

Short Stories

1. **“The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway”**
Loss, war, and human emotion.
2. **“Interpreter of Maladies”** by Jhumpa Lahiri
Identity, cultural displacement, and communication.
3. **“Dubliners”** by James Joyce
Focus on themes of paralysis, identity, and the mundane.

Non-Fiction

1. **“The Hero with a Thousand Faces”** by Joseph Campbell
Exploration of myth and narrative structure.
2. **“On Writing”** by Stephen King
Insights into the craft of writing and storytelling.
3. **“How to Read Literature Like a Professor”** by Thomas C. Foster
A guide to understanding literary elements and themes.

Critical Theory and Context

1. **“Literary Theory: An Introduction”** by Terry Eagleton
A foundational text on different critical perspectives.
2. **“The Cambridge Companion to English Literature”**
Covers historical contexts and movements.