



Rushcliffe School

A-LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE



SUMMER TRANSITION WORK

Why should I study A Level English Literature?

- You love reading independently
- You love discussing and debating texts
- You love arguing your point
- You love working exceptionally hard and challenging yourself
- You love getting to grips with big questions, concepts, psychology, philosophy, society, language, human nature...

... hopefully the answer is yes to all of the above! This booklet talks you through how to prepare for A Level Literature.

What does the course consist of?

Assessments

Paper 1: Literary genres	+	Paper 2: Texts and genres	+	Non-exam assessment: Theory and independence
<p>What's assessed Choice of two options</p> <p>Option 1A: Aspects of tragedy</p> <p>Option 1B: Aspects of comedy</p> <p>Study of three texts: one Shakespeare text; a second drama text and one further text, of which one must be written pre-1900</p>		<p>What's assessed Choice of two options</p> <p>Option 2A: Elements of crime writing</p> <p>Option 2B: Elements of political and social protest writing</p> <p>Study of three texts: one post-2000 prose text; one poetry and one further text, of which one must be written pre-1900</p> <p>Exam will include an unseen passage.</p>		<p>What's assessed Study of two texts: one poetry and one prose text, informed by study of the Critical anthology</p> <p>Two essays of 1,250–1,500 words, each responding to a different text and linking to a different aspect of the Critical anthology</p> <p>One essay can be re-creative. The re-creative piece will be accompanied by a commentary.</p>
<p>Assessed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • written exam: 2 hours 30 minutes • closed book • 75 marks • 40% of A-level 		<p>Assessed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • written exam: 3 hours • open book • 75 marks • 40% of A-level 		<p>Assessed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50 marks • 20% of A-level • assessed by teachers • moderated by AQA
<p>Questions</p> <p>Section A: one passage-based question on set Shakespeare text (25 marks)</p> <p>Section B: one essay question on set Shakespeare text (25 marks)</p> <p>Section C: one essay question linking two texts (25 marks)</p>		<p>Questions</p> <p>Section A: one compulsory question on an unseen passage (25 marks)</p> <p>Section B: one essay question on set text (25 marks)</p> <p>Section C: one essay question which connects two texts (25 marks)</p>		

To summarise:

Two exams (80%)

Two coursework essays (20%)

Section 1: Revision of key knowledge and skills

Me and Books

Complete this book reflection:

Favourite childhood book:

Most read book:

Most shocking book:

Book that changed your life:

Funniest book:

Saddest book:

Guilty Pleasure:

Book you'd recommend:

Book you've always wanted to read:

Have a look at the following 'book shelf' and think about these questions:

<https://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/100-books-to-read-before-you-die>

How many have you read?

What makes them so important?

Are they important?

Which of these would I like to read over the summer and why?

GCSE Skills

Remind yourself of the key skills on the GCSE English Mark Scheme. Write down next to each tips on how to do it 'well':

Skill	How to do it 'well'
Quotes	
Terms	
Inferences	
Context	

GCSE Key Phrases:

Revise the following phrases as they will also be used at A Level:

INFERENCE PHRASES:

Suggests...
Implies...
Connotes...
Emphasises...
Highlights...
Indicates...

TENTATIVE PHRASES:

Perhaps...
Possibly...
Could...
May...
Arguably...
Almost...
Borderline...

SIMILAR CONNECTION PHRASES:

This is reinforced...
This is further supported when...
This is heightened when...
To bolster this notion...
Also...
In addition...
Furthermore...

DIFFERENT CONNECTION PHRASES:

However...
Contrasting this...
Yet...
Overriding this...
On the other hand...
Contrary to this...
This is disabled however by...
Despite this...

EXTENDED INFERENCES PHRASES:

By extension...
In turn, it would seem...
Symbolically...
Therefore...
Perhaps then...
Ultimately making it seem...
It is almost as if...
At a deeper level...

CHEEKY NOD PHRASES

'less...'
'more...'
'unlike...'
'far from...'
'... quite adverse to...'
'whereas...'
'dissimilar to...'

GCSE Terms:

Although not as important at A-Level, you will still make use of terms:

Noun (abstract/concrete)	A naming word.
Pronoun	I/You/He/She/They/Them
Verb (dynamic/modal)	A doing word/an action or state of being.
Adverb	Describes a verb, usually ends in -ly.
Adjective	Describes a noun.
Semantic field	A group of words suggesting a theme/topic e.g. A semantic field of war – guns/bullets/army/soldier
Simile	Comparing one thing to another using like or as e.g. the tree was like a mountain.
Metaphor	Comparing one thing to another by saying it is something else e.g. the tree was a mountain.
Juxtaposition	Two things being seen or placed close together with contrasting effect
Personification	Giving an inanimate object human qualities.
Symbolism	A word/phrase/object that represents a bigger idea
Declarative sentence	A statement e.g. The sky is blue.
Imperative sentence	A command e.g. Stop running.
Interrogative sentence	A question.
Exclamative sentence	A sentence ending with a !
Asyndetic list	A list without conjunctions or connectives.
Protagonist	The main character.
Linear narrative	Narrative that follows a straight line e.g. beginning – middle - end
Non-linear narrative	Often starts in the middle of the story and then goes back to the beginning may involve flashbacks.

Motif	A recurring theme or idea throughout the story.
Foreshadowing	Hints of what is to come in the story.
Climax	The point of greatest tension in the story.
Exposition	The start of the narrative
Denouement	The end of the narrative
Time phrase	References made to a change in time.
Topic sentence	The summarising first sentence of a paragraph.
Repetition	An idea or reference made more than once.

GCSE SQUID structure:

To be treated 'loosely' and flexibly, the SQUID writing frame still helps you at A Level:

SQUID

The writer presents ____ as ____ and ____ as “quote” which suggests ____ and ____ because ____.

Furthermore, the fact that ____ suggests ____ (unpick). At a deeper level, it is almost as though... This could make the reader feel ____ because ____.

This is reinforced by the use of “quote” which suggests ____ and ____ because ____ and ____ where the use of the (unpick feature) emphasises...

Generic Inference Bank

Fill in the boxes with as many synonyms as you can think of. This will help with inferences at A Level too.

<u>Good</u>	<u>Bad</u>	<u>Brave</u>	<u>Happy</u>	<u>Proud</u>
<u>Dangerous</u>	<u>Nervous</u>	<u>Difficult</u>	<u>Fear</u>	<u>Isolated</u>
<u>Violent</u>	<u>Sad</u>	<u>Disgust</u>	<u>Anger</u>	<u>Sympathy</u>

Character Inference Bank

When you have read 'Othello' and 'Death of a Salesman', use your generic inference bank to help fill in inferences for your characters:

<u>Othello</u>	<u>Iago</u>	<u>Desdemona</u>	<u>Cassio</u>	<u>Emilia</u>
<u>Willy</u>	<u>Linda</u>	<u>Biff</u>	<u>Happy</u>	<u>Howard</u>

GCSE Writing Skills

Read through this Grade 9 paragraph on Macbeth and highlight the skills. Can you specifically label where there is a sense of DEBATE? This is key to A-Level.

Having demonstrated outright immorality through the act of regicide, arguably Macbeth's morality is retained when he reflects on the criminal act with his wife revealing overwhelming guilt, remorse and possibly regret. Despite his wife's previous promise that to kill the King would be to prevent him becoming a "coward", here Macbeth ironically is presented as cowardly by comparison to her, as he mournfully labels it as "a sorry sight". While this could suggest flippancy and possible dismissiveness due to the understated use of "sorry" coupled also with the aesthetically based "sight" as opposed to considering the gravity of such an "assassination", it cannot be ignored that he reflects negatively on it, almost detaching himself from his actions as a coping mechanism to alleviate his guilt and shame. Also, Macbeth's damning thought that he could not "pronounce Amen" indicates his awareness that he has committed a blasphemous crime, which in turn, has disrupted the Great Chain of Being – confirmed by the "owl shriek[ing]" and "earth.. shak[ing]" – which in turn, highlights the gravitas of the wrongdoing, and indisputably condemns him in the audience's eyes. Despite this, his sorrowful view that he could "make the green one red" implies a moral understanding of his sin and its magnitude, which in turn demonstrates his possible capacity for redemption – which he unfortunately fails to exact later – but certainly here, does warrant some pity from an audience. This is especially the case by comparison to Lady Macbeth who lightly advises him to "consider it not so deeply", promoting a robotic reaction as she fails to recognise the scale of such an inhumane action; clearly to her, Macbeth is still "too full of the milk of human kindness", with her supposedly "easy" solution being to simply use "a little water" to "clear" them of the "deed". Therefore, it would seem Shakespeare presents morality, not as a simple dichotomy between good and evil, but rather as functioning on a gradient that can be altered and changed in response to the severity of one's actions. At this point then, Macbeth is not wholly immoral, but also cannot be called moral as his act has made it impossible to return to such a pure, "brave" state that he once possessed.

Section 2: Key Skills Development

For this section, we are going to begin developing our skills by exploring our primary A Level texts and the Tragedy genre for Paper 1. You will need the following (publishers preferable but not compulsory) and you may also want the York Notes to accompany them:

Othello (Shakespeare) – Heinemann Advanced (Paperback) Pearson – Waterstones or Amazon (ISBN: 9780435193058)

Othello (York Notes Advanced Paperback) – 29 Aug. 2003. Longman

Death of a Salesman (Miller) – Methuen (Paperback) – Amazon or Waterstones (ISBN: 9781408108413)

Death of a Salesman (York Notes Advanced series) Paperback – 29 Aug. 2003. Longman 1st ed.

The Tragedy Genre

Tragedy Terms:

Read through and learn these key terms:

Allegory	A symbolic narrative in which the surface details imply a secondary meaning. Allegory often takes the form of a story in which the characters represent moral qualities.
Antagonist	A character or force against which another character struggles.
Aside	Words spoken by an actor directly to the audience, which are not "heard" by the other characters on stage during a play.
Blank verse	The verse form most like everyday speech; in English, unrhymed iambic pentameter. In the sixteenth century blank verse became the standard form for dramatic and epic poetry.
Catastrophe	The action at the end of a tragedy that initiates the denouement or falling action of a play.
Catharsis	The purging of the feelings of pity and fear that, according to Aristotle, occur in the audience of tragic drama. The audience experiences catharsis at the end of the play, following the catastrophe
Climax	The turning point of the action in the plot of a play or story. The climax represents the point of greatest tension in the work.
Conflict	A struggle between opposing forces in a story or play, usually resolved by the end of the work. The conflict may occur within a character as well as between characters.
Denouement	The resolution of the plot of a literary work.
Exposition	The first stage of a fictional or dramatic plot, in which necessary background information is provided
Falling Action	In the plot of a story or play, the action following the climax of the work that moves it towards its denouement or resolution.
Figurative Language	A form of language use in which writers and speakers convey something other than the literal meaning of their words. Examples include hyperbole or exaggeration, litotes or understatement,

	simile and metaphor, which employ comparison, and synecdoche and metonymy, in which a part of a thing stands for the whole.
Flashback	An interruption of a work's chronology to describe or present an incident that occurred prior to the main time frame of a work's action.
Foil	A character who contrasts and parallels the main character in a play or story.
Foreshadowing	Hints of what is to come in the action of a play or a story.
Gesture	The physical movement of a character during a play. Gesture is used to reveal character, and may include facial expressions as well as movements of other parts of an actor's body. Sometimes a playwright will be very explicit about both bodily and facial gestures, providing detailed instructions in the play's stage directions.
Irony	A contrast or discrepancy between what is said and what is meant or between what happens and what is expected to happen in life and in literature. In verbal irony, characters say the opposite of what they mean. In irony of circumstance or situation, the opposite of what is expected occurs. In dramatic irony, a character speaks in ignorance of a situation or event known to the audience or to the other characters.
Monologue	A speech by a single character without another character's response
Pathos	A quality of a play's action that stimulates the audience to feel pity for a character. Pathos is always an aspect of tragedy, and may be present in comedy as well.
Protagonist	The main character of a literary work
Recognition	The point at which a character understands his or her situation as it really is.
Resolution	The sorting out or unravelling of a plot at the end of a play, novel, or story
Reversal	The point at which the action of the plot turns in an unexpected direction for the protagonist.
Rising Action	A set of conflicts and crises that constitute the part of a play's or story's plot leading up to the climax
Soliloquy	A speech in a play that is meant to be heard by the audience but not by other characters on the stage. If there are no other characters present, the soliloquy represents the character thinking aloud
Subplot	A subsidiary or subordinate or parallel plot in a play or story that coexists with the main plot.
Tragedy	A type of drama in which the characters experience reversals of fortune, usually for the worse. In tragedy, catastrophe and suffering await many of the characters, especially the hero.
Tragic Flaw	A weakness or limitation of character, resulting in the fall of the tragic hero.
Tragic hero	A privileged, exalted character of high repute, who, by virtue of a tragic flaw and fate, suffers a fall from glory into suffering.

Aspects of Tragedy:

Read through and think about what texts you have seen these aspects in. Start to think about Othello and Death of a Salesman in relation to them:

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 and in all texts there is an interplay between what might be seen as villains and victims. 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 four chosen texts. The absence of an 'aspect' can be as significant as its presence. There can be no exhaustive list of the 'aspects' of tragedy but areas that can usefully be explored include:

- the type of the tragic text itself, whether it is classical and about public figures, like Lear, or domestic and about representations of ordinary people, like Tess
- the settings for the tragedy, both places and times
- the journey towards death of the protagonists, their flaws, pride and folly, their blindness and insight, their discovery and learning, their being a mix of good and evil
- the role of the tragic villain or opponent, who directly affects the fortune of the hero, who engages in a contest of power and is partly responsible for the hero's demise
- the presence of fate, how the hero's end is inevitable
- how the behaviour of the hero affects the world around him, creating chaos and affecting the lives of others
- the significance of violence and revenge, humour and moments of happiness
- the structural pattern of the text as it moves through complication to catastrophe, from order to disorder, through climax to resolution, from the prosperity and happiness of the hero to the tragic end
- the use of plots and sub-plots
- the way that language is used to heighten the tragedy
- ultimately how the tragedy affects the audience, acting as a commentary on the real world, moving the audience through pity and fear to an understanding of the human condition.

Othello

Read the play 'Othello' – use your own copy or it is available via <http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/othelloscenes.html>

Tip: read the 'Othello' scene summary before reading each scene on <https://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/othello/> , then read the scene analysis. If you are struggling with the language, you can read a modern 'translation' on <https://www.sparknotes.com/nofear/shakespeare/othello/>

'Othello' is a play, so was written as a text designed to be performed. Watch the RSC production of 'Othello' on Digital Theatre Plus (please note that while the character of Iago is played by a black actor in this production, this is not referenced in the original text by Shakespeare – Othello is the only black character). Make notes about the dramatic and tragic conventions.

www.digitaltheatreplus.com Username: student@rushcliffe.notts.sch.uk Password: rushcliffedrama

Death of a Salesman

Read the play 'Death of a Salesman' – use your own copy or it is available via <http://www.wcusd15.org/kershaw/ENG%20302/DS%20Death%20of%20a%20Salesman%20Complete.pdf>

Use Sparknotes to help you: <https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/salesman/>

Or Shmoop: <https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/death-of-a-salesman/analysis>

Just like 'Othello', 'Death of a Salesman' is a play so you need to enjoy it as an audience member. Watch the 1985 film version (featuring Dustin Hoffman) on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RMqiCtq5VLs> or the 1966 version on Digital Theatre Plus using the link above. Make notes about the dramatic and tragic conventions.

Annotate both texts as we would at GCSE focussing specifically on:

- **Inferences for key characters**
- **Aspects of tragedy**
- **Structural decisions**

Write your own plot summary on each text.

You can also find AQA Text Overviews and sample answers here:

<https://www.aqa.org.uk/resources/english/as-and-a-level/english-literature-b/teach/tragedy-resource-package>

3. Research and wider reading

Theory

When you begin your A-Level, your teacher will introduce you to your 'Critical Anthology'. This is a book that explores different ways of reading literature using sociological theories.

To prepare for this, read through Shmoop's (rather entertaining!) explanations of what each critical theory involves.

Make a poster/cue card on the key principles for each:

Feminism:

<https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literary-schools-of-theory/feminist-theory>

Marxism:

<https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literary-schools-of-theory/marxism>

Post-Colonial:

<https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literary-schools-of-theory/postcolonial-theory>

Research

These tasks are optional but will supplement your analysis of the primary texts:

- 1) Carry out some Internet research about the Tragedy genre. Read online articles and/or watch videos such as: <https://study.com/academy/lesson/tragedy-in-literature-definition-characteristics-examples.html>
- 2) Carry out some Internet research about the context behind 'Othello' and 'Death of a Salesman'. I.e. what is the socio-political backdrop? What social issues are the texts exploring/commenting on?
- 3) Watch some more videos on Digital Theatre Plus about our texts. There are some really interesting ones such as 'Director's Notebook: Death of a Salesman', 'Arthur Miller Documentary', 'Shakespeare Uncovered: David Harewood on Othello', 'On the Women in Othello' etc

Optional extra reading (these texts will be studied in Year 13):

- The Kite Runner (Hosseini) – Bloomsbury. There is also a film adaptation.
- The Handmaid's Tale (Atwood) – Contemporary Classics. There is also a TV series.

4. Submission Pieces

We would like you to bring along all of the work you have completed from this booklet but in particular:

- Your book reflection task
- Your book shelf task
- Your inference banks
- Annotated copies of Othello and Death of a Salesman
- Your plot summaries of each

You will also submit one piece of extended writing:

Othello describes himself as a "monster". To what extent do you agree with this view in light of how Shakespeare presents his protagonist?

(700 – 1000 words)

Tips:

- In your intro, create a debate (for and against)
- Zoom in on certain moments
- Make structural points – does he change throughout and how does that affect our interpretation of him?
- Provide close textual language analysis
- Are there any contextual factors that illuminate your interpretations (e.g. social issues, genre features)?
- Try to reach an evaluative, decisive conclusion using 'I'

5. Supra-Learning Opportunities

Now is the time to enjoy literature in all of its forms. Below are some suggested reading lists and access to theatre:

Read free books online:

<https://nothingintherulebook.com/2017/01/10/55-places-you-can-download-tens-of-thousands-books-plays-and-other-literary-texts-completely-legally-for-free/>

The National Theatre

There is an opportunity to watch National Theatre productions **every Thursday evening at 7pm** on YouTube. The National Theatre is going to put them for **free** online for 7 days each on their YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLJgBmjHpqgs6WHi1g0FW7Tdf3ejvWbcL0>

Find out more here on the National Theatre's website: https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/nt-at-home?queueitoken=e_safetysiteevent2apr20~q_f904c1ba-3165-45e6-b05a-1b19ee03c32a~ts_1585814482~ce_true~rt_safetynet~h_4eff3083c6fa2fd369d04fec51a50b7e304b92f0fa781a63d6f3c7aa7e96d518

Digital Theatre Plus

We are so lucky to have access to this brilliant resource. There are lots of other films, productions, documentaries and articles available to you:

www.digitaltheatreplus.com Username: student@rushcliffe.notts.sch.uk Password: rushcliffedrama

Book Recommendations:

Young Adult:

- Before I fall – Lauren Oliver
- The Bone Sparrow – Zana Frallion
- Beck – Mal Peet with Meg Rosoff (some quite explicit and harrowing content)
- Salt to the Sea – Ruta Sepetys
- The Handmaid's Tale – Margaret Atwood
- The Rest of Us Just Live Here – Patrick Ness
- The Reluctant Journal of Henry K Larsen – Susin Neilsen
- One – Sarah Crossan
- The Smell of Other People's houses – Bonnie-Sue Hitchcock
- The One Memory of Flora Banks – Emily Barr
- 13 Reasons Why – Jay Asher
- Vanishing Girls – Lauren Oliver
- Eleanor & Park – Rainbow Rowell
- We Were Liars – E. Lockhart

Classics:

- George Orwell – 1984; Animal Farm
- Jane Austen – Pride and Prejudice; Emma, (any)
- Joseph Conrad – Heart of Darkness; Lord Jim;
- Charles Dickens – Great Expectations; David Copperfield, (any)
- Graeme Greene – Our Man in Havana; The Power and the Glory (any)
- George Eliot - Middlemarch
- John Fowles – The Magus; The Collector
- George Eliot – Mill on the Floss; Silas Marner
- Thomas Hardy – Tess of the D'Urbervilles
- Charlotte Bronte – Jane Eyre
- Emily Bronte – Wuthering Heights
- W.M. Thackeray – Vanity Fair
- Oscar Wilde – The Picture of Dorian Gray
- Evelyn Waugh – Brideshead Revisited; Decline and Fall (any)
- Wilkie Collins – The Woman in White
- Nevil Shute – A Town Like Alice
- Ken Kesey – One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest
- Sylvia Plath – The Bell Jar
- J.D. Salinger – Catcher in the Rye
- John Steinbeck – The Grapes of Wrath; Of Mice and Men
- Harper Lee – To Kill a Mockingbird

Contemporary:

- Joseph Heller – Catch 22
- Margaret Atwood – The Blind Assassin; Alias Grace
- Khaled Hosseini - The Kite Runner; A Thousand Splendid Suns
- Toni Morrison – Beloved; Song of Solomon
- Kazuo Ishiguro – Remains of the Day
- Chinua Achebe – Things Fall Apart
- Alice Walker – The Colour Purple
- Yann Martel – Life of Pi
- Angela Carter – Wise Children; Nights at the Circus
- Ian McEwan – Enduring Love; Atonement
- Iain Banks – The Wasp Factory
- Anita Brookner – Hotel du Lac
- Lionel Shriver – We Need to Talk about Kevin
- Sebastian Faulks – Birdsong
- Jeanette Winterson – Oranges are not the Only Fruit
- Julian Barnes – A History of the World in 10 Days; (any)
- Michael Frayn - Spies
- Philip Pullman – His Dark Materials Trilogy
- Arthur Golden – Memoirs of a Geisha
- Irvine Welsh – Trainspotting
- Terry Pratchett – The Colour of Magic

Tragedy Reading List:

King Lear – William Shakespeare
Richard II – William Shakespeare
Macbeth – William Shakespeare
A Streetcar Named Desire – Tennessee Williams
The Great Gatsby – F. Scott Fitzgerald
Tess of the D'Urbervilles – Thomas Hardy
The Remains of the Day – Kazuo Ishiguro
Wuthering Heights – Emily Bronte
Frankenstein – Mary Shelley
Atonement – Ian McEwan
Doctor Faustus – Christopher Marlowe
Les Miserables – Victor Hugo
Lolita - Vladimir Nabokov
The Road – Cormac McCarthy
Heart of Darkness – Joseph Conrad
A Doll's House – Henrik Ibsen
The Spanish Tragedy – Thomas Kyd
Paradise Lost – John Milton
Glengarry Glen Ross – David Mamet
The Metamorphosis – Franz Kafka
We Need to Talk about Kevin – Lionel Shriver
Brave New World – Aldous Huxley

The Theory of Tragedy:

Tragedy: A Student Handbook (EMC Advanced Literature Series) – Sean McEvoy
Tragedy: A Short Introduction – Adrian Poole
The Cambridge Introduction to Tragedy – Jennifer Wallace

Watch some documentaries

Watch some documentaries that explore the human condition (e.g. Louis Theroux, crime based ones on Netflix/BBC iPlayer)

Super-curricular

Jenni Nuttall offers some advice on how to read around your subject



If you're intending to apply to university in year 13, you might be planning to do some extra reading over the summer. Your teachers might have advised you to 'read around' your subject. Universities look for evidence of this wider reading in your UCAS personal statement (though perhaps not by clichéd references to your 'passion for literature' and your 'love of reading'). They are keen to see that you have a commitment to your subject, the sort of commitment that can sustain you through three or four years of a university degree. Independent reading also shows that you are motivated to read, study and analyse on your own — skills you will depend on in higher education. If you apply to a university that interviews prospective students, you might be asked about your extracurricular reading in your interview.

Use the stairs

The Staircase 12 website run by the University of Oxford's University College, which offers advice to students aiming for top universities, calls this kind of reading *super-curricular reading*: 'Super-curricular activities are those that take your regular curriculum further. They take the subjects you study in the classroom beyond that which your teacher has taught you or what you have been set for homework.' So, to 'read around' your English literature A-level, what sort of super-curricular reading should you do?

You could, obviously enough, read a different work by one of the authors you are studying for your exams. If you've enjoyed studying Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), for example, you could try her later novel *Oryx and Crake* (2003). Think about how you might compare the works. What is similar and what is different, and why? How do the settings of the two novels compare in their descriptions of future society? Do the novels treat sexuality and human reproduction in the same way? Does Atwood use the same narrative strategies in both novels? Has Atwood's prose style changed over the years?

Alternatively, you could read other works written in a different genre by the author you are studying, if they wrote in more than one form. If you're studying *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), for example, you could explore some of the poems from Thomas Hardy's first published collection of poems, *Wessex Poems and Other Verses* (1898), such as 'Hap', 'A Meeting with Despair' and 'A Sign-Seeker' (you can access all these poems at poemhunter.com). The speaker of each of these poems is not necessarily Hardy himself, as poets often adopt different

reading



personae in lyric poems. But you might find in these poems ideas about religion, free will, philosophy and the universe and more, which you can compare with aspects of *Tess*. It might also help you to think about different genres. What can Hardy do in a long narrative, using the resources of plot, character and setting, that he cannot do in a short lyric, and vice versa?

Authors' lives

It can also be useful to try to find out more about an author's life. Your school library might be able to help you track down a biography to explore the life story of the writer you are studying. Alternatively, most county library services have online catalogues so you can search to find out if they have a biography of your author. You can then order the book to your local library. So, for example, if you are studying the poetry of Christina Rossetti, you could search to see if your county has copies of some of the recent biographies of Rossetti, such as Georgina Battiscombe's *Christina Rossetti: A Divided Life* (1981), Frances Thomas' *Christina Rossetti* (1994), or *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography* by Jan Marsh (1994). These biographies explore different aspects of Rossetti's life, her mental and physical health, her religious piety and artistic ambition, and family life and romantic relationships, relating these biographical elements to interpretations of Rossetti's poems. You could compare your own reading of one of your poems with one of these biographical interpretations.

Critical readings

As well as exploring an author's life and works, you could also find out more about how literary critics read texts. David Mikics's *Slow Reading in a Hurried Age* (2013) is a brilliant guide to how to read slowly and closely. His chapter on 'The Rules' gives you 14 entertaining and inspirational approaches to reading and analysing literary works.

You might also start to investigate literary theory, the study of what literature is, how it works, and how and why we analyse it. Jonathan Culler's *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (2011) is only 184 pages long but full of accessible explanations of different literary theories. Do any of the theories that Culler explicates help you make sense of your A-level texts?

Genre approaches

You could also read some books on how to approach different genres in particular. Anything you can get your hands on will

do, but here are some suggestions. For poetry, you could look at Terry Eagleton's *How to Read a Poem* (2006), Edward Hirsch's *How to Read a Poem: And Fall in Love with Poetry* (2000), or James Fenton's *An Introduction to English Poetry* (2003). For novels, you could try John Sutherland's *How to Read a Novel: A User's Guide* (2007), John Mullan's *How Novels Work* (2008), or James Wood's *How Fiction Works* (2008). Books such as these can help you tailor your analysis to the demands of different genres.

If you are studying a Shakespeare play or a revenge tragedy for your A-levels, you could read the recently published *Cambridge Introduction to Early Modern Drama, 1576–1642* (2014) by Julie Sanders. This has useful chapters introducing different genres (tragedy, revenge drama, history, comedy, satire, tragicomedy) as well as case studies on different aspects of performance and staging.

Super-charging your studies

Whatever you read, make sure to take lots of notes and keep a record of the helpful ideas and information that you find. You might want to talk about this super-curricular reading in your personal statement or in a university interview, and so you'll need to have it fresh in your mind. You may also find some of your reading helpful when you are reading texts and writing essays. Super-curricular reading will super-charge your studies.

References and further reading



Online resources

BBC Radio 4's *In Our Time* Culture Archive (podcasts on many different literary and artistic topics):

www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01drwny

Poetry Foundation: www.poetryfoundation.org/

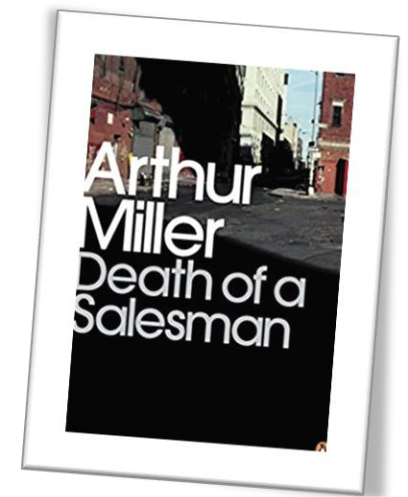
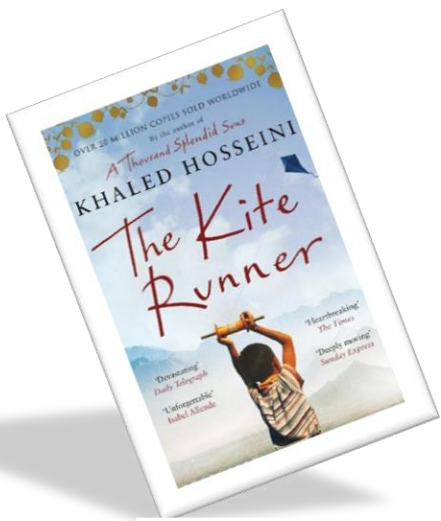
University College Oxford's Staircase 12:

<http://staircase12.univ.ox.ac.uk/>

University of Oxford's Great Writers Inspire:

www.writersinspire.org/

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We look forward to exploring some fascinating literature with you in September!

