

World class thinking. World class achieving.



# St Mary's College

**A LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE B AQA 7717**  
**Pre-course reading and guidance**





# A LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE

## WHY SHOULD I CHOOSE ENGLISH LITERATURE?

- › English Literature is a fantastic course for those who are passionate about reading and enjoy exploring and analysing texts across all three genres (drama, poetry and prose.) The course itself, whilst building upon your prior knowledge and experience of English Literature at GCSE, goes further to challenge you to read more widely and formulate your own arguments in response to a debate set up in the question.

## WHAT IS THE COURSE STRUCTURE LIKE?

- › The course is a **two year** course. It consists of **two exams** and **two pieces of coursework** (NEA). The exams are worth a total of 80%, and the coursework is 20%. All exams will be taken at the end of your second year.

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# A LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE (Year 12)

## Paper 1: Literary genres Option 1A: Aspects of Tragedy

Study of three texts: one Shakespeare text; a second drama text and one further text, of which one must be written pre-1900

Assessed written exam: 2 hours 30 minutes CLOSED BOOK (75 marks) 40% of A-level

Section A: one passage-based question on set Shakespeare text – Othello (25 marks)

Section B: one essay question on set Shakespeare text – Othello (25 marks)

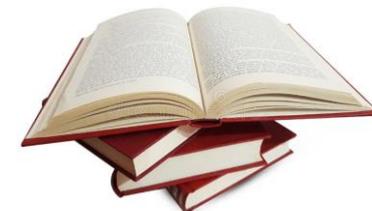
Section C: one essay question linking two texts (25 marks) Keats and Death of a Salesman – linked by aspect of Tragedy – choice of two questions.

### SET TEXTS SUITABLE FOR PRE-READING

**William Shakespeare - Othello**

**Arthur Miller – Death of a Salesman**

**John Keats – La Belle Dame Sans Merci, Lamia, The Eve of St Agnes, Isabella or The Pot of Basil**





# A LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE (Year 12)

Exam Syllabus for English Literature

- › <http://filestore.aqa.org.uk/resources/english/specifications/AQA-7716-7717-SP-2015.PDF>

Text overview for KEATS:

- › <http://filestore.aqa.org.uk/resources/english/AQA-7717-P1AC-TO-KEATS.PDF>

- › Text overview for Death of a Salesman – Arthur Miller

<http://filestore.aqa.org.uk/resources/english/AQA-7717-TO-DS.PDF>

- › Text overview for Othello

<http://filestore.aqa.org.uk/resources/english/AQA-7717-P1AB-TO-OO.PDF>



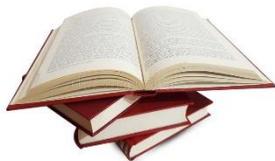
# A LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE- NEA (coursework)

## Non-exam assessment: Theory and independence

- › Study of two texts: one poetry and one prose text, informed by study of the **Critical anthology** (Ideas about narrative, Marxist ways of reading, Feminism ways of reading, Post-colonial ways of reading, Eco-critical ways of reading, Literary value and the Canon)
- › Two essays of 1,250 – 1,500 words, each responding to a different text and linking to a different aspect of the Critical anthology
- › One essay can be re-creative. The re-creative piece will be accompanied by a commentary.
- › 50 marks, 20% of A-level, assessed by teachers, moderated by AQA

THIS IS TO BE COMPLETED DURING Y12 AS AN INDEPENDENT STUDY UNIT (Full details – see link below)

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



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# CRITICAL THEORY (for NEA)



## Section 1 – Ideas about narrative

This section contains extracts that explore some of the methods writers use to construct stories. Stories, for many, are seen as being of fundamental importance to human life. Booker begins to explore the idea that there are commonly recurring story types that can be traced throughout all literature. David Lodge has written extensively about narrative, and here there are extracts related to how writers start and end their narratives, how narratives are structured and told, and how time and setting are used within stories. For many readers the characters are the most important and memorable aspect of a story and there are some ideas here about that crucial element of characterisation. In focusing on the story and its structure, some writers also focus on the gaps in narrative, the parts of the story that are not told. Ideas about narrative gaps are specifically included here as they can be very fruitful areas of investigation and exploration, especially for those students interested in producing re-creative pieces, which often focus on what is silent, missing or not explained in the text... (extract from Critical Anthology)

# CRITICAL THEORY (for NEA)



## Section 2 – Marxist ways of reading

In this section you will see writers looking at texts from a specific political perspective: one which focuses on the struggles between social classes and the struggles between those who oppress and those who are oppressed and those who have power and those who do not. This particular way of reading literature is based on the theories of Karl Marx who believed that Western capitalist economic systems were designed to increase the wealth of the rich, while oppressing and suppressing the poor. Marxist critics tend to believe that literature is the product of the writer's own class and cultural values and that literary texts are themselves products of a particular ideology. The Marxist critic is a reader who keeps in mind issues of power, work, oppression and money, and in focusing on what the text reveals of the author's values and social context, Marxism questions whether the text supports the prevailing social and economic system or undermines it...(extract from the Critical Anthology)

# CRITICAL THEORY (for NEA)



## Section 3 – Feminist ways of reading

While there are many different types of feminist criticism, in this section you will see writers who focus on the struggles women face in society and the ways these struggles are reflected and questioned (or not reflected and not questioned) in literature. Texts are read in a way that critically explores the male centred nature of civilisation and therefore the phallogentric nature of much literature. Feminist critics consider different gender representations within texts but also questions whose voices are heard and whose attitudes and values are assumed within the text. Gender issues are clearly central to those who write about literature through a feminist lens. Texts are often criticised for focusing on male protagonists while women have marginal roles. Feminist critics often reposition the focus and either sympathise with the oppression of women or celebrate the attempts of women to assert themselves. Some feminists critics use ideas from feminist literary criticism to read the text in a way that is counter to the commonly accepted reading. (extract)

# CRITICAL THEORY (for NEA)



## Section 4 – Post-colonial ways of reading

In this section you will see writers considering the idea that the established literature of Europe and North America has traditionally ignored or marginalised the experiences of non-Western peoples and cultures, seeing them as 'other', 'different' and invariably 'lesser'. To many readers such texts are, either consciously or unconsciously, racist. Some writers here focus on the perspectives of those affected by colonisation or imperialism, either because they have experienced it themselves or via studying literature that describes it or is a product of it. Post-colonial critics, like Marxists and feminist critics, are interested in issues of power, dominance, and control and also in freedom and empowerment. They too are keen to explore how different groups of people are represented in literary texts, whose voices are heard and what attitudes and values the texts seem to embody and support. Writers taking this theoretical position also focus on the complex relationships between the colonisers and the colonised and on the language that is used to present these relationships. (extract)

# CRITICAL THEORY (for NEA)



## Section 5 – **Ecocritical ways of reading (slide 1 of 2)**

In this section you will see writers focusing on the relationship between literature and the physical environment. The earth is seen as being central to literary readings, and for many eco-critics this is essentially the only thing worth considering because if we don't have a planet to live on then all other human concerns are pointless. Texts are read in relation to the ecological values they show. The focus might be on whether men and women write about nature and values differently , about how the wildness of nature has been represented over time and how language is used to reveal concerns about the environment. Ecological criticism sees human culture as being crucially connected to the non-human world and eco-critics believe we ignore that connection at our peril.

# CRITICAL THEORY (for NEA)



## Section 5 – **Ecocritical ways of reading (slide 2 of 2)**

Ecocriticism is essentially modern and, although it has its roots in the pastoral tradition and Romanticism, it really only gained momentum in the 1990s when scientists began to understand the environmental crisis facing the world. It reflects the concerns of the modern world regarding nature and the environment and directs readers to consider how human beings and their actions impact our planet. Because ecocriticism has its roots in pastoral writing there are some extracts included here that provide some insights into the pastoral genre and begin to link it to ecocritical concerns. Many of the writers whose work is included in this section also mention literary texts that have been of interest to them and which may provide students and teachers with some ideas about which texts to explore in the light of eco-critical ideas. (extract from Critical Anthology)



# CRITICAL THEORY (for NEA)

## Section 6 – Literary value and the canon

The literary canon is often understood to mean the group of authors or works that a consensus of academics, historians and teachers recognise as worthy of study: these are the texts that are regularly in print, are studied for school examinations and in universities and which have 'status'. The apparently 'accepted texts' that appear on your English Literature exam papers, for example are regarded as belonging to the literary canon. The canon is often accused by its critics of representing the values of the ruling educated classes. Writers who question the canon often do so because of its association with privilege. In this section you will see writers questioning who makes decisions about what makes certain literary texts more valuable or worthy than others and why they do so. In reading this criticism you will be able to think for yourselves about what makes a text valuable. (extract from Critical Anthology)



# A LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE (YEAR 12)

## **Some prose texts used for NEA by previous students:**

- › The Heart of Darkness - Joseph Conrad
- › Frankenstein – Mary Shelley
- › Wuthering Heights – Emily Bronte
- › Pride and Prejudice - Jane Austen
- › Northanger Abbey - Jane Austen
- › Far From the Madding Crowd – Hardy
- › The Collector – John Fowles
- › The Catcher in The Rye - JD Salinger
- › Bonfire of the Vanities – Tom Wolfe
- › Lolita – Vladimir Nabokov
- › Dracula – Bram Stoker
- › Animal Farm – George Orwell
- › 1984 – George Orwell
- › Lord of The Flies – William Golding
- › The Bloody Chamber- Angela Carter
- › Howard's End – EM Forster
- › Jane Eyre – Charlotte Bronte
- › The Bell Jar – Sylvia Plath
- › The Painted Veil – Maughan (creative response)
- › Frenchman's Creek - Daphne De Maurier

# A LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE (YEAR 12)



## Some of the poets used for NEA by previous students:

- › Alfred Lord Tennyson
- › TS Eliot
- › Dylan Thomas
- › Maya Angelou
- › Wilfred Owen
- › Cristina Rossetti
- › Marcus Mosiah Garvey
- › Langston Hughes
- › June Jordan
- › Emily Dickinson
- › Carol Ann Duffy
- › Ted Hughes

Useful website for exploring literature:

British Library, Literature

- › [http://explore.bl.uk/primo\\_library/libweb/action/dlSearch.do?vid=BLVU1&institution=BL&search\\_scope=LSCOP-WEBSITE&query=any,contains,literature&tab=website](http://explore.bl.uk/primo_library/libweb/action/dlSearch.do?vid=BLVU1&institution=BL&search_scope=LSCOP-WEBSITE&query=any,contains,literature&tab=website)

# A LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE (YEAR 13)



## **Paper 2: Texts and genres** 2B: Elements of Political and Social Protest Writing

Study of three texts: one post-2000 prose text; one poetry and one further text, of which one must be written pre-1900. Exam will include an unseen passage.

› Assessed written exam: 3 hours • open book • 75 marks • 40% of A-level

Section A: one compulsory question on an unseen passage (25 marks)

Section B: one essay question on set text (25 marks)

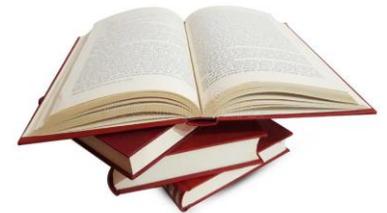
Section C: one essay question which connects two texts (25 marks)

## **SET TEXTS SUITABLE FOR PRE-READING**

Kite Runner – Hosseini

A Doll's House – Henrik Ibsen

Songs of Innocence and Experience – William Blake





## Resources to develop your literature knowledge:

- › [www.massolit.io](http://www.massolit.io) – this website provides a range of lectures on a number of courses including English Literature. Useful courses include Shakespeare's Othello; The Poetry of John Keats and Miller's Death of a Salesman.

URL: [www.massolit.io](http://www.massolit.io)

RSC Productions of Shakespeare – the RSC have put a number of productions online that are available to watch over the coming weeks

<https://www.rsc.org.uk/news/watch-rsc-shows-from-home>

- › Digital Theatre Online – stream productions of theatre shows from around the world and also gain insight into the production process with interviews from directors and actors. This site includes the Shakespeare play you studied for GCSE and useful a-level texts. Also, use this site to widen your drama knowledge.

<https://www.digitaltheatreplus.com/education>

- › English and Media Centre – produce a quarterly magazine that explores a wide range of literature texts. This magazine is aimed at A-level students and includes an archive of previous articles.

<https://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/e-magazine/emag-login/>

# Any further questions?:



Contact details of lead teachers of Literature:

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We also offer **English Language** and a combined **English Language and Literature** course at A Level.

Please see the relevant pre-reading guidance for further details.