



St Benedict's
Sixth Form

English Literature A Level TRANSITION PACK



A journey into unknown
worlds



St Benedict's Sixth Form

Course: A Level Literature

Exam Board: OCR

Specification Code: H472

Reading widely and developing research skills are essential to your success at A level. Begin with the suggestions below

<p>LITERATURE SET TEXTS</p>	<p>Dystopian Novels</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Handmaid's Tale – Margaret Atwood • 1984 – George Orwell • Brave New World – Aldous Huxley • The Road – Cormac McCarthy <p>Other Novels</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide Sargasso Sea – Jean Rhys <p>Drama</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Doll's House – Henrik Ibsen • A Streetcar Named Desire – Tennessee Williams <p>Poetry</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christina Rossetti – Maude Clare, Goblin Market, Remember, Song, A Birthday, From the Antique, Uphill, Echo, Shut Out, Twice, Good Friday, Winter: My Secret, Soeur Louise de la Misericorde, In the Round Tower at Jhansi, No thank you, John
<p>WEBSITES</p>	<p>English Edu Sites: https://english.edusites.co.uk/category/c/ocr-a-level</p> <p>OCR website for Language and Literature for the specification and sample essays: https://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/as-and-a-level/english-language-and-literature-emc-h074-h474-from-2015/specification-at-a-glance/</p> <p>Seneca Learning: https://senecalearning.com/en-GB/blog/a-level-english-literature-revision/ https://mrspeacockenglish.wordpress.com/</p>
<p>TV/YOUTUBE</p>	<p>National Theatre Live: a brilliant collection of live productions of iconic plays, available on YOUTUBE here: https://bit.ly/Uc9Qzu</p>
<p>Magazines</p>	<p>The emagazine and archive, also including video clips on set texts and language analysis available here: https://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/ Username- SBSJ15 password - english The Guardian Opinion for Non Fiction: https://www.theguardian.com/uk/commentisfree</p>



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Welcome to English Literature!

We hope you enjoy these tasks they will get you thinking again! Lockdown is not great BUT at least you have lots of time to get on with our reading lists above and below.

Baseline Assessment

During the week beginning 27/9/21, an assessment will be undertaken to consider suitability for the course. The assessment will comprise of:

- A review of summer work including your two transition tasks and your summer reading.
- Assessment of a preliminary work that you will produce in the first 3 weeks.

Transition Task 1 in two parts:

40% of the course focuses on Shakespeare, Rossetti and Ibsen. You are going to have to deliver a 10 mins presentation with two parts:

- A) In the **first part** you need to deliver specifically on Christina Rossetti to the class. You can choose which facet of her life you want to look at. The focus needs to be on depth rather than breadth.

You are going to need to get to know this poet extremely well. You will need to make copious notes on the below and learn a lot about her life and the context in which she lived in order to manage this assignment. Eventually, you will compare her poetry and her life and times to Ibsen's plays and his life and times. In order to do so, you will need to read a lot about her and know a lot about Victorian mores. You will also need to read her poetry to get a feel for her before we start our studies.

Here are a couple of good places to look to research her life. Do expand your search and read biographies too:

<http://victorianweb.org/authors/crossetti/index.html>

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/christina-rossetti>

<https://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/poetryperformance/rossetti/biography/rossettibiography.htm>
↓

Exploring our poet – these are the questions you will need to be able to answer:

1. Who was Christina Rossetti? Where was she born and where did she live? What was her parentage and what was the financial status of her family and how did that change and why?
2. What was her family background? Discuss her father, mother, sister and brother and then her relationship with each one. What impact did they have on her? What was she like as a child – how did she change?



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3. What was her religion? Be specific about Tractarianism and what that meant to her. What did God mean to her and what impact did that have on her life and her relationships throughout her life?
 4. What was her romantic life like? Did she have any suitors, get engaged and married? Who were the loves in her life? Did she have children?
 5. What was the trajectory of her professional life as a poet? Was she acclaimed, famous then or now? If not, when did that happen? How was she esteemed by the Victorian audience? Who was her main contemporary? What did they have in common? How did she feel about her poetry and how did she perceive it?
 6. How did she spend her time? What charity work did she get absorbed in? How was her health? Was she a feminist? How does she fit within her era? What was it like to be her in Victorian times?
 7. What have you learnt about her that hasn't been covered in these questions but gives us a deeper insight into her as a person?
- B) The **second part** of your presentation will be a comparison between Rossetti's' poem, 'A Birthday' and the opening of Ibsen's 'A Doll's House', both included below.

Annotate in as much detail as possible and then craft a 5 minute analysis, using the glossary, comparing the two. Use the context on Rossetti you have just learnt to illuminate your understanding and give you insights into the poetry.

Things you could consider:

- The language, specifically the nouns and adjectives used
- Any related semantic fields
- The voice of the poem vs the characters' dialogue
- The difference between the forms
- The themes/tone
- The imagery and the setting



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A Birthday

My heart is like a singing bird
Whose nest is in a water'd shoot;
My heart is like an apple-tree
Whose boughs are bent with thickset fruit;
My heart is like a rainbow shell
That paddles in a halcyon sea;
My heart is gladder than all these
Because my love is come to me.

Raise me a dais of silk and down;
Hang it with vair and purple dyes;
Carve it in doves and pomegranates,
And peacocks with a hundred eyes;
Work it in gold and silver grapes,
In leaves and silver fleurs-de-lys;
Because the birthday of my life
Is come, my love is come to me.



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[SCENE.--A room furnished comfortably and tastefully, but not extravagantly. At the back, a door to the right leads to the entrance-hall, another to the left leads to Helmer's study. Between the doors stands a piano. In the middle of the left-hand wall is a door, and beyond it a window. Near the window are a round table, arm-chairs and a small sofa. In the right-hand wall, at the farther end, another door; and on the same side, nearer the footlights, a stove, two easy chairs and a rocking-chair; between the stove and the door, a small table. Engravings on the walls; a cabinet with china and other small objects; a small book-case with well-bound books. The floors are carpeted, and a fire burns in the stove.

It is winter. A bell rings in the hall; shortly afterwards the door is heard to open. Enter NORA, humming a tune and in high spirits. She is in outdoor dress and carries a number of parcels; these she lays on the table to the right. She leaves the outer door open after her, and through it is seen a PORTER who is carrying a Christmas Tree and a basket, which he gives to the MAID who has opened the door.]

Nora. Hide the Christmas Tree carefully, Helen. Be sure the children do not see it until this evening, when it is dressed. *[To the PORTER, taking out her purse.]* How much?

Porter. Sixpence.

Nora. There is a shilling. No, keep the change. *[The PORTER thanks her, and goes out. NORA shuts the door. She is laughing to herself, as she takes off her hat and coat. She takes a packet of macaroons from her pocket and eats one or two; then goes cautiously to her husband's door and listens.]* Yes, he is in. *[Still humming, she goes to the table on the right.]*

Helmer *[calls out from his room]*. Is that my little lark twittering out there?

Nora *[busy opening some of the parcels]*. Yes, it is!

Helmer. Is it my little squirrel bustling about?

Nora. Yes!

Helmer. When did my squirrel come home?



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Nora. Just now. [*Puts the bag of macaroons into her pocket and wipes her mouth.*] Come in here, Torvald, and see what I have bought.

Helmer. Don't disturb me. [*A little later, he opens the door and looks into the room, pen in hand.*] Bought, did you say? All these things? Has my little spendthrift been wasting money again?

Nora. Yes but, Torvald, this year we really can let ourselves go a little. This is the first Christmas that we have not needed to economise.

Helmer. Still, you know, we can't spend money recklessly.

Nora. Yes, Torvald, we may be a wee bit more reckless now, mayn't we? Just a tiny wee bit! You are going to have a big salary and earn lots and lots of money.

Helmer. Yes, after the New Year; but then it will be a whole quarter before the salary is due.

Nora. Pooh! we can borrow until then.

Helmer. Nora! [*Goes up to her and takes her playfully by the ear.*] The same little featherhead! Suppose, now, that I borrowed fifty pounds today, and you spent it all in the Christmas week, and then on New Year's Eve a slate fell on my head and killed me, and--

Nora [*putting her hands over his mouth*]. Oh! don't say such horrid things.

Helmer. Still, suppose that happened,--what then?

Nora. If that were to happen, I don't suppose I should care whether I owed money or not.

Helmer. Yes, but what about the people who had lent it?

Nora. They? Who would bother about them? I should not know who they were.

Helmer. That is like a woman! But seriously, Nora, you know what I think about that. No debt, no borrowing. There can be no freedom or beauty about a home life that depends on borrowing and debt. We two have kept bravely on the straight road so far, and we will go on the same way for the short time longer that there need be any struggle.

Nora [*moving towards the stove*]. As you please, Torvald.

Helmer [*following her*]. Come, come, my little skylark must not droop her wings. What is this! Is my little squirrel out of temper? [*Taking out his purse.*] Nora, what do you think I have got here?

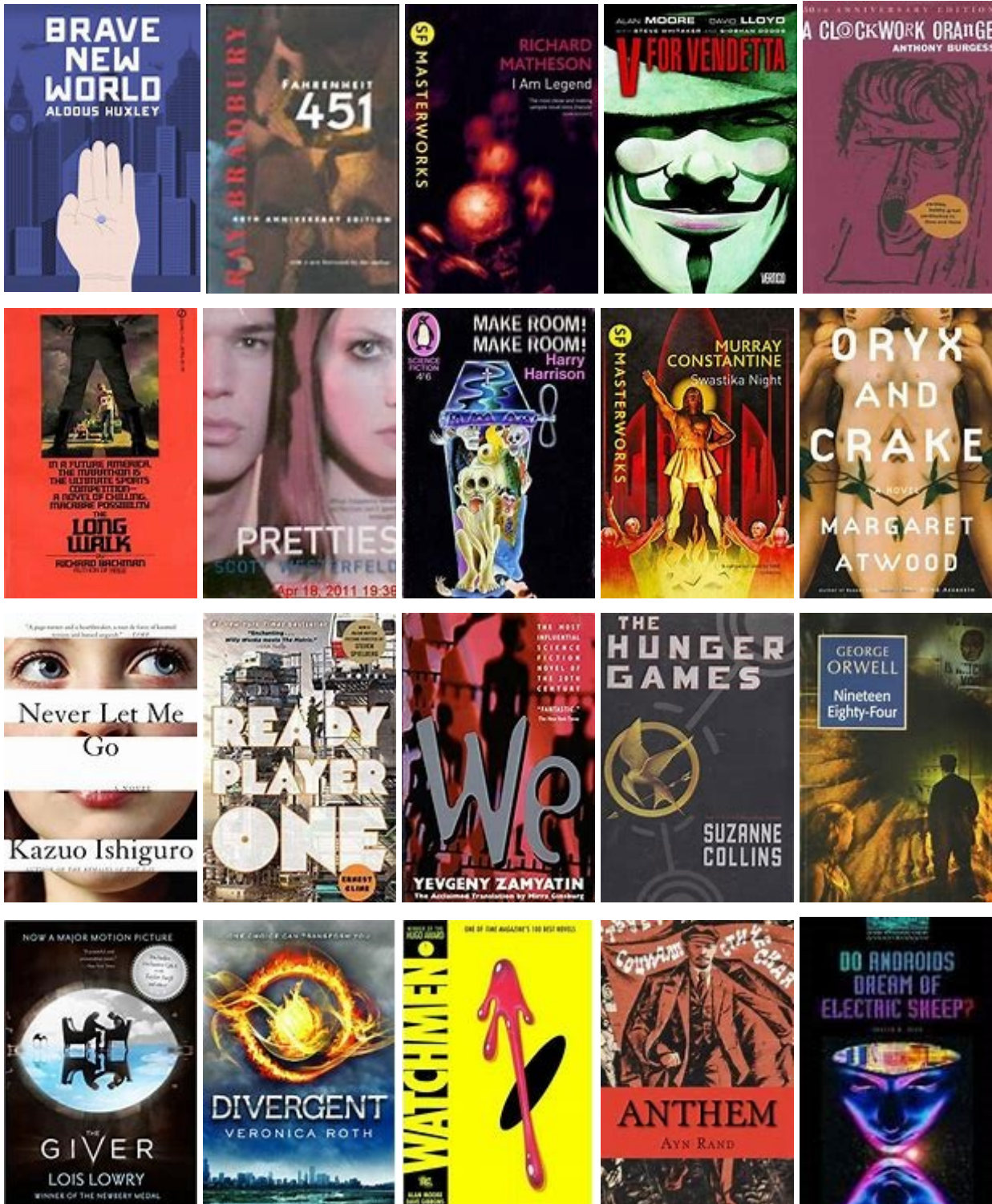
Nora [*turning round quickly*]. Money!



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WIDER READING LIST: DYSTOPIA

English literature is for those students who are readers, or who are committed to becoming readers. It is expected you read as many of the below as possible





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Apart from the coursework which will be started at the end of the first year (worth 20%), the other major part of the course, which accounts for 40%, will focus on a single genre of literature. In our case, it will be dystopia.

Read the extracts from different dystopian novels and stories and then annotate focusing on the following points:

- How do they differ to each other and what do they have in common?
- What is the difference between them and our current society?
- When were they written and what socio-historical or political or technological events have influenced them?
- How does the author perceive the world?
- What is his/her fear?
- How are the characters represented? Are they like us?
- How is the language different? How is the syntax, imagery and word groups different to usual? Are there any unfamiliar words? What is their impact?
- Is there a sense of threat or danger or corruption? How so?
- How is the setting similar or different to our present day?

Although you will need to understand all the concepts around dystopia and context for this part of the course, you will need to be able to compare and analyse too.

We by Yevgeny Zamyatin

Second Entry

TOPICS:

Ballet

Square Harmony

X

Spring. From beyond the Green Wall, from the wild, invisible plains, the wind brings yellow honey pollen of some unknown flowers. The sweet pollen dries your lips, and every minute you pass your tongue over them. The lips of all the women you see must be sweet (of the men, too, of course). This interferes to some extent with the flow of logical thought.

But the sky! Blue, unblemished by a single cloud. (How wild the tastes of the ancients, whose poets could be inspired by those absurd, disorderly, stupidly tumbling piles of vapor!) I love—I am certain I can safely say, we love—only such a sterile, immaculate sky. On days like this the whole world is cast of the same impregnable, eternal glass as the Green Wall, as all our buildings. On days like this you see the bluest depth of things, their hitherto unknown, astonishing equations—you see them even in the most familiar everyday objects.

Take, for instance, this. In the morning I was at the dock where the Integral is being built, and suddenly I saw: the lathes; the regulator sphere rotating with closed eyes, utterly oblivious of all; the cranks flashing, swinging left and right; the balance beam proudly swaying its shoulders; the bit of the slotting machine dancing up and down in time to unheard music. Suddenly I saw the whole beauty of this grandiose mechanical ballet, flooded with pale blue sunlight.



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And then, to myself: Why is this beautiful? Why is dance beautiful? Answer: because it is unfree motion, because the whole profound meaning of dance lies precisely in absolute, esthetic subordination, in ideal unfreedom. And if it is true that our forebears abandoned themselves to dance at the most exalted moments of their lives (religious mysteries, military parades), it means only one thing: the instinct of unfreedom is organically inherent in man from time immemorial, and we, in our present life, are only consciously....

I will have to finish later: the annunciator clicked. I looked up: 0-90, of course. In half a minute she'll be here, for our daily walk.

The Power by Naomi Alderman

There's a pause, but Jos doesn't say anything, so Margot just keeps talking. 'There were. . . three other girls? I know they started it. That boy should never have been near you. They've been checked out at John Muir. You just gave the kid a scare.'

'I know.'

All right. Verbal communication. A start.

'Was that the... first time you've done it?'

Jocelyn rolls her eyes. She plucks at the comforter with one hand.

'This is brand new to both of us, OK? How long have you been doing it?'

She mutters so low that Margot can barely hear, 'Six months.'

'Six months?'

Mistake. Never express incredulity, never alarm. Jocelyn draws her knees up.

'I'm sorry,' says Margot. 'It's just. . . it's a surprise, that's all.'

Jos frowns. 'Plenty of girls started it before I did. It was. . . it was kinda funny. . . when it started, like static electricity.'

Static electricity. What was it, you combed your hair and stuck a balloon to it? An activity for bored six-year-olds at birthday parties.

'It was this funny, crazy thing girls were doing. There were secret videos online. How to do tricks with it.'

It's this exact moment, yes, when any secret you have from your parents becomes precious. Anything you know that they've never heard of.

'How did you. . . how did you learn to do it?'

Jos says, 'I don't know. I just felt I could do it, OK. It's like a sort of... twist.'

'Why didn't you say anything? Why didn't you tell me?'



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She looks through the window to the lawn. Beyond the high back fence, men and women with cameras are already gathering.

'I don't know.'

Margot remembers trying to talk to her own mother about boys or the stuff that happened at parties. About how far was too far, where a boy's hand should stop. She remembers the absolute impossibility of those conversations.

'Show me.'

Jos narrows her eyes. 'I can't. . . I'd hurt you.'

'Have you been practising? Can you control it well enough so you know you wouldn't kill me, or give me a fit?'

Jos takes a deep breath. Puffs her cheeks out. Lets the breath out slowly. 'Yes.'

Her mother nods. This is the girl she knows: conscientious and serious. Still Jos. 'Then show me.'

'I can't control it well enough for it not to hurt, OK?'

'How much will it hurt?'

Jos splays her fingers wide, looks at her palms. 'Mine comes and goes. Sometimes it's strong, sometimes it's nothing.'

Margot presses her lips together. 'OK.'

Jos extends her hand, then pulls it back. 'I don't want to.'

There was a time when every crevice of this child's body was Margot's to clean and care for. It is not OK with her not to know her own child's strength. 'No more secrets. Show me.'

Jos is near to tears. She places her forefinger and her middle finger on her mother's arm. Margot waits to see Jos do something; hold her breath, or wrinkle her brow, or show exertion in the muscles of her arm, but there's nothing. Only the pain.

The Drowned World by JG Ballard

As the cutter moved off across the lagoon he went back to his chair. For a few minutes the two men stared across the table at each other, the insects outside bouncing off the wire mesh as the sun lifted into the sky. At last Kerens spoke.

'Alan, I'm not sure whether I shall be leaving.'

Without replying, Bodkin took out his cigarettes. He lit one carefully, then sat back smoking it calmly. 'Do you know where we are?' he asked after a pause. 'The name of this city?' When



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Kerens shook his head he said: 'Part of it used to be called London; not that it matters. Curiously enough, though, I was born here. Yesterday I rowed over to the old University quarter, a mass of little creeks, actually found the laboratory where my father used to teach. We left here when I was six, but I can just remember being taken to meet him one day. A few hundred yards away there was a planetarium, I saw a performance once - that was before they had to re-align the projector. The big dome is still there, about twenty feet below water. It looks like an enormous shell, fucus growing all over it, straight out of The Water Babies. Curiously, looking down at the dome seemed to bring my childhood much nearer. To tell the truth, I'd more or less forgotten it - at my age all you have are the memories of memories. After we left here our existence became completely nomadic, and in a sense this city is the only home I've ever known -' He broke off abruptly, his face suddenly tired.

'Go on,' Kerens said evenly.

Transition task 2

Dystopian literature is a form of speculative fiction that began as a response to utopian literature. A dystopia is an imagined community or society that is dehumanizing and frightening. A dystopia is an antonym of a utopia, which is a perfect society.

Once you have completed your annotations, write a piece of analysis comparing just two of them in the following essay question:

'Which one of these texts do you think is the most interesting example of a 'dehumanizing and frightening' dystopia?'

Include an introduction and a conclusion. It needs to be at least 500 words. Use your detailed annotations, the glossaries below and the bulleted prompts to write developed paragraphs. Good luck and enjoy having the freedom to express your own well thought out opinions.



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Glossary: Poetry

- anaphora** the repetition of a word or phrase, usually at the beginning of a line.
- alliteration** the repetition of sounds in a sequence of words. (See also **consonance** and **assonance**.)
- allegory** narrative with two levels of meaning, one stated and one unstated.
- apostrophe** direct address to an absent or otherwise unresponsive entity (someone or something dead, imaginary, abstract, or inanimate).
- assonance** the repetition of vowel-sounds.
- beat** a stressed (or accented) syllable.
- binary** dual, twofold, characterized by two parts.
- blank verse** unrhymed iambic pentameter.
- caesura** an audible pause internal to a line, usually in the middle. (An audible pause at the end of a line is called an **end-stop**.) The French *alexandrine*, Anglo-Saxon alliterative meter, and Latin dactylic hexameter are all verse forms that call for a caesura.
- chiasmus** from the Greek letter Chi (χ), a "crossed" rhetorical parallel. That is, the parallel form $a:b::a:b$ changes to $a:b::b:a$ to become a chiasmus.
- climax** the high point; the moment of greatest tension or intensity. The climax can occur at any point in a poem, and can register on different levels, e.g. narrative, rhetorical, or formal.
- consonance** the repetition of consonant-sounds.
- couplet** two lines of verse, usually rhymed. **Heroic couplet**: a rhymed iambic pentameter couplet.
- diction** word choice, specifically the "class" or "kind" of words chosen.
- elegy** since the 17th century, usually denotes a reflective poem that laments the loss of something or someone.
- end-stopped line** a line that ends with a punctuation mark and whose meaning is complete.
- enjambéd line** a "run-on" line that carries over into the next to complete its meaning.



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foot	the basic unit of accentual-syllabic and quantitative meter, usually combining a stress with one or more unstressed syllables.
free verse	poetry in which the rhythm does not repeat regularly.
imagery	the visual (or other sensory) pictures used to render a description more vivid and immediate.
meter	a regularly repeating rhythm, divided for convenience into feet .
metonymy	a figure of speech in which something is represented by another thing that is commonly and often physically associated with it, e.g. "White House" for "the President."
ode	a genre of lyric, an ode tends to be a long, serious meditation on an elevated subject.
prosody	the study of versification , i.e. the form—meter, rhyme, rhythm, stanzaic form, sound patterns—into which poets put language to make it verse rather than something else.
refrain	a phrase or line recurring at intervals. (N.b. the definition does not require that a refrain include the <i>entire</i> line, nor that it recur at <i>regular</i> intervals, though refrains often are and do.)
rhythm	the patterns of stresses, unstressed syllables, and pauses in language. Regularly repeating rhythm is called meter .
scansion	the identification and analysis of poetic rhythm and meter. To "scan" a line of poetry is to mark its stressed and unstressed syllables.
simile	a figure of speech that compares two distinct things by using a connective word such as "like" or "as." Symbol: a literary device that contains several layers of meaning , often concealed at first sight, and is representative of several other aspects, concepts or traits than those that are visible in the literal translation alone. Symbol is using an object or action that means something more than its literal meaning . For example a raven could act as a symbol of loss.
speaker	the "I" of a poem, equivalent to the "narrator" of a prose text. In lyric poetry, the speaker is often an authorial persona.
speech act	the manner of expression (as opposed to the content). Examples of speech acts include: question, promise, plea, declaration, and command.
stanza	a "paragraph" of a poem: a group of lines separated by extra white space from other groups of lines.



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- symbol** an image that stands for something larger and more complex, often something abstract, such as an idea or a set of attitudes. (See **imagery**.)
- symbolism** the serious and relatively sustained use of symbols to represent or suggest other things or ideas. (Distinct from allegory in that symbolism does not depend on narrative.)
- synecdoche** a figure of speech in which a part of something is used to represent the whole, e.g. “wheels” for “car.”
- tone** the speaker’s or author’s attitude toward the reader, addressee, or subject matter. The tone of a poem immediately impresses itself upon the reader, yet it can be quite difficult to describe and analyze.
- topos** a traditional theme or motif (e.g. the topos of modesty).
- trope** a figure of speech, such as a metaphor (**trope** is often used, incorrectly, to mean **topos**)
- valediction** an act or utterance of farewell.

Glossary: dystopia

Dystopia – a futuristic, imagined, unpleasant, repressed (forbidding) society where people lead dehumanized, fearful lives.

Utopia – an imaginary place where everything in society is perfect.

Apocalypse – disaster, catastrophe, destruction, the end of the world. In Dystopian literature, a new world may begin with those who lived.

Revolution – a revolt, rebellion, uprising in which people completely change their government or political system, usually by force.

Protagonist – “the good guy” who feels trapped, questions the situation, struggles to escape, and helps the reader to see/feel the negative aspects of the Dystopian world.

Antagonist – “the bad guy”, the adversary of “the good guy”. In Dystopian novels, it might be control by a government, a corporation, technology or religion/philosophical beliefs.



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Conformity – everyone is the same, in actions and how they are treated in a Dystopian world. People are expected to behave the same, and follow orders, without having individual thoughts or ideas.

Propaganda - a form of communication aimed at influencing the attitude of the community toward some cause or position by presenting only one side of an argument.

Allusion – making an indirect reference to somebody or something. Ex: “Don’t act like a Romeo in front of her.”

Symbolism – words or a visual that represents a deeper meaning; what does the author want you to feel?

Freewill – doing something willingly rather than being ordered/forced to do it.

Perception – using the senses to understand what is observed in a situation

And, just in case you weren't certain, here's why you should study English literature!

A-level English Literature is highly respected amongst Higher Education institutions and employers in a range of industries but there are many more valuable reasons to take the subject. Below are just a few...

To benefit from the insight of others

The body of world literature contains most available knowledge about humanity--our beliefs, our self-perception, our philosophies, our assumptions and our interactions with the world at large. Some of life's most important lessons are subtly expressed in our art. We learn these lessons only if we pause to think about what we read. Why would anyone bury important ideas? Because some ideas cannot be expressed adequately in simple language, and because the lessons we have to work for are the ones that stick with us.

To open our minds to ambiguities of meaning

While people might "say what they mean and mean what they say" in an ideal world, language in the real world is maddeningly and delightfully ambiguous. If you go through life expecting people to play by your rules, you'll only be miserable, angry and disappointed. You will not change them. Ambiguity, double entendres and nuance give our language depth and endless possibility. Learn it. Appreciate it. Revel in it.



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To explore other cultures and beliefs

History, anthropology and religious studies provide a method of learning about the cultures and beliefs of others from the outside looking in. Literature, on the other hand, allows you to experience the cultures and beliefs of others first-hand, from the inside looking out. The only other way to have such a personal understanding of others' beliefs is to adopt them yourself--which most of us are not willing to do. If you understand where other people are coming from, you are better equipped to communicate meaningfully with them--and they with you.

To appreciate why individuals are the way they are

Each person we meet represents a unique concoction of knowledge, beliefs, and experiences. In our own culture we find an infinite variety of attitudes and personalities, hatreds and bigotries, and assumptions. With each exposure to those who differ from us, we expand our minds. We may still reject their beliefs and assumptions, but we are one step closer to understanding them.

To expand our grasp of the machinations of history. History and literature are inextricably intertwined. History is not just names and dates and politics and wars and power. History is about people who were products of their time with their own intricately woven value systems. Study of literature enhances our appreciation of history's complexity, which in turn expands our appreciation of present political complexities and better equips us to predict and prepare for the future.

To teach us to see individual bias

In a sense, each of us is an unreliable or naive narrator, but most of us mindlessly accept the stories of certain friends or family without qualification. We should remember that they are centres of their own universes, though, just like we are. They are first-person narrators--not omniscient--just like we are. The only thing that suffers when we appreciate individual bias is our own gullibility.

To help us see ourselves as others do

Literature is a tool of self-examination. You will see your own personality or habits or assumptions in literature. The experience may even be painful. While our ego defence systems help us avoid self-scrutiny and ignore others' observations or reactions to us, literature serves as a mirror, revealing us to ourselves in all our naked, undefended glory.

To see the tragedy

Lenin said, "A million deaths are a statistic, but one death is a tragedy." History gives you the statistics. Literature shows you the human tragedy.

To recognize language devices and appreciate their emotional power. Like good music, poetry uses wordplay, rhythm, and sounds to lull the reader into an emotional fog, and therein deliver its message. Great leaders learn to harness these techniques of communication and persuasion. Listen closely to effective advertisements and politicians and lawyers. Listen to the pleasing rhythm and wordplay of their mantras and watch the sheep blithely flock to them: "It does not fit-



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you must acquit!" "Crisp and clean and no caffeine!" Politicians use prolific parallelism: "We will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail."

To explore ethical complexities

Only children find ethical rules cut and dried. Literature forces readers to challenge their simplistic ethical conceptions and sometimes their outright condemnation of others' actions. For example, we believe lying is wrong. But what do we mean? Do we never lie? Have you ever met a person rude enough to follow this rule implicitly? Be advised, though: ethical exploration is a mature endeavour; it is not for the thin-skinned.

To see the admirable in everyday life We are surrounded by unsung nobility and sacrifice. Once we learn to see it in the actions of common folk, our lives will be forever richer, as will our faith in humanity itself.

To know we aren't alone

Others have been where we are, have felt as we feel, have believed as we believe. Paradoxically, we are unique just like everyone else. But we aren't alone. Others were here and they survived...and may have even learned from it--and so may we.

To refine our judgment

This involves several aspects of reading: exposure to new ideas and new ways of looking at old assumptions, expanded vocabulary and understanding, and improved ability to write. Altogether, these benefits refine our ability to think, and thus guide us toward informed, mature judgment.

To learn to support our points of view and trust our own interpretations

We provide evidence for our interpretation of a story or poem when we explicate it. When we build a solid case in support of our opinion, we build self-confidence in our own interpretations of language itself.

To develop empathy for those who are unlike us

Literature can train and exercise our ability to weep for those who are not us or ours. As children, our circles of concern stop with ourselves. As we grow, we expand those circles to our families and friends, and perhaps to our neighbourhoods, towns, cities, states or countries. Our study of literature continues to expand that realm of concern beyond the things we physically experience.

Final note

The most important thing you can do to prepare for September is read, read, read. Use the reading lists and start where your interest most takes you. We will be checking in with you once a week. Remember, we are at the end of the email or chats. Don't get stuck. Enjoy!

Ms Hassell, Mrs Hoyle, Mrs Oldfield, Ms Smith-Longman.