



English Literature

We are asking all students to complete some Independent Preparatory Work over the summer, before they join Year 12 in September. You will need to bring this work to lessons as the content will be assessed through introductory assessments which will be completed within the few first weeks of the new term.

Tasks

There are two tasks to complete over summer:

1. Reading the critical theory introduction (which will form the basis of our initial assessment)
2. Analysis of a poem

Details of these can be found overleaf

Extra reading

We have attached a reading list of set texts.



Critical Theory

One of the ways in which A Level improves on GCSE Literature is the use of critical theory. These are wider ideas about society that you can apply to the texts you are studying. The exam board calls this a 'critical lens', a particular way to look at a text. When you write your coursework, you will need to apply one or more of these critical ideas to the texts you choose, and they are helpful tools to explore your exam texts too.

Feminist Theory

Feminism is a political and philosophical movement that focuses on the position of women in society. Its starting point is the idea that society is, and always has been, 'patriarchal' - that is, controlled by men, organised to a great extent for the benefit of men and designed to maintain the dominance of men. (This kind of power structure- where one social group has profound dominance over another- is known as hegemony.)

One of the key elements of feminist analysis is the idea that the hegemony of men is perpetuated, often on a subconscious or unconscious level, through the operation of accepted social norms and conventions. These conventions are encoded in social, cultural and linguistic behaviours. Feminist literary theory sees literature as one of the crucial ways in which ideas about gender are spread throughout society. It is concerned with the ways in which women and gender roles are represented in literature, as well as in culture more widely. It is also interested in visibility: in whether women's experiences are considered worthy of exploration in literature and other cultural forms.

Approaching literature from a feminist point of view might involve:

- Analysing the balance of power between men and women in the literary world (such as the obstacles that faced women writers in the past)
- Exploring the representation of women's lives in literary texts

It might also encompass the ways in which texts hide and reveal patriarchal power structures, for instance:

- Through the use of male narrators, voices and viewpoints
- Through language patterns and imagery
- Through representations of behaviour and emotions

Feminist theory in practice:

Consider the presentation of Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth*. In order to be able to influence Macbeth and participate in politics, she has to 'unsex me' and behave in ways that go against conventional femininity at the time. She is punished for her bravery at the time of Duncan's murder by the emotional and psychological breakdown she suffers later and dies off stage, unmourned, while Macbeth is the focus of the final act and dies as he would want to- 'with harness on [his] back'.

How are other women presented in the play? The witches are ugly, evil old hags who deliberately bring about the downfall of 'brave Macbeth'. Lady Macduff is an angry victim, deserted by her husband and having to watch her son die before being murdered herself. Then there's the waiting woman, whose only job is to watch over Lady Macbeth and is terrified that she will get into trouble.



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Marxist Theory

Marxist theory draws on the political ideas of Karl Marx, which focused on relationships between the social classes and the concept of class struggle. Marxism's starting point is the idea that wealth in society is created by the working classes (the proletariat) but controlled by a few in the upper classes (the bourgeoisie) who own the means of production (this is another example of hegemony). Despite producing society's wealth, the working class receive the least payment for their work. The middle and upper classes receive higher rewards and uphold social systems that promote their values.

Applying this to literature may seem a bit of a stretch, but Marxism considers ideas that are clearly relevant to the texts we study. An important theme of Marxist theory is that of oppression: the way in which different social groups attempt to control others. Marxist theorists might consider how texts challenge the established forms of social and political control that are used to uphold particular kinds of order, or the way less powerful groups try to resist the methods of control that others try to use in order to assert power over them. Alienation is another key element of Marxist analysis: the idea that life for the working classes is mechanical and monotonous. They have little control over their own lives because of the social structure they live in, so can't flourish and grow.

Approaching literature from a Marxist point of view might involve:

- Exploring the representation of class in literary texts: how are the relationships between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie depicted?
- Considering the balance of power between classes in the literary world: to what extent is literature dominated by the bourgeoisie? To what extent does literature reflect the voices of the proletariat?

It might also include the ways in which texts hide and reveal social and economic structures, for instance:

- Through the use of bourgeois narrators, voices and viewpoints
- Through the use of particular language patterns and imagery to depict class relationships
- Through what is hidden and not said about class struggle

Marxist theory in practice:

Think about your study of *An Inspector Calls* and *A Christmas Carol*. Both are excellent texts for Marxist analysis- working class people (Eva and Bob) are oppressed and exploited by an uncaring middle class (the Birlings and Scrooge). The Birlings and Gerald systematically destroy Eva's opportunities and dignity, and most of them still refuse to accept any responsibility at the end, because (according to Marxist theories) they are products of a system designed to support them at the expense of people like Eva. It requires three ghosts and an awful lot of Christmas celebrations to finally show Scrooge that his greed for profit and callous disregard for the poor are wrong.



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Eco-critical theory

Eco-critical theory is a relatively new way of looking at literary texts. As its name suggests, it emerged from the environmental movement. It focuses on the way that literature depicts the relationship between humans and the natural world, both celebrating nature and pointing out threats to it. A key genre for eco-critical theory is pastoral. Pastoral writing often offers an idealised, nostalgic view of the countryside, seeing the natural world as an escape from everything that is wrong with the hustle and bustle of urban life. Eco-critical theory looks at the values invested in nature, which often becomes a repository for all manner of aspirations and ideals.

One complaint sometimes levelled at writing about the natural world is that it often glosses over the difficulties of living in the countryside. The idealised world of the pastoral tends to present the countryside through rose-tinted lenses- ignoring the fact that the natural world can be harsh, and that it does not always provide people with the peaceful retreat that they seek.

Approaching literature from an eco-critical point of view might involve:

- Considering the values that nature is used to represent in the text
- Exploring the relationship between nature and humanity

It may also include the ways in which texts reveal or conceal specific aspects of nature, for instance:

- Through the use of narrative voices with or without a specific relationship to the countryside
- Through the use of particular language patterns and imagery to depict the natural world
- Through representation of natural processes

Eco-critical theory in practice:

Consider some of the poems you studied at GCSE. What is the relationship between the speakers/ characters of the poems and nature? In some cases- *Ozymandias*, *Exposure*, *Storm on the Island*- nature is seen as threatening towards humanity and society. In *Kamikaze*, it is beneficial and gives the pilot a reason to live. In *The Prelude*, nature is more ambiguous- a source of secret pleasure to start with, it then seems to become 'a trouble to my dreams'.



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Post-colonial theory

Post-colonial theory, which first emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, concentrates on the relationships between different cultures and the legacy of colonialism. This process saw a number of western European countries establishing colonies around the world, subjecting the native populations to colonial rule and exploiting natural resources. The process of colonialism was often justified through narratives that spoke of bringing 'civilisation' to parts of the world that lacked the sophistication and belief-systems of the colonial powers.

Post-colonial theory questions these narratives, and explores the impact they have had on the ways in which people in (or from) former colonies see themselves. One key area of focus for post-colonial theory is the way in which colonised nations, and their inhabitants, have been depicted by writers from colonial powers. European descriptions often depict non-European natives as savage, primitive and uncivilised: Europe, in contrast, is a model of sophistication. The non-European, in short, is the 'Other': unfamiliar, strange and threatening.

Approaching literature from a post-colonial point of view might involve:

- Considering the values that colonial locations are used to represent in the text
- Exploring the relationship between colonisers and native characters

It may also include the ways in which texts reveal or conceal specific aspects of the colonial experience, for instance:

- The ways in which writers have experimented with language and style to produce hybrid forms of literature that blend elements of different languages and cultures
- Through the different perspectives afforded by different characters
- Through representation of communities from colonised nations, now living in Europe

Post-colonial theory in practice:

Checking Out Me History is the most obvious text you have already studied to apply a post-colonial lens to. Agard is explicitly criticising the way a Eurocentric education is forced on colonial subjects in Guyana, forced to learn about things from British and European history, while important historical figures and role models from non-European countries are ignored. *Kamikaze* presents a culture that the narrator finds baffling, where the community's shame at the pilot's return causes him a worse fate than he originally intended. Finally, *The Emigrée* presents the experience of someone who has had to relocate and is dealing with their fractured perception of their homeland.



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English Literature Summer Assignment 2

Read and annotate the following poem, then answer this question using ideas from the critical theory you have read:

‘John Agard presents Britain’s future as better than the past.’ How far do you agree?

From Britannia To Whom It May Concern

Thank you for the kind thought, the compliment
of even calling me mother country.
You make an island feel like a continent.

When I ruled the waves, all the world seemed pink.
I manipulated maps with sword and cross.
Shifted boundaries with seal of royal ink.

I enthroned my language as a rule of tongue.
Gathered India’s jewels into my crown.
And Africa’s blood still haunts my monuments.

How can I turn from history’s looking-glass
when even my sugar holds a bitter past?
The sea has been my girdle and my guilt.

Though darkness enriches my red white and blue,
I’ve learnt how the sun sets on empires.
And the voiceless voice their righteous fires.

Now, old ruptures bless me with hybrid webs.
I feel horizons throbbing at my doorstep.
My streets pulse with a plurality of tongues.

And mother country has much work to do.
I must prepare my cliffs for new homecomings.
Tie yellow ribbons round my children’s minds.



A Level English Literature Reading List

In Year 12 we will be studying the following texts which you need to have bought before you start the course.

You must have read *The Kite Runner* before you start the course:

- ***The Kite Runner*, Khaled Hosseini** [ISBN 978-1408824856]
(You can get second hand copies, just make sure they don't have someone else's annotations!)
- ***Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, William Blake** or ***Selected Poems*, Tony Harrison**
These will be available through an anthology from school, but are well worth a read online.
- ***A Doll's House*, Henrik Ibsen**
This needs to be the Bloomsbury Methuen Drama Edition, translated by Michael Meyer [ISBN 978-1-4081-0602-0]
- ***Twelfth Night*, William Shakespeare**
Get the Oxford Schools Shakespeare [ISBN 9780198328711] because it has good notes, lots of room to annotate and a range of activities to help you.

In Year 13 we will also study the following, but don't buy anything until nearer the time:

- ***She Stoops to Conquer*, Oliver Goldsmith** or ***The Importance of Being Earnest*, Oscar Wilde**
- **Comedy Poetry collection**
These will also be available through an anthology from school.

Further reading:

- **AQA:** <https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/english/as-and-a-level/english-literature-b-7716-7717>
- We subscribe to the emagazine, a brilliant resource on a range of texts published by the English and Media Centre. Our login details are as follows:

Username: EnglishLHS **Password:** littleheath
- **The British Library** <https://www.bl.uk/>
- **LHS English folder** of relevant resources:
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/11W4cVdBj6aitbkdU8_awOG9W22Lt1IRA?usp=sharing
- **Crossref-it:**
 - Blake - <https://crossref-it.info/textguide/songs-of-innocence-and-experience/13/0>
 - *Twelfth Night* - <https://crossref-it.info/textguide/twelfth-night-context-links/22/0>



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The exam board publishes a text book which some students have found useful for revising; we don't expect you to have a copy for use in class. It is quite expensive, so don't get a new copy!

A/AS Level English Literature B for AQA Student Book (A Level (AS) English Literature AQA)

ISBN [978-1107468023]

Revision Guides

There are a range of revision guides available to support your understanding of the texts, **York Notes Advanced** are generally the best. We will be able to offer some at a discounted rate in September, through ParentMail, our preferred method of payment. Please contact our Finance Department if you have any difficulty using this system this payment.