

SOUTHFIELDS ACADEMY
ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

ENGLISH LITERATURE A-LEVEL



Southfields
Academy

INDEPENDENT STUDY BOOKLET

Introduction to English

Studying English Literature at Southfields Academy involves doing quite a bit of independent reading. This booklet is designed to offer guidance on the key texts you need to cover in order to pass the course, as well as to suggest additional reading that can really help you to excel and shine in English.

The importance of wider reading

A-level English Literature provides the opportunity for you to move beyond the set curriculum and start exploring on your own. You have more freedom than at GCSE to discover texts and to form your own understanding of what you read. Exploring novels, poetry and plays in their historical context, considering their significance in literary history, and what others have to say about them, can deepen your appreciation, developing your skills as an independent critical thinker.

Making reading a habit

Reading regularly is important, and building it into your daily routine can make all the difference. Whether you prefer to read for thirty minutes or an hour before bed, during your journey home, or in a quiet spot like a café or the park, finding time that works for you can help you to develop a good reading habit. Could you set yourself a personal reading challenge? Perhaps your aim is to read a certain number of books over the next year, or to explore the works of a particular author. Keeping a reading log is a great way to track your progress and stay motivated.

Course Overview

The course is divided into 3 sections: Drama, Prose and Poetry. Throughout the duration of the course you will be exploring themes and ideas within these forms of literature, making comparisons between texts across different time periods when necessary.

Set class texts:

| Drama – 30% of course | Prose – 20% of course | Poetry – 30% of course |
|---|---|--|
| A Streetcar Named Desire- Tennessee Williams | Beloved- Toni Morrison | Poems of the Decade (2001-2010) |
| Othello- William Shakespeare | The Picture of Dorian Gray - Oscar Wilde | John Donne Poetry |

For more information, here is the specification for our course:

A Level Literature-

<https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/A%20Level/English%20Literature/2015/Specification%20and%20sample%20assessments/gce2015-a-level-eng-lit-spec.pdf>

Independent Critical Study (Non-Exam Assessment: 20%)

The coursework component of your English Literature qualification is a chance to pursue a piece of independent research and investigation into a specific area of literature. The essay is a comparison of two texts linked by theme or idea. This forms 20% of your final grade. It is the product of two years of intensive study of English Literature and should represent the absolute best of your work. An extended piece of writing may feel daunting at first, but with careful research, planning and redrafting, you will achieve work that demonstrates your full potential.

In class we will support you by teaching one or two texts, either on the theme of ‘**The American Dream**’ or ‘**Dystopia**.’ We will guide you to complete your coursework by choosing another suitable text from a list that we provide. Please see the list below for an example from this year.

Texts on the theme of The American Dream

The Great Gatsby- F Scott Fitzgerald (taught in class)

Death of A Salesman- Arthur Miller (taught in class)

A View from the Bridge – Arthur Miller

American Psycho- Brett Easton Ellis

Revolutionary Road- Richard Yates

Catcher in the Rye- J.D Salinger

The Reluctant Fundamentalist – Mohsin Hamid

The Awakening – Kate Chopin

Preparation Task 1: Independent Reading Skills

1. Choose any book that interests you. It can be a novel or a play.
2. Read the book. Set aside regular, focused time to read.
3. Make notes under the following headings:

| Heading | What to consider |
|------------------|--|
| Author | Who wrote the text? Include basic background information and important facts about their life / career. |
| Genre | Is it a novel or a play? What genre is it? Comedy, tragedy, satire, science fiction, horror, fantasy, romance, bildungsroman, autobiography? |
| Context | When and where was the text written? What were the key historical, social or cultural influences? |
| Plot | Summarise the main events or structure of the story. |
| Symbols / motifs | Identify any recurring images, objects, themes or symbols. Reflect on their significance. |
| Writer message | What big ideas or themes is the writer exploring? What is their message or purpose? |

Please bring your notes to class for the first lesson in Year 12. You will be expected to discuss your reading.

Preparation Task 2: Unseen Poetry

Read and annotate Heaney's 'Digging'.

Digging by Seamus Heaney (1966)

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.

Under my window, a clean rasping sound
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
My father, digging. I look down

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds
Bends low, comes up twenty years away
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills
Where he was digging.

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep
To scatter new potatoes that we picked,
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

By God, the old man could handle a spade.
Just like his old man.

My grandfather cut more turf in a day
Than any other man on Toner's bog.
Once I carried him milk in a bottle
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up
To drink it, then fell to right away
Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods
Over his shoulder, going down and down
For the good turf. Digging.

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge
Through living roots awaken in my head.
But I've no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it.

Preparation Task 3: Poetry Analysis

Using your annotations and independent research of the unseen poem, complete the poetry organiser on the next page.

Name of Poem (+ author's name): _____

WHAT: Summary of the poem. What is the "story" of the poem?

WHO are the main characters of the poem? Whose perspective is the poem told from? What is the significance of this?

HOW? What are the four key quotes/images from the poem. Zoom in on symbols or techniques. Explain their significance. At least one of your comments should be about form/structure.

WHEN was the poem written? How does this influence its ideas? How long a period of time does the poem take place over?

WHERE is the poem set? What atmosphere is created by the setting? How do the characters interact with the setting?

WHY do you think the poet wrote the poem? What are the key themes/messages?

