

Lawnswood School English Department

A-Level English Literature



LAWNSWOOD
— SCHOOL —

Summer Reading Diary

Course Outline

We are delighted you have chosen to study English Literature A Level with us! We are with the exam board AQA and follow Specification A. The AQA website has more detailed information on the course if you are interested at this stage, but here is a quick outline so you know what to expect.

Over the course of the next two years you will prepare for two exams and one Non-Exam Assessment (NEA)*

In Year 12 - Paper 1 – Love Through the Ages

Set texts:

- *Othello* by William Shakespeare
- *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald
- Love Through the Ages – An anthology of poems set by AQA
- Unseen Poetry

Year 13 - Paper 2 – Modern Texts

Set texts:

- *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams
- *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker
- *Feminine Gospels* by Carol Ann Duffy
- Unseen Prose

*The Non-Exam Assessment (NEA) is a piece of coursework, done mostly independently, of 2500 words. You will be comparing two different texts, from two different time periods, one of which will be chosen by you. The planning for this will begin towards the end of Year 12 and you will hand it in around Easter of Year 13. It is worth 25% of your overall grade.

The Summer Reading Challenge!

Welcome to the study of English Literature! We are so happy you've chosen this course because we love to teach it. Over the next two years you will be introduced to a wide range of exciting texts from Britain and the USA which cover topics as broad as love and sex, race, slavery and its legacy, motherhood, mental health and many other fascinating topics. You will also be introduced to a variety of different literary genres and concepts that will develop your understanding of literature far beyond what you learned at GCSE.

How can you succeed on this course?

The key to doing well is to learn to read with a critical eye – to interrogate what you are reading and ask yourself questions about what the writer is trying to say. How do they use literary techniques to construct meaning? How does knowing what was happening in the world at the time affect my understanding of it? How does this text compare with others of its genre?

How do I develop this skill?

I'm glad you asked! To help you on your way to becoming a critical reader, we have created a summer reading list for you to dip in and out of in preparation for the start of the course. Each of the things listed will help you in one way or another to develop your understanding of the core set texts when we come to read them in class.

Firstly, don't worry. **You are not expected to read all of them.** Just the ones that tickle your fancy.

Your main job is to read (or listen to or watch) and enjoy them. This is the most important thing!

Your only other job is to keep a little diary of the things you've read and what you thought about them. This could be done using this booklet, in a small notebook or electronically on your phone or computer. Whichever you find most convenient is fine by us. You don't need to write pages and pages (unless you want to) but we would like to talk to you about some of the things you've read when we start the course in September.

If you have any questions about the course before we start, please feel free to email me on kirsty.dolan@elawnswood.co.uk and I'll be happy to answer them as best I can.

Looking forward to seeing you in September!

Ms Dolan

Assistant Faculty Leader for English

Lawnswood School

Suggested Summer Reading

(Remember, just choose a few – you don't have to read everything!)

Shakespeare's Theatre

You'll be studying *Othello*, one of Shakespeare's great tragedies, which deals with themes of jealousy, masculinity, racism and domestic violence. Here are some resources which will help you understand the context of the play.

1. Take a virtual tour of the Globe theatre in London, where most of Shakespeare's plays were performed. Make a few notes about how the theatre was different then and now.

<https://www.shakespearesglobe.com/discover/about-us/virtual-tour/>

2. Read in more detail here about what it was like to attend a theatre in Shakespeare's time:

<https://www.folger.edu/shakespeares-theater>

3. What are the elements of a Shakespearean tragedy, I hear you say? Find out here!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqwETHbjhGE>

Great American Novels!

You'll be reading a lot of amazing modern American drama and fiction throughout the course, so it would be a great idea to read some other literary greats to get a feel for the different styles and voices in US fiction. All of these will be available through Leeds libraries (free to join, just go in with some ID!) Here are some of our absolute favourites!

1. Toni Morrison – *Beloved* (1987)

This is the story of a slave woman in the US south who is treated brutally by her owners. It is very shocking in places, and not for the faint-hearted, but it is considered one of the best American novels ever published. In her novels, Toni Morrison tackles a lot of the same issues which Alice Walker confronts in *The Color Purple*, which you will be reading in Year 13.

2. Harper Lee – *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960)

Another wonderful novel about the wrongful conviction of a black man, Tom Robinson, for a crime he didn't commit. It is told from the point of view of a young white girl whose father is defending Tom's case. Set in the 1930s in rural Alabama under the Jim Crow laws (where black people and white people were legally not allowed to mix) it will teach you a lot about the level of injustice and prejudice that existed at the time.

3. J.D. Salinger - *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951)

This is the story of seventeen-year-old Holden Caulfield, a mixed-up boy who runs away from boarding school and goes on a grown up adventure in New York. This is a classic coming-of-age story about a mixed-up teenager trying to discover who he really is, while getting into all sorts of trouble in the big city in the meantime. If you've ever been/are a teenager, there is a lot to relate to in this book.

N.B. There is also a short story, available for free online, featuring Holden which was the precursor to *Catcher*. It's called *Slight Rebellion Off Madison* and is available here: http://pete0121.tripod.com/SALINGER/Slight_Rebellion_Off_Madison.htm

4. Sylvia Plath – *The Bell Jar* (1963)

Sylvia Plath's only novel focuses on the Esther Greenwood, a young woman who is making her way in publishing in 1960s New York, trying to become a writer. Along the way she encounters all sorts of obstacles, many of them sexist, but none more insurmountable than her own mental health. This semi-autobiographical book is a painful account of what it is like to live with chronic depression and how it feels when the treatments are often worse than the cure. Be warned – there are some difficult moments in this book. The author sadly committed suicide some years after it was published after succumbing to her own crippling mental illness.

5. John Steinbeck – *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939)

You may remember John Steinbeck from such novels as *Of Mice and Men*, but believe it or not he wrote a few others too. This is perhaps his most famous one. It is the tale of Tom Joad and his family, who are poor farmers from Oklahoma whose farm is destroyed by a terrible dust storm. They are forced to head west to California in search of work, (much like George and Lennie). However, it proves to be more difficult to survive than they'd thought due to the onset of the Great Depression and the amount of people left homeless and desperate. Steinbeck's novel shows the American Dream to be a lie and the ending brings a whole new meaning to the phrase 'the milk of human kindness.'

Poetry Stuff!

Here are some of our favourite poems and a couple of podcasts which might get you thinking. Just type the titles of the poems into Google – they'll all be available for free online.

The Romantic Poets

John Keats – 'Endymion' (just read the first verse) - 'A thing of beauty is a joy forever...'

William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge - 'We Are Seven' and 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' from *Lyrical Ballads*

William Blake – 'Little Girl Lost' from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*

The Metaphysical Poets

John Donne – 'To His Mistress Going to Bed'

Andrew Marvell – 'The Definition of Love'

William Shakespeare – 'Sonnet 94'

Podcasts and Videos

BBC In Our Time: The Romantics: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00546ws>

BBC In Our Time: The Metaphysical Poets:
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b00cbqhq>

Metaphysical Poetry Explainer - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X07DH7YKnk4>

The Romantics and Nature (1 hour) -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liVQ21KZfOI>

Shakespeare's Sonnets – Nice and easy to follow! -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bDpW1sHrBaU>

