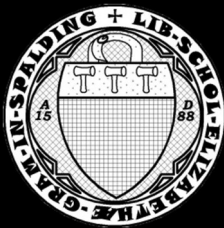


A Guide to

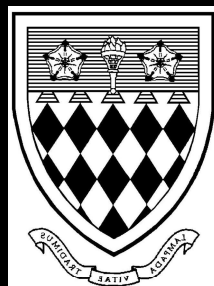


A level English Literature

Spalding
Grammar
School



Spalding
High
School



A level English Literature

English Literature is a real process of discovery. If you love reading, you should relish the opportunity to spend one or two years exploring books – discussing them, analysing them and writing about them. You'll be introduced to a wide range of texts, from contemporary novels to literature written in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. You'll think about what makes people write, and how their books have been viewed and interpreted at different times. You'll focus on key genres and themes, looking at how authors have tackled some of humanity's most important concerns and reinterpreted them to make them relevant to their own societies. You'll discuss the concept of 'literature' itself: why some texts are seen as 'better' than others, and what you gain through reading texts from different perspectives. And you'll also have the chance to extend your own personal reading, experimenting with different authors and developing your tastes.

Some of the work you do in English Literature will be familiar to you from GCSE. You'll still be reading and analysing novels, plays and poetry – but you'll look at these texts in more depth, and you'll be expected to read and interpret them much more independently. You'll group texts by genre and theme, looking at the historical and cultural factors that have influenced different authors, and at the different ways in which their works have been interpreted. So the course will build on what you already know, but also introduce you to new ways of thinking and talking about books.



Derek Jacobi, in a 2010 production of King Lear

What does the subject involve?

The course is made up of three units.

Unit 1: Literary Genres: Aspects of Tragedy

40% of A level

Closed-text exam: 2 hours 30 minutes

In this unit you will explore the major literary genre of tragedy – a genre that has its roots in the ancient world and has been reworked and reinterpreted by many authors since. You'll focus on drama, studying *King Lear* – one of Shakespeare's major tragedies – and Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman*, a much more recent example of the genre. You'll also study Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, examining how aspects of tragedy are also present in novels.

Assessment

The exam consists of three sections. You will do one question from each section.

Section A consists of one question on an extract from your set Shakespeare play.

Section B consists of two essay questions on your set Shakespeare play. You will answer one question.

Section C consists of two questions about the genre of tragedy. You will answer one of these questions, relating it to your other two set texts.



From the cover of the Penguin edition of Death of a Salesman

Unit 2: Texts and Genres: Elements of Crime Writing

40% of A level

Open-text exam: 3 hours

In this unit, you will explore elements of a more modern genre: that of crime writing. This genre holds an enduring power over readers, due partly to our love of solving mysteries and working out 'whodunnit', but also to our fascination with the criminal mind. Crime writing allows us to examine issues of morality, justice, sin and redemption, and to see how different writers at different times have grappled with the idea of transgression.

You'll look at two significant but very different crime novels. *Brighton Rock*, by Graham Greene, focuses on the small-time gangster Pinkie Brown, a teenage misfit whose story is set against the sleazy backdrop of Brighton in the 1930s. *Atonement*, by Ian McEwan, examines a very different kind of crime – this time, a mistake that changes the lives of one upper-class family. You'll also examine a collection of poems, to see how poets at different times have dealt with the idea of crime and depicted villains, victims, guilt and punishment.

In addition to your set texts, you'll also explore extracts from a range of other texts, in preparation for the unseen element of the exam paper.

Assessment

The exam contains three sections. You will do one question from each section.

Section A consists of one compulsory question on an unseen passage.

Section B consists of a range of essay questions on each of the set texts. You will answer one question.

Section C consists of two essay questions about different aspects of crime writing. You will answer one of these questions, relating it to your other two set texts.

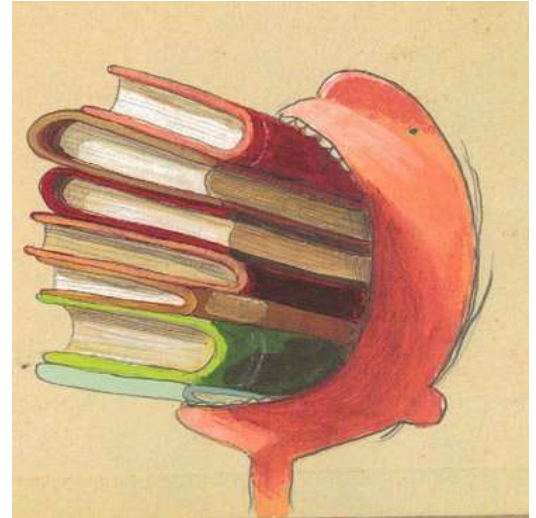


Sam Riley as Pinkie Brown in the 2010 film version of Brighton Rock

How is the course organised?

You'll have two teachers, each of whom will be responsible for certain parts of the course. They may approach the subject in different ways, but you'll benefit from having your thinking extended in this manner. They'll expect you to read widely and think for yourself. You should be prepared to express your thoughts and offer contributions – you'll get much more from lessons if you join in!

The style of your lessons will vary. Sometimes you'll be given very structured lessons, led by the teacher. At other times, you will be asked to take over – by giving a presentation (singly or in small groups), taking part in a debate, doing some drama or display work, or doing some multimedia work like creating a podcast or webpage. All of this will help you to engage with the texts you're studying, explore them from different perspectives and build your confidence in developing your own interpretations.



The Incredible Book Eating Boy, by Oliver Jeffers

How will my work be assessed?

You will do a number of formally-assessed pieces each term. Usually, these will take the form of an essay: sometimes, they might be timed exam questions. In addition, your teachers will be assessing your work on an informal basis all the time – making judgements based on the contributions and ideas you put forward in class and your willingness to participate in lessons.

Your written work will be marked in accordance with a number of Assessment Objectives. These are set out by the exam board, and specify the skills involved in the study of English literature at A level. These Assessment Objectives are as follows:

- AO1:** Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using associated concepts and terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression.
- AO2:** Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts.
- AO3:** Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received.
- AO4:** Explore connections across literary texts.
- AO5:** Explore literary texts informed by different interpretations.

You will also be asked to assess your own work, and that of other students – this is an essential part of developing your own skills and understanding.

Getting used to A level

There is a big gap between GCSE and A level, and some students take longer to bridge this gap than others. As well as coping with changes in the volume and difficulty of the work, you'll also find that lessons are different: the groups are smaller, and you'll be expected to take on much more responsibility for organising your workload. You may need time to adjust to this – but it's important that you take control, and don't allow yourself to be overwhelmed.

There are certain expectations that we will have of you. These are as follows:

1. Play an active role in your studies, contributing regularly to classroom discussions and participating fully in group work.
2. Read around the course, investigating topic areas independently and taking every opportunity to develop your understanding of the subject. Keep a log of everything that you read with a few comments relating to what you found interesting or some possible further reading. We recommend that you use either a reading journal section in your main folder or a notebook to keep all the information in the right place
3. Equip yourself with two large lever arch files (one for Unit 1, one for Unit 2) to organise your notes at home, and two smaller ring binders to bring your notes to school. You will also need coloured dividers and clear plastic wallets, a pad of lined A4 paper and pens, pencils and highlighters.
4. File any notes and handouts you are given in clear sections for each topic area.
5. Come to lessons with the correct equipment, including your folder, textbook, set texts and any relevant notes.
6. Attend lessons punctually.
7. Notify your English teacher in advance of any planned absence.
8. Catch up on any missed lesson work at the earliest opportunity.
9. Complete written work to the best of your ability and hand it in on time.
10. Make use of the guidance your teachers give you and don't be afraid to let us know if you're having any problems.

We will give you copies of the set texts, but you may want to buy your own so that you can annotate them – you will be unable to do this with your school copies.

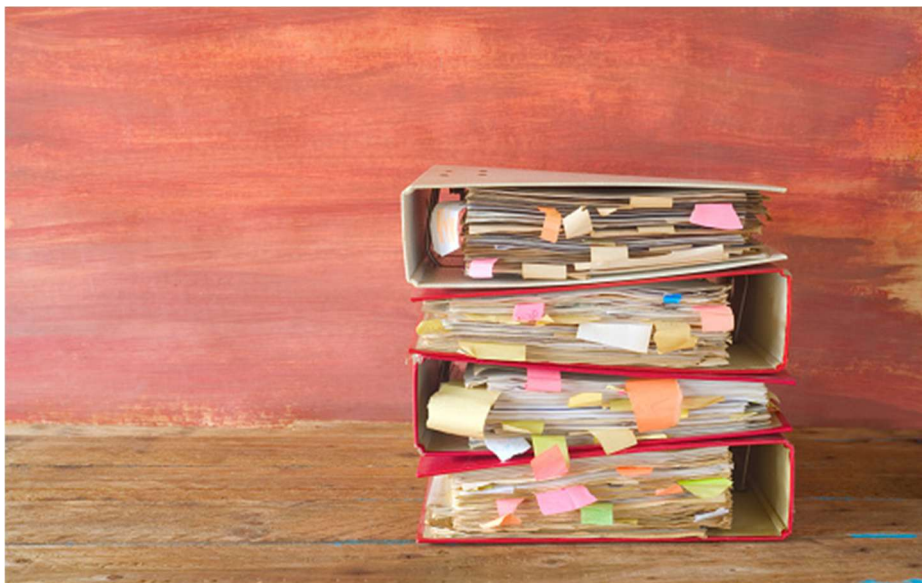
Many of our lessons are discussion-based, and you will be expected to join in. Don't worry about being 'wrong'. A level is a steep learning curve and mistakes are part of the learning process!

Organisation and Presentation

At GCSE you probably did most of your work in exercise books. At A level it's much better to work on A4 paper and to file your notes carefully along with any handouts or articles that you're given. People have different ways of organising their notes, but one tried and tested method is as follows:

- Make your main notes on A4 paper, headed with the date and the title of the text and chapter or scene that you're studying. Keep your working notes in an A4 ring binder so that they're easy to carry to school.
- Leave a space at the bottom of each page for additional ideas, such as points made by your fellow students in class.
- Set aside time each week to go through your notes on the texts you're studying. Highlight key quotations and important points. You should then use these to build an additional set of notes on key characters and themes. Keep these notes in a separate section in your folder.
- You will also need to make notes on any critical reading that you do, such as study guides and articles. Again, head your notes with the title of the piece that you're reading. Summarise their key arguments as a series of bullet points.
- Spend time each week making sure your folder is organised – make sure loose sheets are hole punched or put into plastic wallets so they don't get lost.
- When you finish a particular set text, transfer your notes to a lever arch file so that you don't have to bring everything to school with you. Use dividers to keep your file organised.

Most of your assessed work will be handwritten in class, but we will ask for some of your work to be word processed and printed out. Sometimes you will be asked to type work with double spacing to allow for feedback and moderation. The essays you submit for the NEA will need to be word processed to academic standard, with a detailed bibliography. We will give you further guidance about this nearer the time.



Get yourself organised right from the start!

Wider reading

As a student of A level English Literature, you should already enjoy reading. But during the course, you should try to broaden your tastes and experiment with different kinds of text: fiction, poetry, drama and different types of non-fiction. This list represents a wide cross-section of books and authors for you to try out and discuss. Don't back off from experimenting with a new author or genre – you may be pleasantly surprised! And when you find something you like, don't hold back from communicating your enjoyment, enthusiasm or excitement. Reading is intrinsically a totally private experience but it becomes so much more when your personal enthusiasms, reactions and opinions are voiced.

Fiction

This is the genre you will probably want to start with. The novel can give you a lasting insight into the ways in which writers have interpreted human lives and behaviour, transporting you into other worlds. It can also provide a way of looking at what has been considered the 'truth' about human nature, at different points in history. This list begins with some popular modern novels and short stories, and goes on to other centuries – remember to branch out when you're ready for a challenge!

Contemporary:

Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie	<i>Half of a Yellow Sun</i>
Kate Atkinson	<i>Life After Life, A God in Ruins</i>
Margaret Atwood	<i>Cat's Eye, The Handmaid's Tale, Alias Grace</i>
Pat Barker	<i>Regeneration, The Eye in the Door, The Ghost Road</i>
Sebastian Barry	<i>The Secret Scripture</i>
Louis de Bernières	<i>Captain Corelli's Mandolin</i>
Angela Carter	<i>The Bloody Chamber</i>
Jonathan Coe	<i>What a Carve Up, The Rotters' Club</i>
Anthony Doerr	<i>All The Light We Cannot See</i>
Helen Dunmore	<i>Birdcage Walk, The Siege, Girl Balancing</i>
Jeffrey Eugenides	<i>Middlesex</i>
Bernardine Evaristo	<i>Girl, Woman, Other</i>
Sebastian Faulks	<i>Birdsong</i>
Kate Grenville	<i>The Idea of Perfection, The Secret River</i>
Kiran Millwood Hargrave	<i>The Mercies</i>
Gail Honeyman	<i>Eleanor Oliphant is Absolutely Fine</i>
Kazuo Ishiguro	<i>The Remains of the Day, Never Let Me Go</i>
Barbara Kingsolver	<i>The Poisonwood Bible</i>

Andrea Levy	<i>Small Island</i>
Colum McCann	<i>Let The Great World Spin</i>
Cormac McCarthy	<i>The Road, All The Pretty Horses</i>
Ian McEwan	<i>The Child in Time, Enduring Love, Atonement, The Children Act</i>
Jon McGregor	<i>So Many Ways To Begin, Even The Dogs, Lean Fall Stand</i>
Hilary Mantel	<i>Wolf Hall, Bring Up The Bodies, The Mirror and the Light</i>
Yann Martel	<i>The Life of Pi</i>
Magnus Mills	<i>The Restraint of Beasts</i>
David Mitchell	<i>Cloud Atlas, Ghostwritten, Black Swan Green</i>
Lorrie Moore	<i>Collected Stories</i>
Haruki Murakami	<i>Norwegian Wood, The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle</i>
Andrew O'Hagan	<i>Personality, Be Near Me</i>
Sunjeev Sahota	<i>The Year of the Runaways</i>
Jane Smiley	<i>A Thousand Acres</i>
Francis Spufford	<i>Golden Hill, Light Perpetual</i>
Donna Tartt	<i>The Secret History</i>
Colm Toibin	<i>Brooklyn</i>
Barbara Trapido	<i>Frankie and Stankie</i>
Rose Tremain	<i>Restoration, The Road Home</i>
William Trevor	<i>The Story of Lucy Gault, Collected Stories</i>
Sarah Waters	<i>The Little Stranger, The Paying Guests</i>
Irvine Welsh	<i>Trainspotting</i>
Jeanette Winterson	<i>Oranges are Not the Only Fruit</i>



*'Like most people I lived a long time with my mother and father. My father liked to watch the wrestling, my mother liked to wrestle: it didn't matter what. She was in the white corner and that was that'.
Charlotte Coleman and Geraldine McEwan in the BBC adaptation of Oranges are Not the Only Fruit*

Twentieth century:

Julian Barnes	<i>A History of the World in 10½ Chapters, Flaubert's Parrot, Metroland</i>
Louis de Bernières	<i>Captain Corelli's Mandolin</i>
Albert Camus	<i>The Outsider, The Plague</i>
Joseph Conrad	<i>Heart of Darkness</i>
E.L. Doctorow	<i>Ragtime</i>
Roddy Doyle	<i>The Van, Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha</i>
F. Scott Fitzgerald	<i>The Great Gatsby</i>
E.M. Forster	<i>A Passage to India, Howards End, A Room with a View</i>
John Fowles	<i>The French Lieutenant's Woman</i>
Stella Gibbons	<i>Cold Comfort Farm</i>
William Golding	<i>Lord of the Flies</i>
Graham Greene	<i>Brighton Rock, The Heart of the Matter, The End of the Affair</i>
Ernest Hemingway	<i>The Old Man and the Sea, A Farewell to Arms</i>
Nick Hornby	<i>High Fidelity, About a Boy</i>
Aldous Huxley	<i>Brave New World</i>
John Irving	<i>A Prayer for Owen Meany</i>
James Joyce	<i>Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man</i>
D.H. Lawrence	<i>The Rainbow, Sons and Lovers</i>
Harper Lee	<i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i>
David Lodge	<i>Nice Work</i>
Anne Michaels	<i>Fugitive Pieces</i>
George Orwell	<i>Animal Farm, 1984, Keep the Aspidistra Flying</i>
Jean Rhys	<i>Wide Sargasso Sea</i>
J.D. Salinger	<i>The Catcher in the Rye</i>
Muriel Spark	<i>The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie</i>
Graham Swift	<i>Waterland</i>
Alice Walker	<i>The Color Purple</i>
Evelyn Waugh	<i>Brideshead Revisited, Scoop, Decline and Fall</i>
Antonia White	<i>Frost in May, The Lost Traveller</i>
Virginia Woolf	<i>The Waves, To The Lighthouse, Orlando</i>



Nineteenth century:

Jane Austen	<i>Pride and Prejudice, Sense and Sensibility, Mansfield Park, Northanger Abbey, Persuasion, Emma</i>
Charlotte Brontë	<i>Jane Eyre, Vilette, Shirley</i>
Emily Brontë	<i>Wuthering Heights</i>
Willa Cather	<i>My Antonia, The Song of the Lark</i>
Wilkie Collins	<i>The Moonstone, The Woman in White</i>
Charles Dickens	<i>Oliver Twist, Great Expectations, Hard Times, David Copperfield</i>
George Eliot	<i>The Mill on the Floss, Middlemarch</i>
Elizabeth Gaskell	<i>North and South, Mary Barton, Cranford, Wives and Daughters</i>
Thomas Hardy	<i>Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Far from the Madding Crowd, The Return of the Native, The Woodlanders</i>
Charlotte Perkins Gilman	<i>The Yellow Wallpaper</i>
Mary Shelley	<i>Frankenstein, The Last Man</i>
Bram Stoker	<i>Dracula</i>
Edith Wharton	<i>The Age of Innocence, The House of Mirth</i>

Eighteenth century and beyond:

Frances Burney	<i>Evelina</i>
Daniel Defoe	<i>Robinson Crusoe, Moll Flanders</i>
Henry Fielding	<i>Joseph Andrews</i>
Jonathan Swift	<i>Gulliver's Travels</i>

Drama

Don't forget to include plays and film scripts in your wider reading! Some students have a strong feel for dramatic literature, which can be linked to the history of the theatre, and particular social periods.

Elizabethan drama: William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, John Webster

Restoration comedy: R.B. Sheridan, Aphra Behn, John Gay.

Irish playwrights: Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, Sean O'Casey, J.M. Synge.

American playwrights: Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller.

Modern playwrights and dramatists: R.C. Sherriff, John Osborne, Joe Orton, Harold Pinter, Robert Bolt, Peter Shaffer, David Hare, Alan Bennett, Alan Ayckbourn, Timberlake Wertenbaker, Mike Leigh

Foreign playwrights in translation: Bertolt Brecht, Jean-Paul Sartre.

Poetry

This is perhaps the most private and personal source of reading, and the most individual. Here are some well-established names.

Contemporary: Simon Armitage, Gillian Clarke, Tony Harrison, U.A. Fanthorpe, Liz Lochhead, Carol Ann Duffy, Benjamin Zephaniah, Helen Mort, Zaffar Kunial, Lemn Sissay, Kae Tempest.

C20th: Thomas Hardy, Oscar Wilde, Rudyard Kipling, Robert Louis Stevenson, W.B. Yeats, Walter de la Mare, Edward Thomas, D.H. Lawrence, T.S. Eliot, Robert Graves, W.H. Auden, Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, Philip Larkin, Seamus Heaney, Ted Hughes, Sylvia Plath.

C19th: William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats, John Clare, Robert Browning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Emily Brontë, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Christina Rossetti, Gerard Manley Hopkins.

C18th: William Blake, Alexander Pope, John Dryden, Robert Burns, Jonathan Swift.

C17th: John Donne, Ben Jonson, George Herbert, John Milton, Andrew Marvell.

C16th: William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser, Philip Sidney.

Television, film and radio

You should also keep an eye open opportunities to extend your experience of literature through related television, film and radio broadcasts. Adaptations of novels and plays, discussions of relevant authors and topics ... there are a range of possibilities. The following Radio 4 programmes are available on iPlayer:

A Good Read

Bookclub

Open Book

Poetry Please

Remember to see what's on at local theatres and bookshops too! The South Holland Centre and Bookmark in Spalding and Stamford Arts Centre all host events that will help you to reflect on and develop your understanding of English literature.

MOOCs

Looking for an extra challenge? MOOCs, or Massive Open Online Courses, are a fantastic way to engage with a new area of learning and many Universities lend their material and expertise in their creation. One of the main platforms for MOOCs is FutureLearn (www.futurelearn.com); another is OpenLearn (www.open.edu/openlearn/), part of the Open University. MOOCs that you could complete include approaching prose, poetry and drama; exploring Shakespeare's stagecraft; introductions to Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy; graffiti as a form of protest art and Simone de Beauvoir and the feminist revolution. Registration is free and all you need to do is to create an

account. Participating in a MOOC is a brilliant way of demonstrating your capacity for further study and will impress any recruiter or admissions tutor!

And finally ...

Remember that your English teachers are your main resource. A level should be a time when your intellectual interests take shape and when you flourish as a learner. You will get as much out of the course as you are prepared to put in. We are here to help you with this – so if there's anything you're not sure about, just ask!

Good luck!

Dr C Atherton (Spalding Grammar School)

Miss E Jeffery (Spalding High School)