

Welcome to A Level English! This booklet will guide you through key transition tasks which need to be completed before you join the course in September.

It is important to be sure that you will enjoy and manage the quantity and quality of reading that you will have to do throughout the course. There will be five 'compulsory' texts and a poetry anthology which we will work on in depth, but you will have to have read all them independently. The more widely you read, the easier you will find it to relate the set texts to Literature in general.

You should find this work challenging and we ask that you try your best. If you need any support or clarification, please contact [escott@raynespark.merton.sch.uk](mailto:escott@raynespark.merton.sch.uk)

## Task 1 - The Ultimate English Literature Questionnaire!

1. Which book are you currently reading or have you just read?
2. Who was your favourite author when you were a child? Why?
3. What was your favourite book when you were a child?
4. Which magazine(s) or websites did you read as a child?
5. Which magazine(s) or websites do you read now?
6. Which literary character would you like to take out on a date and why?
7. Which literary character would you least like to be stranded on a desert island with and why?
8. In which literary/fictional location would you most like to live?
9. Which is the best TV/film adaptation of a book you have seen?
10. Which person, real or fictional, living or deceased, would you most like to have a 'one-to-one' with?
11. What is your favourite book?
12. Who is your favourite author?
13. What is the most memorable line delivered in a film?
14. What is your favourite film?
15. What is your least favourite book and why?

**Jot down your answers and be ready to share them with the rest of the group!**

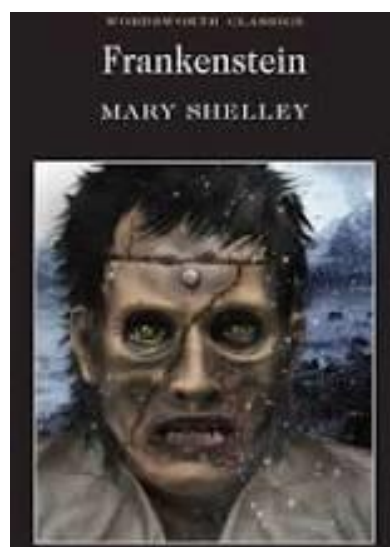
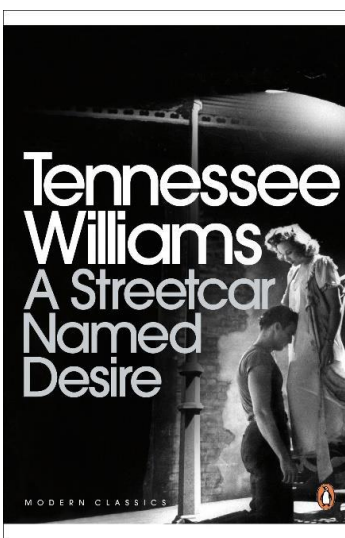
## Task 2 – Read the Set Texts

The most important thing you can do to prepare for September is read the set texts so you are familiar with the plot and characters. Below is a list of the key texts we will explore together in class in the Autumn Term.

You will need to have read all three of these texts

You will need an A4 ring binder and A4 lined paper to start keeping a record of your notes on the set texts.

- 1) Summarise each chapter/scene in note-form as you read
- 2) Identify prominent themes/ideas and add key quotations
- 3) Create separate notes pages for each character and track their development throughout the novel/play



Used copies of these texts (in good condition) are readily available on Amazon at a good price, however, should you need any financial assistance to purchase the texts, please contact Mrs Mc Inerney:

[hmcinerney@raynespark.merton.sch.uk](mailto:hmcinerney@raynespark.merton.sch.uk)

Once you have read *The Handmaid's Tale*, it would be beneficial, and you will find it interesting, to read the sequel which was published in 2019 (over 20 years after the original text).

As you read, consider:

Does this text change your perception of any of the characters?

Have you noticed a shift in Atwood's perspective? Has her focus/her priorities/her message shifted over the past 20 years?



## Task 3 – Critical Theory

You need to familiarise yourself with different approaches to studying a text and begin to appreciate how a text can be viewed through a different 'lens'.

- Pick two sections from the 'Critical Anthology' that you think might interest you
- Read the articles in these sections
- Create notes pages, identifying the key ideas and approaches of each critical theory
- Think about the set texts or wider reading that you have done. Add to your notes on the set texts by considering a different critical approach i.e. A Feminist reading of *The Handmaid's Tale*

Of course, you could read and make notes on additional sections!

## Task 4 – English knowledge based project

The aim of this project is for you to consider how English literature as a subject has developed since being established as an academic subject in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to its study in schools, colleges and university today. It gets you to consider the link between the emergence of literature linked to colonialism, the political landscape, identity and culture, considering questions such as who and what determines whether a text has literary value, to whether Shakespeare should be studied in schools today and whether there is a right way to interpret a text, looking at the role of critical theory in shaping and constructing criticism. In considering these ideas, you will consider the wider question of the significance of studying literature as a subject at A-Level- why is English literature important?

After completing each section, please email your completed work to Mrs Scott at:  
[escott@raynespark.merton.sch.uk](mailto:escott@raynespark.merton.sch.uk)

### Topic Tracker

<u>Topic</u>	<u>Completed (tick when complete)</u>
Section One: English through the ages	
Section Two: Doing English today	
Section Three: Applying literary theory	
Section Four: Literary value and the Canon	
Section 5: Discursive essay question	



## Section One: English through the ages

This particular section gets you to consider how and why English literature as an academic discipline has developed.

**Task: In order to answer the questions in the grid provided, you will need to read the text below the grid. As you read, highlight key information in order to answer the questions.**

Question	Your answer
1) What is the link between the emergence of the study of English Literature as an academic subject and its link to the colonialism and the British Empire in India?	
2) What led to the study of English literature emerging in Britain?	
3) What did the supporters of English literature suggest the reason behind why it should be studied?	
4) What two key things led to English literature emerging as an academic subject in the twentieth century? Explain.	
5) (i) What was the purpose of literature according to Leavis?  (ii) The three features of Leavis's method in studying English Literature were: objective judgement; practical criticism; studying great work of literature. Explain what Leavis meant by each of these features.  (iii) What are some of the pitfalls in relation to Leavis's approach? Explain.	

## The history of English literature as a subject

English, as we recognise it today, is a very new discipline but wasn't really established as a subject until after World War 1.

This is not to say that people had not been writing about books until then: it's just that their writing was not recognised as serious investigation or as part of a subject in its own right. There was no subject that corresponded to the discussions people had about Shakespeare or the letters they wrote to each other about the books or poetry they had read. The study of literature in English simply did not exist.

### English and colonial rule

The literature of England was seen as a mould of the English way of life, morals, taste and the English way of doing things, so why not teach Indians how to be more English by teaching them English literature? Studying English literature was seen as a way of 'civilising' the native population. By 1835, this tactic was made law by the English Education Act, which officially made English the medium of instruction in Indian education and required the study of English literature.

So it was in India, then, that the British formed the idea of a school and academic discipline called English, which involve reading and writing about novels, plays and poems written in English. This helps to explain why the subject is called 'English' and not, as in many other countries, 'Literature'. The idea that the study of English literature was a 'civilising force' remained very strong and it was this idea that brought the subject back to Britain.

### English in Britain

The study of English literature was brought back to Britain to 're-civilise the native savages'.

During the nineteenth century, internal struggles threatened to tear Britain apart. There was a huge increase in population and the Industrial Revolution led to the growth of enormous cities filled with poor workers. Those in power felt that Britain was being overrun by these 'barbarians' and that anarchy or revolution was just around the corner. By educating the 'British savages' in 'civilised English' values, they hoped to maintain the political and social status quo.

As the end of the nineteenth century approached, the discipline of 'English' as a study of literature didn't exist in universities or in any formal environment, except as part of a broader subject in schools and adult education. Despite this, the teaching of English literature had become the focus of heated argument. On one side its supporters argued that it imparted beneficial and civilised moral values. One of the most influential of these campaigners, John Churton Collins wrote a polemical book called *The Study of English Literature*, in which he insisted that education, especially university education, had 'new duties and new responsibilities' to instruct people of all classes, not just the well off. Literature and the interpretation of literature he claimed, could be taught to students of any background. For Collins, studying literature was a 'moral and aesthetic education', and had a positive and healthy influence on 'taste', 'tone', 'sentiment', 'opinion' and 'character'.

On the other side of the debate were those like Henry Nettleship, who thought that the study of English literature was of little worth, suitable only as a pastime for lesser minds. For such people, as I have outlined, only the historical study of the development of the English Language was rigorous enough to count as a subject in its own right.

For the most part it was the 'English as the study of language point of view that triumphed'. When Nettleship's own university, Oxford, introduced its first English degree course in 1893, it involved studying subjects like German, Old English and the history of the language. Poetry was a source of examples, and novels were not worthy of study. Interestingly, most of the students were women, which again fulfilled the sexist idea that English was for those 'less able' to cope with the great works of civilisation.

### Twentieth Century: A changing landscape for English literature

In 1917, during the carnage of World War 1, a group of lecturers at Cambridge university came together, planned and went on to introduce radical innovations in their university's English degree course. This group, which included the now famous critics E.M.W. Tillyard and I.A. Richards, wanted to create a subject that would study literature in English in its own right, not just as a source of examples of how English was used in Shakespeare's time, say, or as pale imitations of Ancient Greek and Roman works. They believed that the study of literature would restore a sense of humanity to the world, in the face of the rampant growth of technology, and the machine age'. The need for this, they claimed, was being graphically demonstrated by the ongoing world war. The programme they put together and the way they taught it reflected these beliefs and was to become hugely influential.

Two years later, the government commissioned a report with the aim of studying and suggesting improvements for the teaching of English in England. The Newbolt Report, finished in 1921, effectively gave government backing to this 'new English'. It stated that 'literature is not just a subject for academic study, but one of the chief temples of the 'Human Spirit', in which all should worship'. The Newbolt report was the final victory over those who wanted the subject to remain the study of the history of the language and increased the speed at which English literature as a discipline grew. It was vital in making this new form of English (centred on the study of literature) acceptable and laid the groundwork for the subject we recognise today.

### The study of English literature: The Leavis method

F.R. Leavis, the Cambridge University literary critic was key in shaping the approach to the study of English literature. According to the Leavis approach, the study of literature has a civilising mission to 'humanise' people and provide values which, in the modern world, can't be obtained elsewhere. For Leavis, the aim of criticism should be to make an authoritative and objective judgement or 'evaluation' of a literary text. This means that your personal views don't really count. Leavis's approach also stressed the importance of practical criticism focused on close reading and ignoring the work's context. Leavis suggested that there are certain authors who are part of a list of 'great literary works' that everyone should study and admire, for example, authors like



**Reflection- Bigger picture Question: To what extent was the emergence of English Literature as a subject a result of political reasons? Explain your answer.**

## Section Two: Studying English today

It is clear that the study of English Literature today has further transformed and evolved from that of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Central to this transformation has been the idea of interpretation.

One of the key purposes of teaching and studying English literature as an academic subject

was that it had a civilising mission. In creating this idea of 'civilised' Englishness and a sense of national identity, those that shaped the subject were proponents of there only being one true interpretation of the text with no room for personal interpretation.

### **Task**

Once you have read the text below the grid and completed your wider reading on key ideas that inform the approach to studying English literature today, complete the grid below. Highlight the key information in order to answer the questions.

<b><u>Question</u></b>	<b><u>Answer</u></b>
Why does the idea of English as presenting a civilising mission no longer apply?	
Why is an objective interpretation not possible?	
Why is it important to consider context when completing analysing a text?	
What is literary theory?  What does literary theory suggest about interpreting a text?  What is the link between literary theory and culture?	
What is Historicism?	
What is post-colonialism?  What does Edward Said's Orientalism suggest the representation of non-Western societies in literature?  How does post-colonialism link to historicism?	
What is feminist literary theory concerned with?	



<p>What is Marxist literary criticism?</p> <p>In what ways is Marxist literary criticism applied to Twelfth Night, The Great Gatsby and the poem, 'The Social Classes'?</p>	
<p>What does post-modernism suggest about truth and morality and how was this shaped by WW2?</p> <p>What type of techniques are usually used in post-modern literature?</p> <p>What is the difference between modernism and post-modernism?</p>	
<p>According to the literary critic Roland Barthes, who determines meaning in a text: the author or the reader? Do you agree with Barthes's view? Explain your answer.</p>	

**Task: Read the information and complete the research in order to answer the questions in the grid. Highlight the key information in order to answer questions.**

Below are modern day responses to the traditional approach that shaped the study of English literature.

**English has a civilising mission**

The world in which we live today, with an end to colonialism and with the multicultural societies across the world, the importance of literature expressing the identity of different communities, their cultures and their lived experiences has replaced the purpose of literature being seen as fulfilling the aim of civilising and with it promoting one set of ideals and values over others.

**Objective interpretation**

The idea of a novel, poem or play should be studied and judged objectively, is one that we no longer subscribe to today. No interpretation is objective. No judgement is neutral, unaffected by your own experiences and context.

### **Close reading- intrinsic artistic worth of a text**

This approach suggests that we only read texts for their literary worth, so context should not be taken into account when interpreting a text. However, context we know plays a significant role in understanding a text, authorial intent, along with the context of the reader in responding and interpreting the text.

### **Literary theory**

Literary theory represents a break away from the idea of a single interpretation of a text, rather suggesting that multiple interpretations of a text is possible.

Read the information on what is literary theory on the following website and answer the questions on literary theory in the grid:  
<https://www.iep.utm.edu/literary/#H1>

### **Literary critical theories**

Listen to the following clips and make notes on the questions to the different critical theoretical approaches to the study of literary texts.

Historicism: [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=historicism+theory+in+literature+](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=historicism+theory+in+literature+)

Post-colonialism: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SG-0KCAwFBo>

Feminist literary criticism: <https://www.thoughtco.com/feminist-literary-criticism-3528960>

Marxist literary criticism: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wvec0Bmp8xM>

Post-modernist literary criticism: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GYov7Uhfj3o>

### **Who determines meaning: author or reader?**

Task: Read the below in order to answer the last question in the grid.

Perhaps most importantly the 'death of the author'- or at least of their authority – leads to what Roland Barthes called 'the birth of the reader' .... The meaning of a text lies not in its origin (the writer) but in its destination: in you, the readers. Understanding a text isn't a matter of 'divining a secret' but of actively creating a meaning'.

Nevertheless, the author's intention is still endlessly referred to, sometimes to discount perfectly convincing and interesting readings of texts. It seems that, any people want to find an authority to explain the text and provide the final answer. It is this wish for a final meaning that links the word 'author' with the word 'authority'. This desire is particularly heightened in reading literature precisely because, I would argue, literature stimulates an unlimited proliferation of meanings. This idea, taken seriously, can seem quite threatening. If thinking about literature makes us think about the world, and there are no right answers about literature, are there any firm answers anywhere?

**Reflection Bigger Picture Question: What role does literary theory play in the interpretation of texts?**



## Section Three: Applying literary theory

**Task: You will be given three extracts and will be applying a literary theory to each extract.**

### **Extract 1: The Tempest**

#### **PROSPERO**

Thou poisonous slave, got by the devil himself  
Upon thy wicked dam, come forth!

*Enter CALIBAN*

#### **CALIBAN**

As wicked dew as e'er my mother brush'd  
With raven's feather from unwholesome fen  
Drop on you both! a south-west blow on ye  
And blister you all o'er!

#### **PROSPERO**

For this, be sure, to-night thou shalt have cramps,  
Side-stitches that shall pen thy breath up; urchins  
Shall, for that vast of night that they may work,  
All exercise on thee; thou shalt be pinch'd  
As thick as honeycomb, each pinch more stinging  
Than bees that made 'em.

#### **CALIBAN**

I must eat my dinner.  
This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother,  
Which thou takest from me. When thou camest first,  
Thou strokedst me and madest much of me, wouldst give me  
Water with berries in't, and teach me how  
To name the bigger light, and how the less,  
That burn by day and night: and then I loved thee  
And show'd thee all the qualities o' the isle,  
The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile:  
Cursed be I that did so! All the charms  
Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you!  
For I am all the subjects that you have,  
Which first was mine own king: and here you sty me  
In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me  
The rest o' the island.

#### **PROSPERO**

Thou most lying slave,  
Whom stripes may move, not kindness! I have used thee,  
Filth as thou art, with human care, and lodged thee  
In mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate  
The honour of my child.

#### **CALIBAN**

O ho, O ho! would't had been done!  
Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else  
This isle with Calibans.

#### **PROSPERO**

Abhorred slave,  
Which any print of goodness wilt not take,  
Being capable of all ill! I pitied thee,

Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour  
One thing or other: when thou didst not, savage,  
Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like  
A thing most brutish, I endow'd thy purposes  
With words that made them known. But thy vile race,  
Though thou didst learn, had that in't which  
good natures  
Could not abide to be with; therefore wast thou  
Deservedly confined into this rock,  
Who hadst deserved more than a prison.

**CALIBAN**

You taught me language; and my profit on't  
Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you  
For learning me your language!

**Task:** Read the Tempest extract above and answer the following questions:

- (1) How is Caliban the 'native' on the island presented in the extract?
- (2) Prospero, according to Caliban has taken the island from him, how might post-colonial theory be applied in the presentation of Caliban in this extract? Explain your answer.

## Extract 2: Oliver Twist (The scene is in a Victorian workhouse)

The evening arrived; the boys took their places. The master in his cook's uniform, stationed himself at the copper; his pauper assistants ranged themselves behind him, the gruel was served out; and a long grace was said over the short commons. The gruel disappeared; the boys whispered each other and winked at Oliver; while his next neighbours nudged him. Child as he was, he was desperate with hunger and reckless with misery. He rose from the table; and advancing to the master, basin and spoon in hand, said: somewhat alarmed at his own temerity:

'Please, sir, I want some more.'

The master was a fat healthy man; but he turned very pale. He gazed in stupefied astonishment on the small rebel for some seconds, and then clung for support to the copper. The assistants were paralysed with wonder; the boys with fear.

'What! said the master at length, in a faint voice.

'Please, sir,' replied Oliver, I want some more.'

The master aimed a blow at Oliver's head with the ladle; pinioned him in his arm; and shrieked aloud for the beadle.

The board were sitting in solemn conclave, when Mr. Bumble rushed into the room in great excitement, and addressing the gentleman in the high chair, said,

Mr. Limbkins, I beg your pardon sir! Oliver Twist has asked for more!

There was a general start. Horror was depicted on every countenance.

'For more!' said Mr. Limbkins 'Compose yourself, Bumble, and answer me distinctly. Do I understand that he asked for more, after he had eaten the supper allotted by the dietary?'

'He did sir,' replied Bumble

'That boy will be hung,' said the gentleman in the white waistcoat. 'I know that boy will be hung.'

Nobody controverted the prophetic gentleman's opinion. An animated discussion took place. Oliver was ordered into instant confinement; and a bill was next morning pasted on the outside of the gate, offering a reward of five pounds to anybody who would take Oliver Twist off the hands of the parish. In other words five pounds and Oliver Twist were offered to any man or woman who wanted an apprentice to any trade, business, or calling.

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Task: Read The Oliver Twist extract above and answer the following questions:

- (1) How is Oliver Twist presented in the extract?
- (2) How are those with authority presented in the extract?
- (3) In what ways could marxist literary criticism be applied to the extract?

**Section Four: Literary value and the Canon**

In this section you will be considering who determines the literary value of a text; why are certain texts considered 'great' works of literature, whilst others are considered poor works of literature? The English 'literary canon' is one way in which literary works deemed as having literary value has been identified.

**Task: Complete the grid by using the links provided and the reading to complete your research.**

Question	Answer
What is the literary canon?	
What determines whether a literary text is part of the literary canon? Why might these considerations be problematic?	
How has the classification of the literary canon changed today from George Eliot's claim in the 19 <sup>th</sup> century that the literary 'canon' is the storehouse of Western values)? Explain your answer.	
What are the reasons why Shakespeare is part of the literary canon today?	
What is the link between literature and identity?	

Task: Complete your research on the literary canon by going on the followings, highlighting key information as you go along in order to answer the questions.

Read the article: What's wrong with the literary canon? <https://thebadgeronline.com/2018/04/whats-wrong-literary-canon/>

Read the article: 'The literary canon throughout the years' <https://theboar.org/2018/08/the-literary-canon-over-the-years/>

## Shakespeare and the Literary Canon

Shakespeare is still considered as part of the English literary canon. There are many reasons for why Shakespeare is regarded as part of the literary canon. Some would argue of the artistic worth of Shakespeare's plays in terms of his literary choices; others would argue of the universal appeal of Shakespeare's work versus new ideas. Further Shakespeare as the 'national poet' conveys ideas of 'Englishness' linking to nationalism.

-Read the article: 'Why is Shakespeare still relevant over 400 years after his death?'

<https://www.oxfordhomeschooling.co.uk/blog/why-shakespeare-is-still-relevant-over-400-years-since-his-death/>

-Watch the clip: 'Hip Hop and Shakespeare?' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DSbtkLA3GrY>

## Literature and identity

The book *Imagined Communities* by Benedict Andersen offers a crucial insight into national identity and the idea of a nation. He argues that nations are created, or constructed, culturally. They are, in his key phrase, 'imagined communities'. Nations are 'imagined' in two senses. First, they are 'imaginary' communities because, despite any nationalistic rhetoric, they cannot be a real community; simply, they are too big for any one person to know any but the smallest fraction of the total population.... Second, and more important, nations are imagined because they exist in the imagination, they are put together with images and ideas. There is no 'real' national identity, no 'essence' of being English or Colombian or Kenyan. Instead there is a shared stock of images, ideas, stories and traditions, all of which go together to help each of us 'imagine' (and so identify) ourselves as English, Colombian, or Kenyan. These shared images, stories and ideas are national culture.

English as a subject is a form of cultural heritage, aiming to create a 'we' by making us read and interpret in the same way.

This is one of the reasons why people find theory quite threatening to culture and national identity. If theory is as I have argued, a range of different ways of looking at things, it means that the 'English' way of interpreting literature is no longer unique. 'Theory' is seen as a threat not just because it offers new interpretations of texts, but because it offers new ways of looking. New ways of interpreting don't construct the same 'we' as before; in fact, they both teach and produce new forms of national identity.

Those cultural things from the past which are chosen to shape the 'we' of the imagined community make up a 'cultural heritage'. Traditionally, English, the subject, is a form of cultural heritage, both in the texts it chooses (the canon) and in the way it interprets those texts.

However, national identity is changing, both because it is clear that there never was one, single national identity and because we now inhabit a hybrid society. Both the books on English courses, and how we interpret them are changing to reflect this.



**Reflection Bigger Picture Question: Should texts such as William Shakespeare still be part of the National Curriculum? Explain your view.**



## Section 5: Discursive essay question

In this section you will be bringing your knowledge of the development of English Literature through the ages and your own reflections on the purpose of English literature to answer the essay question below. Your essay response should be at least one side of A4.

### Essay Question

‘English is still evolving. English continues to focus on enabling you to respond to the world around you’. How far does English literature and the study of English Literature in schools reflect human experience?

Use the success criteria to plan your response first before you write your essay.

### Success Criteria

Your response should include the following:

- The changes to the study of English Literature from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to today
- The role of critical theory in interpretation
- The literary canon today
- Relevance of writers such as Shakespeare
- Link between literature and identity
- Your reflections on the purpose of literature