

A Level English Literature Bridging Work



The Gothic

Welcome to A Level English literature. Please complete the following tasks in this booklet ready for your first day at sixth form.

What does the course require of me?

A Level English literature is a rigorous course which requires you to enjoy reading, writing academic essays whilst exploring context and sharing critical views and ideas. Therefore, the more you can do now to get ahead of course content and reading, the better prepared you will be for the programme.

How will this booklet help me to prepare for A Level study?

This booklet is designed to help you get ahead with crucial reading, whilst introducing you to key texts and ideas needed to access the course.

Course Overview

Exam board: OCR A Level English Literature

Course code: H472

Component 1

- Shakespeare (Section 1)
- Drama and Poetry pre-1900 (Section 2)

Assessment

- Written paper (Closed book)
- 2h 30m (60 marks – 40%)

Component 2: The Gothic Novel

- Close reading in chosen topic area – unseen prose extract
- Comparative and contextual study from chosen topic area – choice of 3 questions

Assessment

- Written paper (closed book)
- 2h30m (60 marks – 40%)

Component 3: Coursework

- Close Reading and Comparative Study (20% of overall grade)

We will start Year 1 with a unit on Gothic literature – a genre you probably already know something about.

At GCSE if you studied Macbeth, Great Expectations or A Christmas Carol then you already know a work of Gothic literature. You might also have read, or watched a film adaptation, of books like Jane Eyre, The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, Wuthering Heights or Rebecca.

Set Texts:

- *The Bloody Chamber and other stories* by Angela Carter
- *Dracula* by Bram Stoker



Ilearn:

Please buy an A3 sketch pad (available from The Works for £5).

This is where you will complete all your ilearn, and your bridging work.



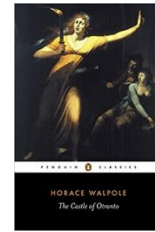
You don't need to read your set texts before September – but, of course, you are welcome to!

Wider reading is assessed at A Level so this summer is a great time to make a start on building up your knowledge of the wider Gothic genre.

You'll find a list of Gothic novels and websites at the end of this booklet, so you can investigate and chose what you want to read over the next few months.

We hope you enjoy getting to know a little more about this subject and look forward to meeting you next term!

TASK 1 - Analysis



Extract from Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764)

Manfred, prince of Otranto, had one son and one daughter: the latter, a most beautiful virgin, aged eighteen, was called Matilda. Conrad, the son, was three years younger, a homely youth, sickly, and of no promising disposition; yet he was the darling of his father, who never showed any symptoms of affection to Matilda. Manfred had contracted a marriage for his son with the Marquis of Vincenza's daughter, Isabella; and she had already been delivered by her guardians into the hands of Manfred, that he might celebrate the wedding as soon as Conrad's infirm state of health would permit. Manfred's impatience for this ceremonial was remarked by his family and neighbours. The former, indeed, apprehending the severity of their prince's disposition, did not dare to utter their surmises on his precipitation. Hippolita, his wife, an amiable lady, did sometimes venture to represent the danger of marrying their only son so early, considering his great youth, and greater infirmities; but she never received any other answer than reflections on her own sterility, who had given him but one heir. His tenants and subjects were less cautious in their discourses: they attributed this hasty wedding to the prince's dread of seeing accomplished and ancient prophecy, which was said to have pronounced, That the castle and Lordship of Otranto should pass from the present family, whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it. It was difficult to make any sense of this prophesy; and still less easy to conceive what it had to do with the marriage in question. Yet these mysteries, or contradictions, did not make the populace adhere the less to their opinion.

Young Conrad's birth-day was fixed for his espousals. The company was assembled in the chapel of the castle, and everything ready for beginning of the divine office, when Conrad himself was missing. Manfred, impatient of the least delay, and who had not observed his son retire, dispatched one of his attendants to summon the young prince. The servant, who had not staid long enough to have crossed to Conrad's apartment, came running back breathless, in a frantic manner, his eyes staring, and foaming at the mouth. He said nothing, but pointed to the court. The company was struck with terror and amazement. The princess Hippolita, without knowing what was the matter, but anxious for her son, swooned away. Manfred, less apprehensive than enraged at the procrastination of the nuptials, and at the folly of his domestic, asked imperiously, what was the matter? The fellow made no answer, but continued pointing towards the courtyard; and, at last, after repeated questions put to him, cried out, Oh the helmet! the helmet! In the mean time some of the company had run into the court, from whence was heard a confused noise of shrieks, horror, and surprise. Manfred, who began to be alarmed at not seeing his son, went himself to get information of what occasioned this strange confusion, Matilda remained endeavouring to assist her mother, and Isabella staid for the same purpose, and to avoid showing any impatience for the bridegroom, for whom, in truth, she had conceived little affection.

The first thing that struck Manfred's eyes was a group of his servants endeavouring to raise something that appeared to him a mountain of sable plumes. He gazed without believing his sight. What are ye doing? cried Manfred wrathfully: Where is my son? A volley of voices replied, Oh my Lord! the prince! the prince! the helmet! the helmet! Shocked with these lamentable sounds, and dreading he knew not what, he advanced hastily – But what a sight for a father's eyes! – He beheld his child dashed to pieces, and almost buried under an enormous helmet, an hundred times more

large than any casque ever made for human being, and shaded with a proportionable quantity of black feathers.

Questions: The Castle of Otranto

1. In his Preface to the first edition of *The Castle of Otranto*, Walpole tells readers that the narrative he presents to them was first discovered in the library of an ancient Catholic family. He claims the manuscript's 'original' place and date of publication was Naples in 1529. This fiction about the novel's origin was accepted as true by many contemporaneous readers and caused annoyance amongst those who were taken in when Walpole later admitted (in the preface to the second edition) that he was the author and that, far from being 'antique', the work had been written in the six months leading up to its publication in December 1764. What might have been Walpole's reasons for misleading readers about the apparent 'antique' date of composition and the exotic place of publication?
2. Think carefully about Walpole's characterisation of Manfred at the opening of the novel:
 - What is his status?
 - What is his main motivation?
 - What is Manfred's primary characteristic as Walpole presents him here?
 - In characterising Manfred does Walpole draw upon any stereotypes that you recognise?
3. Think about the presentation of Matilda and Hippolita:
 - What is their status?
 - What assumptions are made about their roles and destinies?
 - Would you say that Walpole's characterisations draw upon any stereotypes that you recognise?
4. Think about the way society was structured at the time the novel was set: what were the priorities of wealthy, aristocratic fathers?
 - How do you think the original readership would have responded to Manfred's excessive affection for the 'sickly' Conrad and his disregard of his 'beautiful' daughter Matilda?
5. Look at the ways in which the genders are presented in this extract. Are they sharply differentiated?
6. Can you think of any other genre that presents gender in similar ways to Walpole?
7. Is the prophecy (That the castle and Lordship of Otranto should pass from the present family, whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it) comprehensible?
 - What response does the prophecy evoke in readers (confusion, bewilderment, incredulity)?
 - How does the prophecy add to the narrative (does it clarify, complicate or leave readers in a state of incomprehension)?
 - What does this tell you about the Gothic?
8. What is your response to the device of the giant 'helmet' as the cause of Conrad's death?
 - Is this a realistic or credible device?
 - What does this suggest about Gothic plots?

TASK 2 – Research: contextualising the Gothic

1. Linguistic origins:
 - Who were the people to whom the name Goths was first given?
 - Where did they originate?
 - What characteristics came to define the Goths as a people?
 - How did the Goths gain their reputation?
 - Can you make any connections between what you have found out about the Goths and the texts you are studying?
2. Gothic architecture:
 - Find images of examples of Gothic architecture.
 - At what time did this style of architecture first become popular?
 - For how long did Gothic architecture remain popular?
 - What are the characteristic features of Gothic architecture (e.g. plain or highly ornate?)
 - What kinds of decorative features does Gothic architecture employ?
3. Literary Gothic: the fashion for 'Gothic' novels dates from the three decades after 1790 when the term was applied retrospectively to define a sub-genre of Romantic fiction that made use of the supernatural. In this context, Gothic means 'medieval', a period which, from the perspective of late 18th and early 19th century authors, was considered a dark, barbaric and fearful time. Find out about the Romantic movement and Romantic literature.
 - Who were the main proponents of this literary movement?
 - Can you make any connections between the ideas held by Romantic writers and the writing that grew out of Romanticism to become Gothic?
4. Is the Gothic an artistic form that has been superseded today?
5. Has the Gothic managed to reinvent itself over time? Give examples of contemporary Gothic art.
6. How do the more modern Gothic texts differ from the originals?

TASK 3 – Research: the intellectual and philosophical contexts of the Gothic

The period in the history of western thought and culture that stretches roughly from the mid-seventeenth to the eighteenth century is known as the **Enlightenment**. This period is characterised by revolutions in science, philosophy, society and politics; these revolutions replaced the medieval world-view based on religion and superstition with modern systems based on 'reason'.

Research the Enlightenment

In what ways are 'Enlightenment' ways of thinking relevant to the texts you are studying?

1. Find out about Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756). You should be able to find a summary of the ideas that Burke presents in this essay on the internet. In what ways is the idea of the sublime, and the responses it generates, related to the Gothic?

2. The 20th century psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud developed the concept of the unconscious mind. Freud's research and writing revolutionised the ways in which we have come to regard human nature, dreams, anxiety and sexuality. Research Freud and make notes. How might Freud's ideas about hysteria and repression relate to the interpretation of Gothic texts?

3. The Gothic has been adopted by feminists as a means of generating discussion about gender and the ways in which women are often represented in literature as creatures who are confined, imprisoned and trapped. Dramatisations of imprisonment pervade Gothic narratives. Research the Feminist Gothic. What insights does this school of criticism provide into the texts you are studying?

4. The Gothic at its inception might have been thought of as a conservative genre in that, even though its narratives involved the demonisation of particular aristocratic villains, it did not criticise the social systems that legitimised the existence of an aristocracy. Think about the texts set for this topic. Would you say that the Gothic, as it develops through time, retains its early political conservatism?



As you know, your core texts are Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*.

The Gothic unit of the A Level also requires you to have an understanding of **other** Gothic texts. At this point, further reading within the Gothic genre is to be encouraged!

Below is a selection of texts. Select (at least) 1 and read it over the Summer!

- Ann Radcliffe: *The Italian*
- Mary Shelley: *Frankenstein*
- Oscar Wilde: *The Picture of Dorian Gray*
- William Faulkner: *Light in August*
- Cormac McCarthy: *Outer Dark*
- Iain Banks: *The Wasp Factory*
- Toni Morrison: *Beloved*
- Emily Brontë: *Wuthering Heights*
- Charlotte Brontë: *Jane Eyre*
- Daphne DuMaurier: *Rebecca*
- Jane Austen: *Northanger Abbey*
- Shirley Jackson: *The Haunting of Hill House*
- Shirley Jackson: *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*
- Henry James: *The Turn of the Screw*
- Wilkie Collins: *The Woman in White*
- Anya Seton: *Dragonwyck*
- Silvia Moreno-Garcia: *Mexican Gothic*
- Sarah Waters: *The Little Stranger*
- Robert Marasco: *Burnt Offerings*
- Anne Rice: *Interview With The Vampire*
- Danielle Trussoni: *The Ancestor*

USEFUL WEBSITE:

<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/themes/the-gothic>