English Literature

Awarding Body – AQA Specification A

Note - *certification in this course is not available at AS*

Minimum Course Entry Requirement

At least grade 6 in GCSE English Literature and English Language.
For continuation to Year 13 grades in Year 12 English Literature need to demonstrate potential for A Level success.

Course Content

English Literature is ideal for students who enjoy reading; the course covers a range of texts from F Scott Fitzgerald's 'The Great Gatsby' to Shakespeare's 'Othello'. At Durham Johnston, we study AQA Specification A that has a historicist approach to the study of literature, working from the belief that no text exists in isolation but is the product of the time in which it was produced. An example of this is the unit on 'Modern Times: Literature from 1945 to the Present Day', in which students study unseen texts, a play, and a novel, considering how readers would have responded to them at the time they were published and how readers respond today, as well as how the texts reflect common themes and motifs of the period or genre.

Furthermore, English Literature provides good scope for independent thinking in that the Non Examination Unit is a piece that students choose themselves. With guidance, students select two texts of their choice and create their own question. This leads to high engagement and highly engaging pieces of coursework.

Assessments

English Literature is a linear course and external assessment will take place at the end of Year 13 only.

Paper One: Love Through the Ages: 40% of total A Level, 3 hours.
Section A: Shakespeare: one passage based question with linked essay (closed book).
Section B: Unseen poetry: comparing two unseen poems.
Section C: Comparing two texts that have been studied in class (open book).

Paper Two: Texts in Context: 40% of total A Level, 2.5 hours.
Section A: Set Texts: One essay on a set text that has been studied in class (open book).
Section B: Unseen Prose.
Section C: Comparing two further set texts that have been studied in class (open book).

Non Examination Unit: 20% of total A Level
2500 word essay comparing two texts of the student's choice; one of which must have been written pre-1900.

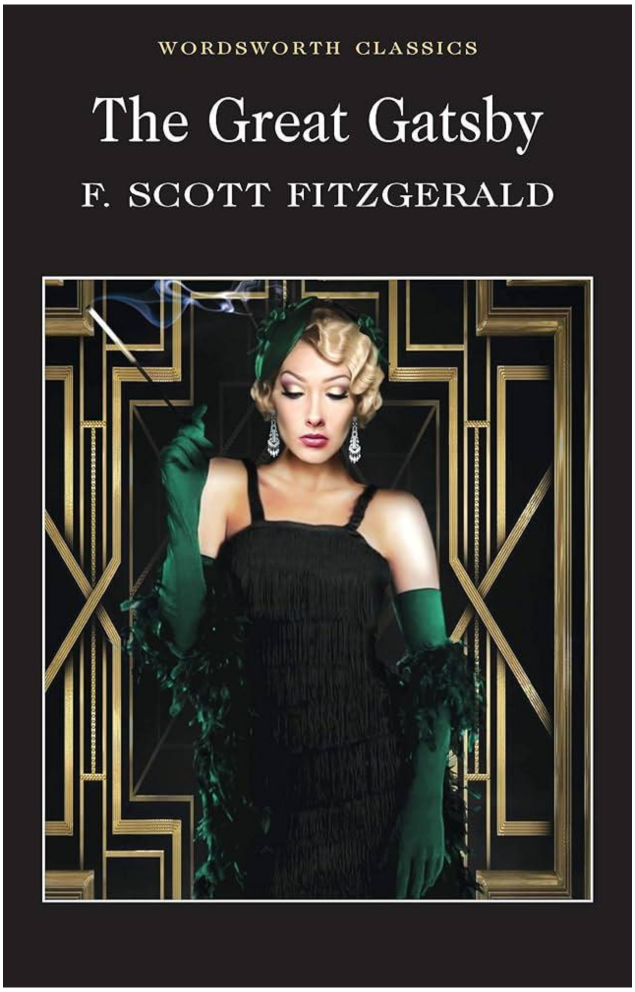
Career Possibilities

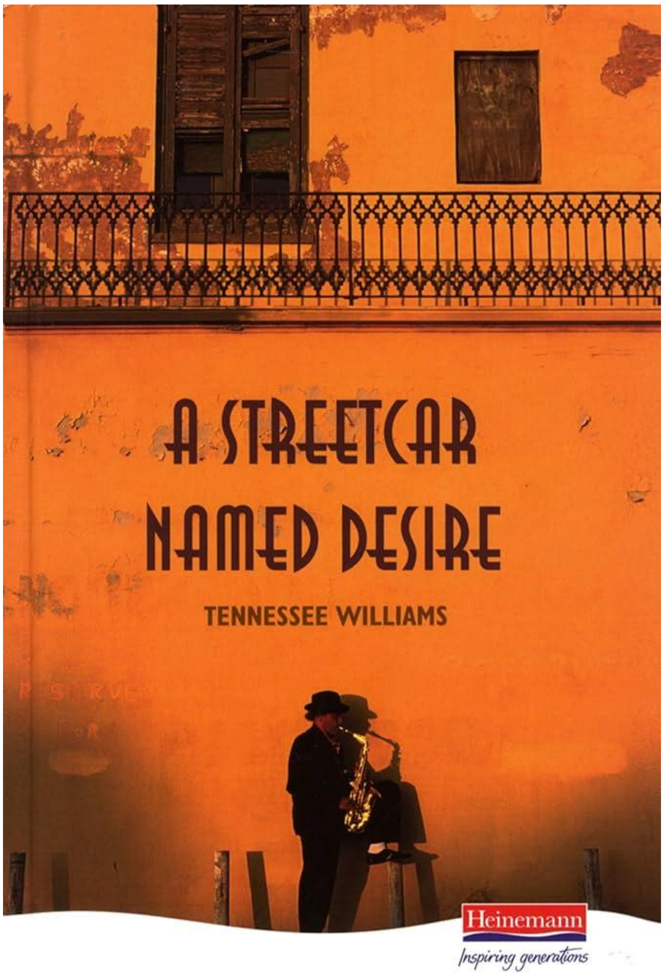
English Literature is excellent preparation for careers in English teaching, journalism or the arts. The course develops skills in close reading, making presentations, structuring arguments, problem solving and working with others that are essential in many jobs including the law, banking, administration, marketing, advertising and any job where management skills are required.

Year 12 English Literature A Level Preparation work

We follow the AQA English Literature Specification A:
https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/resources/english/specifications/AQA-7711-7712-SP-2015.PDF

Please read through the materials regarding the course and assessments. The most important preparation for the English Literature course is to read the following two texts: 'The Great Gatsby' by F Scott Fitzgerald and 'A Streetcar Named Desire' by Tennessee Williams. We recommend the following versions, but if you cannot get these then any version is fine:


WORDSWORTH CLASSICS
The Great Gatsby
F. SCOTT FITZGERALD


A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE
TENNESSEE WILLIAMS
Heinemann
Inspiring generations

Wordsworth Classics
ISBN/Ean 185326041X / 9781853260414

Heinemann
ISBN/Ean 0435233106 / 9780435233105

To help with your understanding of these 'The Great Gatsby' there are a series of videos on Youtube created by Mr Bruff that you could watch **at this link**.

Basic help with 'A Streetcar Named Desire' can be found **at this link**.

However, please remember that the above are not substitutes for your own thoughts and interpretations of the texts; more to be used if you are struggling with certain aspects.

Finally, please read the terminology list and learn as many of the literary terms as possible.

Glossary of Literary Terms

Terms for analysis of verse

Alexandrine: a line of six iambic feet, often used to mark a conclusion in a work which is in heroic couplets: Alexander Pope in his *Essay on Criticism* (1709) satirised this technique (which he was not above using himself): ' Then, at the last and only couplet fraught | With some unmeaning thing they call a thought, | A needless Alexandrine ends the song, | That like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along.' The final line of that extract is of course itself an alexandrine. Spenser used an alexandrine to end his modified form of ottava rima. The same word is used to describe a line of twelve syllables which is the dominant form of French verse. See syllabic verse.

Allegory: the saying of one thing and meaning another. Sometimes this trope works by an extended metaphor ('the ship of state foundered on the rocks of inflation, only to be salvaged by the tugs of monetarist policy'). More usually it is used of a story or fable that has a clear secondary meaning beneath its literal sense. Orwell's *Animal Farm*, for example, is assumed to have an allegorical sense.

Alliteration: The repetition of the same consonants (usually the initial sounds of words or of stressed syllables) at the start of several words or syllables in sequence or in close proximity to each other. In AngloSaxon poetry and in some fourteenth century texts such as *Piers Plowman* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* rigid patterns of alliteration were an essential part of poetic form. More recently it is used for expressive or occasionally onomatopoeic effect.

Anapaest: A metrical foot consisting of three syllables. The first two are unstressed and the last is stressed: 'di di dum'.

Anaphora: Repetition of the same word or words at the beginning of consecutive syntactic units.

Apostrophe: In rhetoric the word is used to describe a sudden address to a person or personification. In punctuation the same word is used to describe the mark ' which can be used to indicate the beginning and end of direct speech, a quotation, or an elision.

Assonance: The word is usually used to describe the repetition of vowel sounds in nieghbouring syllables (compare Alliteration. The consonants can differ: so 'd**ee**p s**ea**' is an example of assonance, whereas 'The queen will sw**eep** past the d**eep** crowds' is an example of internal rhyme. More technically it is used to describe the 'rhyming of one word with another in the accented vowel and those which follow, but not in the consonants, as used in the versification of Old French, Spanish, Celtic, and other languages' (OED).

Asyndeton: The omission of a conjunction from a list ('chips, beans, peas, vinegar, salt, pepper'). Compare polysyndeton.

Blank verse: is the metre most frequently used by Shakespeare. It consists of an unrhymed iambic pentameter. It was first used in Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey's, translation of Books 2 and 4 of Virgil's *Aeneid*, composed some time in the 1530s or 40s. It was adopted as the chief verse form in Elizabethan verse drama, and was subsequently used by Milton in *Paradise Lost* and in a wide range of subsequent meditative and narrative poems.

Caesura: A pause or breathing-place about the middle of a metrical line, generally indicated by a pause in the sense. The word derives from a Latin word meaning 'cut or slice', so the effect can be quite violent. However in many lines of blank verse the caesura may be almost inaudible. A medial caesura is the norm: this occurs in the middle of a line. An initial caesura occurs near the start of a line; a terminal caesura near its end. A 'masculine caesura' occurs after a stressed syllable, and a 'feminine caesura' occurs after an unstressed syllable.

Couplet: a rhymed pair of lines, which are usually of the same length. If these are iambic pentameters it is termed a **heroic couplet**. This form was made popular by Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and became the dominant poetic form in the latter part of the seventeenth century. In the work of Alexander Pope it becomes a flexible medium for pointed expression. Couplets of four iambic feet (i.e. eight syllables in all) are called **octosyllabic couplets**. These were favoured by John Gower, Chaucer's near contemporary, and became a vehicle for a comically brisk style in Samuel Butler's satirical poem *Hudibras* (1663-78).

Dactyl: A metrical foot consisting of three syllables, in which the first is stressed and the last two are unstressed.

Decorum: In literary parlance, the appropriateness of a work to its subject, its genre and its audience.

Diction: or lexis, or vocabulary of a passage refers to nothing more or less than its words. The words of a given passage might be drawn from one register, they might be drawn from one linguistic origin (e.g. Latin, or its Romance descendants Italian and French; Old English); they might be either very formal or very colloquial words.

Elision: The omission of one or more letters or syllables from a word. This is usually marked by an apostrophe: as in 'he's going to the shops'. In early printed texts the elided syllable is sometimes printed as well as the mark of elision, as in Donne's 'She 'is all States, all Princes I'.

Enjambement: The effect achieved when the syntax of a line of verse transgresses the limits set by the metre at the end of the verse. Metre aims for the integrity of the single verse, whereas syntax will sometimes efface that integrity. Thus 'Black drizzling crags that spake by the way-side/ As if a voice were in them, the sick sight/ And giddy prospect of the raving stream...' End-stopping is the alternative to enjambement.

End-stopping: The effect achieved when the syntax of a line coincides with the metrical boundary at the end of a line. The contrary of enjambement.

Fabliau (plural *fabliaux*): A short, pithy story, usually of a bawdy kind.

Foot: the basic unit for describing metre, usually consisting of a certain number and combination of stressed and unstressed syllables. Stressed and unstressed syllables form one or other of the recognised metrical forms: an iamb is 'di dúm'; a trochee is 'dúm di', a spondee is 'dúm dúm' (as in 'home-made'), an anapaest is 'di di dúm', and a dactyl is 'dúm di di'.

Feminine Rhyme: a rhyme of two syllables in which the final syllable is unstressed ('mother | brother'). If an iambic pentameter ends in a feminine rhyme the last, unstressed, syllable is usually not counted as one of the ten syllables in the line ('To be or not to be, that is the question' - the 'ion' is unstressed and takes the line into an eleventh syllable). Feminine rhyme can be used for comic effect, as it is frequently in the works of Byron: 'I've spent my life, both interest and principle, | And think not what I thought, my soul invincible.' It can also be sometimes used to suggest a feminine subject-matter, as in Shakespeare's Sonnet 20, which is addressed to the 'master mistress of my passion' and which makes extensive use of 'feminine' rhymes.

Form: The term is usually used in the analysis of poetry to refer to the structure of stanzas (such as ottava rima). It can also be used less technically of the general structural principles by which a work is organised, and is distinguished from its content.

Free Verse: verse in which the metre and line length vary, and in which there is no discernible pattern in the use of rhyme.

Genre(from Latin *genus*, type, kind): works of literature tend to conform to certain types, or kinds. Thus we will describe a work as belonging to, for example, one of the following genres: epic, pastoral, satire, elegy.
All the resources of linguistic patterning, both stylistic and structural, contribute to a sense of a work's genre.

Generic boundaries are often fluid; literary meaning will often be produced by transgressing the normal expectations of genre.

Homophones: Words which sound exactly the same but which have different meanings ('maid' and 'made').

Hypermetrical: having an extra syllable over and above the expected normal length of a line of verse. See also feminine rhyme.

Iambic pentameter: an unrhymed line of five feet in which the dominant accent usually falls on the second syllable of each foot (di dúm), a pattern known as an iamb. The form is very flexible: it is possible to have one or more feet in which the expected order of accent is reversed (dúm di). These are called trochees.

Irony: strictly a sub-set of allegory: irony not only says one thing and means another, but says one thing and means its opposite. The word is used often of consciously inappropriate or understated utterances (so two walkers in the pouring rain greet each other with 'lovely day!', 'yes, isn't it'). Irony depends upon the audience's being able to recognise that a comment is deliberately at odds with its occasion, and may often discriminate between two kinds of audience: one which recognises the irony, and the other which fails to do so. **Dramatic irony** occurs when an audience of a play know some crucial piece of information that the characters onstage do not know (such as the fact that Oedipus has unwittingly killed his father).

Lexical set: words that are habitually used within a given environment constitute a lexical set. Thus 'Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday...' form a lexical set.

Metaphor: the transfer of a quality or attribute from one thing or idea to another in such a way as to imply some resemblance between the two things or ideas: 'his eyes **blazed**' implies that his eyes become like a fire. Many metaphors have been absorbed into the structure of ordinary language to such an extent that they are all but invisible, and it is sometimes hard to be sure what is or is not dead metaphor: 'the fat book' may imply a metaphor, as may also be the case when we talk of a note of music as 'high' or 'low'. **Mixed metaphors** often occur when a speaker combines two metaphors from very diverse areas in such a way as to create something which is physically impossible or absurd ('the report of the select committee was a bombshell which got right up my nose'). These often result from the tendency of metaphors to become received idioms in which the original force of the implied comparison is lost. See also Simile.

Metonymy: A figure of speech in which the name of one object is replaced by another which is closely associated with it. So 'the turf' is a metonym for horse-racing, 'Westminster' is a metonym for the Houses of Parliament, 'Downing Street' is a metonym for the Prime-Minister or his office. 'Sceptre and crown came tumbling down' is a metonymic way of saying 'the king fell from power'. See synecdoche.

Metre: A regular patterned recurrence of light and heavy stresses in a line of verse. These patterns are given names. Almost all poems deliberately depart from the template established by a metrical pattern for specific effect. Assessing a poem's metre requires more than just spotting an iambic pentameter or other metrical pattern: it requires you to think about the ways in which a poem departs from its underlying pattern and why. Emotion might force a reverse foot or trochee, or the normal patterns of speech might occasionally cut across an underlying rhythm. See Iambic Pentameter.

Monorhyme: A rhymescheme in which all lines rhyme (aaaa etc.)

Onomatopoeia: The use of words or sounds which appear to resemble the sounds which they describe. Some words are themselves onomatopoeic, such as 'snap, crackle, pop.'

Ottava rima: an eight line verse stanza rhyming abababcc. In English it is usually in iambic pentameter. It was introduced into English by Sir Thomas Wyatt in the 1530s, and was widely used for long verse narratives. Sir John Harington translated Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* into ottava rima in 1591; Byron used the form in *Don Juan* (1819-24). Edmund Spenser produced a nine line modification of the form which ends with an alexandrine and rhymes ababbcbcc. for his *Faerie Queene* (1590-6). This is known as the Spenserian stanza, and was quite widely used by Wordsworth, Byron and Keats.

Personification: the attribution to a non-animate thing of human attributes. The thing personified is often an abstract concept (e.g. 'Lust'). Personification is related to allegory, insofar as personification says one thing ('Lust possessed him') and really means another. But it is opposed to allegory insofar as it aims for the maximum degree of explicitness, whereas allegory necessarily involves greater degrees of obliquity.

Polysyndeton: The use of multiple conjunctions, usually where they are not strictly necessary ('chips and beans and fish and egg and peas and vinegar and tomato sauce'). Compare asyndeton.

Quatrain: a verse stanza of four lines, often rhyming abab. Tennyson's *In Memoriam* rhymes abba, however.

Refrain: A repeated line, phrase or group of lines, which recurs at regular intervals through a poem or song, usually at the end of a stanza. The less technical term is 'chorus'.

Register: a term designating the appropriateness of a given style to a given situation. Speakers and writers in specific situations deploy, for example, a technical vocabulary (e.g. scientific, commercial, medical, legal, theological, psychological), as well as other aspects of style customarily used in that situation. Literary effect is often created by switching register.

Rhyme: When two or more words or phrases contain an identical or similar vowel-sound, and the consonant-sounds that follow are identical or similar (red and dead). **Feminine rhyme** occurs when two syllables are rhymed ('mother | brother'). **Half-rhyme** occurs when the final consonants are the same but the preceding vowels are not. ('lo**ve** | ha**ve**'). **Eye rhyme** occurs when two syllables look the same but are pronounced differently ('kind | wind' - although sometimes changes in pronunciation have made what were formerly perfect rhymes become eye rhymes). **Rime riche** occurs when the same combination of sounds is used in each element of the rhyme, but where the two identical sounding words have different senses ('maid | made'). This was in the medieval period regarded as a particularly perfect form of rhyme. **Leonine rhyme** occurs when the syllable immediately preceding the caesura rhymes with the syllable at the end of the line. The **Rhyme Scheme**, or regularly recurring patterns of rhyme within a poem or stanza, is recorded by using a letter of the alphabet to denote each rhyme, and noting the order in which the rhymes recur (aabbcc... is the most simply rhyme scheme of all, that of the couplet).

Rhythm: a term designating the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in verse or prose. Different lines of verse can have the same metre but a different rhythm. Thus two lines of alliterative verse in Middle English poetry might have the same metrical pattern of four stressed syllables, but their rhythm might differ by having a greater or lesser number of unstressed syllables intervening between the stressed syllables.

Rhyme Royal: A form of verse which consists of stanzas of seven ten-syllable lines, rhyming a b a b b c c. It was first used by Chaucer, and was also the form chosen by Shakespeare for the tragic gravity of his narrative poem *Lucrece* (1594).

Simile: a comparison between two objects or ideas which is introduced by 'like' or 'as'. The literal object which evokes the comparison is called the **tenor** and the object which describes it is called the **vehicle**. So in the simile 'the car wheezed like an asthmatic donkey' the car is the tenor and the 'asthmatic donkey' is the vehicle. **Negative similes** are also possible (as in Shakespeare's Sonnet 'My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun'). **Epic similes** are more extended similes, which might involve multiple points of correspondence between tenor and vehicle. The frequently occur in long heroic narrative poems in the classical tradition, such as Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), as when Milton describes the combat of Satan and Death:

Sonnet: In its earliest usages this can mean just 'a short poem, often on the subject of love.' Now it is almost always used to denote a fourteen line poem in iambic pentameter. There are two main forms of Sonnet: the 'Shakespearean Sonnet' rhymes abab cdcd efef gg. It was the form favoured by Shakespeare, in his *Sonnets* (1609), although it is first found in the work of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey. The three quatrains can be linked together in argument in a variety of ways, but often there is a 'volta' or turn in the course of the argument after the second quatrain. The final couplet often provides an opportunity to sum up the argument of the poem with an epigram. Edmund Spenser's *Amoretti* (1595) introduced a variant form in which the quatrains are connected by rhyme: abab bcbc cdcd ee. The 'Petrarchan Sonnet', which is the earliest appearance of the form, falls into an octet, or eight line unit, and a sestet, or six line unit. The Petrarchan sonnet form rhymes abbaabba cdecde (although the sestet can follow other rhyme-schemes, such as cdcdcd). Often there is a marked shift in the progression of the argument after the octet in the Petrarchan sonnet, which is sometimes vestigially registered in the Shakespearean form by a change of argument or mood at the start of the third quatrain. Sonnets may be free-standing poems, or they may form part of an extended sequence of poems which might relate in a loose narrative form the progress of a love affair (as is the case in Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*, Spenser's *Amoretti* and Petrarch's *Canzoniere*).

Stanza: 'A group of lines of verse (usually not less than four), arranged according to a definite scheme which regulates the number of lines, the metre, and (in rhymed poetry) the sequence of rhymes; normally forming a division of a song or poem consisting of a series of such groups constructed according to the same scheme' (OED). See also ottava rima, quatrain. This term is preferable to the less technical 'verse', since that word can also refer to a single line of a poem. In printed poems divisions between stanzas are frequently indicated by an area of blank space.

Stress: Emphasis given to a syllable in pitch, volume or duration (or several of these). In normal spoken English some syllables are given greater stress than others. In metrical writing these natural variations in stress are formed into recurrent patterns, such as iambs, anapaests or trochees.

Syllable: The smallest unit of speech that normally occurs in isolation, or a distinct sound element within a word. This can consist of a vowel alone ('O') or a combination of a vowel and one or more consonants ('no', 'not'). **Monosyllables** contain only one syllable ('dog', 'big', 'shoe'); **polysyllables** contain more than one syllable. The word 'syllable' contains three syllables.

Synecdoche: the rhetorical figure whereby a part is substituted for a whole ('a suit entered the room'), or, less usually, in which a whole is substituted for a part (as when a policeman is called 'the law' or a manager is called 'the management'). See metonymy.

Topos: from a Greek word meaning 'place', a 'topos' in poetry is a 'commonplace', a standard way of describing a particular subject. Describing a person's physical features from head to toe (or somewhere in between) is, for example, a standard topos of medieval and Renaissance poetry.

Trochee: a foot of two syllables, in which the accent falls on the first syllable (dúm di). Some words which are trochaic include 'broken', 'taken', 'Shakespeare'.

Trope: a general term for any figure of speech which alters the literal sense of a word or phrase: so metaphor, simile and allegory are all tropes, since they affect the meaning of words. In the rhetorical tradition tropes are contrasted with **figures**, which are rhetorical devices which affect the order or placing of words (so the repetition of a particular word at the start of each line is a figure).