



OAKS PARK SIXTH FORM

Learning Together, Achieving Together



'A' Level English Literature

Transition Booklet 2026-27

"A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies. The man who never reads lives only one."

— George R. R. Martin

Key areas of focus

Introduction to 'A' Level course	Pearson EdExcel English Literature Specification
GCSE Link	• AO1 – Explain your ideas clearly and write a strong argument using good literary vocabulary and quotations. • AO2 – Analyse how writers use language, structure and form to create meaning and effects. • AO3 – Show how the time period, society and context influence the text and its ideas.
Skills	Develop sophisticated analytical, comparative and essay-writing skills while exploring literature, context, interpretation and independent thinking.
Wider Reading	Please choose from the attached reading list and add to your reading diary

Introduction

Warm Welcome to A-Level English Literature

Welcome to A-Level English Literature! This subject is an exciting journey into the human experience, as George R. R. Martin reminds us: "A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies. The man who never reads lives only one."

Over the next two years, you will study literature across four components—Drama, Prose, Poetry, and Coursework—developing sophisticated analytical, comparative, and essay-writing skills. English Literature is a highly regarded subject that fosters excellent communication and creative thinking, preparing you for diverse careers such as in law, media, and business.

Success on this course depends on becoming an independent learner, ready to engage in reading, research, writing, and group discussions. The tasks below are designed to bridge your GCSE knowledge with the depth required for A-Level study.

Transition Programme of Tasks

To prepare for the A-Level English Literature course (Edexcel specification), please complete the following over your transition period:

1. Reading & Contextual Exploration

- **Wider Reading:** Choose at least one text from the attached Recommended 'A' Level Reading list (Contemporary Fiction, Classic Literature, Non-Fiction, or Plays) and begin reading it. Many are available online and copyright free - therefore free of charge.
- **Reading Log:** Start a reading diary to log your progress, including a summary and key quotations from the text you choose. This log will be checked once every half term.
- **Contextual Research:** Select one of your Year 12 texts (*Othello*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, or *Frankenstein*) and conduct preliminary research into its social, political, and historical context. You are expected to read around the text to enhance your understanding.

2. Skills Review & Preparation

- **Independent Study Habits:** Prepare your physical and digital folders with labelled dividers for the Year 12 texts (*Othello*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Frankenstein*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Poems of the Decade*, and *Prose: Comparative*). Being organised is essential for the course.

The exam board we study is Pearson Edexcel – the full specification of study can be found here:

<https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/qualifications/edexcel-a-levels/english-literature-2015.html>

Course Components

Component 1: Drama (30% – 2hr 15min exam)

- Othello – *Shakespeare*
- A Streetcar Named Desire – *Tennessee Williams*

Component 2: Prose (20% – 1hr 15min exam)

- Theme = Science and Society
 - The Handmaid's Tale – *Margaret Atwood*
 - Frankenstein – *Mary Shelley*

Component 3: Poetry (30% – 2hr 15min exam)

- Poems of the Decade – *Post 2000 Poetry*
- Christina Rossetti Selected Poems – *Victorian Poetry*

Component 4: Coursework (20%)

- A comparison of two texts chosen by students – a list of selected text pairings will be shared with students.

Stretch and challenge

The Open University offer a wide range of super curricular courses that you can complete – they can be found here:

<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/free-courses?filter=date/grid/68/all/all/all/all>

Complete one of the courses of study and, having done so, you should download and submit your certificate at the start of the next academic year. This can also be included to support your UCAS application as a super curricular activity.

Recommended 'A' Level Reading list

Classic Literature

Jane Eyre — Charlotte Brontë
Wuthering Heights — Emily Brontë
Great Expectations — Charles Dickens
Dracula — Bram Stoker
The Picture of Dorian Gray — Oscar Wilde
Rebecca — Daphne du Maurier
Tess of the d'Urbervilles — Thomas Hardy
Middlemarch — George Eliot
Crime and Punishment — Fyodor Dostoevsky
Heart of Darkness — Joseph Conrad
North and South — Elizabeth Gaskell
The Age of Innocence — Edith Wharton

Plays (Classic + Modern)

Hamlet — William Shakespeare
King Lear — William Shakespeare
Doctor Faustus — Christopher Marlowe
The Importance of Being Earnest — Oscar Wilde
Long Day's Journey into Night — Eugene O'Neill
Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? — Edward Albee
Top Girls — Caryl Churchill
Jerusalem — Jez Butterworth
Angels in America — Tony Kushner
Waiting for Godot — Samuel Beckett
The History Boys — Alan Bennett
Arcadia — Tom Stoppard

Contemporary Fiction (Post-1950)

The Secret History — Donna Tartt
Never Let Me Go — Kazuo Ishiguro
Beloved — Toni Morrison
The Road — Cormac McCarthy
Atonement — Ian McEwan
White Teeth — Zadie Smith
The Bell Jar — Sylvia Plath
Life of Pi — Yann Martel
The Remains of the Day — Kazuo Ishiguro
The Kite Runner — Khaled Hosseini
Girl, Woman, Other — Bernardine Evaristo
The Underground Railroad — Colson Whitehead

Non-Fiction

In Cold Blood — Truman Capote
The Psychopath Test — Jon Ronson
The Five — Hallie Rubenhold
Bad Blood — John Carreyrou
H is for Hawk — Helen Macdonald
The Year of Magical Thinking — Joan Didion
Educated — Tara Westover
Men Explain Things to Me — Rebecca Solnit
Into Thin Air — Jon Krakauer
Invisible Women — Caroline Criado Perez
Nothing to Envy — Barbara Demick
The Emperor of All Maladies — Siddhartha Mukherjee

Poetry Anthologies & Collections

Ariel — Sylvia Plath
Birthday Letters — Ted Hughes
Rapture — Carol Ann Duffy
The World's Wife — Carol Ann Duffy
Selected Poems — Seamus Heaney
Citizen — Claudia Rankine
Staying Alive — edited by Neil Astley
The Penguin Book of Romantic Poetry
Poems That Make Grown Men Cry — edited by Anthony Holden & Ben Holden
The Oxford Book of English Verse
The Forward Book of Poetry
Falling Awake — Alice Oswald

How to think like an A Level English Literature student

1. Developing a Critical Voice

- **Go Beyond GCSE:** Move past simple recall and "feature spotting" to develop your own sophisticated, informed, and relevant ideas. You must engage with texts as a whole, focusing on the writer's craft (form, structure, language, and intent).
- **Become an Interpreter (AO5):** Your goal is to be informed by the interpretations of other writers (critics). You should use these different viewpoints to put critics in debate with each other and, crucially, use this debate to solidify and share your own original argument.
- **Integrate Context (AO3):** When writing essays, evaluate the social, political, and historical context in relation to the text; avoid tacking it on in a separate section. Researching critical lenses such as Marxism or feminism can deepen your understanding of texts and contexts.
- **Structured Argument:** Aim to use a clear introduction with a thesis statement and an outline of your three key arguments. Every paragraph should integrate the Assessment Objectives (AOs) by following a **What? How? Why?** structure, and must start and end with a clear link back to the question.
- **Comparative Skills (AO4):** For comparative essays (Prose, Poetry, and Coursework), start each paragraph with an explicit comparative point (e.g., structure, theme, characters) linking to the question.

2. Extended Reading: What and Where

- **Wider Reading Requirement:** You are expected to read at least two texts from the Key Stage 5 Reading List per term, for both study and pleasure, to develop your understanding and improve your expression.
- **Critical and Contextual Research:** Research is mandatory. Do a lot of reading around the text to develop your critical and analytical skills. This includes reading critical essays, and researching the life of an author and the literary period (e.g., Victorian, Romantic).
- **Resources for Reading:** Utilise the school's excellent library, local libraries, university libraries, and Google Books.
- **Study Aids:**
 - Use **Massolit** for short university-level lectures on all set texts.
 - Look out for relevant media coverage of your subject, such as theatre and literary reviews in newspapers (e.g., *The Guardian*), film, radio, and **BBC Radio 4 programmes**.
 - Listen to **TED talks** on literature and grammar to widen your understanding of different perspectives.

3. Cultivating Good Study Habits

- **Independent Study:** Expect to dedicate 4–5 hours of independent study per subject per week outside of lessons. Success depends on self-review, practice, and consistency from the start.
- **Active Engagement:** Re-read chapters or scenes discussed in class and make your own additional notes, looking up any literary terms or words you don't understand. You can download electronic copies of your set texts and audiobooks to read and listen simultaneously.
- **Organisation is Essential:** File all class work, home study, and assessment tasks in relevant sections of your physical and digital folders. Prepare these folders with labelled dividers for the Year 12 texts (*Othello*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Frankenstein*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Poems of the Decade*, and *Prose: Comparative*).
- **Tracking and Reflection:** Keep a **Reading Log** of all texts, including a summary and key quotations; this will be checked at least once every half term. Write a **weekly reflection** of what you have learned to build effective revision notes.