

RMGS

ENGLISH LITERATURE

A LEVEL (AQA)

What are the aims of the course?

The course aims to encourage an enjoyment and appreciation of English Literature, based on informed personal response. We welcome enthusiastic readers onto the course, but also those who may not have read widely but have enjoyed discussing and exploring literature in English lessons at GCSE. We hope students will learn to understand, appreciate and analyse the writing of a range of writers, in a range of genres, from a range of periods. Lastly, we wish to foster a thought-provoking environment in the course, leading to perceptive and insightful discussion.

What does it involve?

English Literature teaches higher level communication skills through the study of literary texts. There is a very wide and interesting range of texts for us to choose from. Students who take the course learn to recognise how writers make creative decision to entertain, engage and convey certain messages to their readers. A level English Literature students study poems, novels and plays, and through this study they develop a critical awareness of how literary writers in particular (but all writers, essentially) make stylistic choices to impact readers in many ways.

How is it assessed?

The A level has two examined modules that focus on two literary genres: tragedy and political / social protest writing. When studying tragedy students learn about the conventional settings of tragedies and the journey towards death of the protagonists, their flaws, pride and folly, their blindness and insight. They evaluate the role of the tragic villain, who directly affects the fortune of the hero, and is partly responsible for their demise. When studying political / social protest writing students explore ideas such as how writers present the abuse of power and the questioning of authority, and how writers give voices to the voiceless. Students explore the intentions of writers who present fictional creations which reflect the real world in which we all live. Central themes of power, repression, inequality and protest will be key to an appreciation of the genre. At the end of the course students will take two examinations, one of which will be closed book; each module represents 40% of the overall A level qualification.

In addition to examinations, students will also produce non-exam assessment (NEA). They will write two short essays, reading a novel and a poetry collection, applying a critical theory (narrative, feminist, Marxist, post-colonial or eco-criticism) to their texts. This module affords students much freedom in their text choice and allows them to explore how applying literary theory can yield very specific and sometimes less overt meanings from literature. The module is worth 20% of the total A level.

Currently our set examination texts are: *Othello* (Shakespeare), *Death of a Salesman* (Miller) and the poetry of John Keats for the tragedy module; *The Kite Runner* (Hosseini), *The Handmaid's Tale* (Atwood) and *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (Blake) for the political / social protest writing module. Text choice for NEA is more flexible and, in some cases, even negotiable.

Are there any specific entry requirements?

Students are expected to have gained at least a grade 6 in GCSE English Literature.

Why is it a useful qualification?

We think there are many good reasons to study English Literature at A level. Here are just three:

1. We are confident that studying our course will nurture the student's cultured and creative character. If a student opts to study English Literature, they will be entertained by celebrated authors, but will also be plugged in to some of the finest minds in history. Students will appreciate themes and issues which reflect and shape our society, developing empathy and emotional intelligence (desirable character traits for employers) as they go.
2. Students who take English Literature develop written communication skills, learning to write convincingly, concisely and accurately. All employers seek to employ people who are literate and can communicate effectively. A level (and degree level) study of English Literature can specifically lead to a number of professions, but more broadly lead to a wide number of graduate jobs which require high levels of spoken and written literacy.
3. A level English Literature is a highly regarded, academic subject. Before the term was dropped in 2019, English Literature was one of The Russell Group's 'facilitating subjects'. It is perceived as a rigorous and challenging A level by the top universities in the UK.