

A Level English Literature 2020

English Literature Enrichment Activities and Wider Reading for the Politics and Social Protest Module of your A level Studies.

Introduction

The English Literature A level is split into two areas of study. Texts that are considered as falling into the 'Tragedy' genre and texts that are considered as falling into the 'Political and Social Protest' genre. The suite of activities below are designed to broaden your understanding of texts that are considered political/social protest in flavour.

You are no stranger to works of fiction that can be considered 'political'. Look at Blake's poem 'London' and you can see a strong message of protest. Consider 'Lord of the Flies' and what Golding might have been saying about the political world around him at the time. There is undoubtedly a political message to be found in 'A Christmas Carol'. You can look at satirical shows such as 'Black Mirror' which hold a metaphorical mirror up to society and highlight its problems. (Interesting fact, Charlie Brooker named the show 'Black Mirror' as a locked screen on your phone, or a switched off flat screen TV, or a computer screen, very much looks like a black mirror). You possibly listen to rap music, and perhaps can see the political motives of the rap artists, particularly when you explore the rap of the late 80s and early 90s.

What we notice about literature that is political in nature is that it has a very broad definition of what is 'political'. These texts are not texts that focus on political parties such as Conservatives or Labour. These texts look at themes and ideas such as:

- Inequality.
- Abuse of Power.
- Exploitation.
- Giving a voice to the 'voiceless'
- Surveillance.
- Human Rights.
- Oppression.
- Coercion.
- Control.
- Class struggle.
- Hypocrisy.
- Resistance.
- Human Spirit.
- The Individual versus the State.

I'm a fan of graphic novels, and I'm particularly a fan of 'V for Vendetta' by Alan Moore and David Lloyd. David Lloyd, the artist of this incredibly political graphic novel published in the late 80s, wrote that it was for "...people who don't switch off the news". Political and social protest literature is hard-hitting; it will encourage you to look at society in a different way. It will encourage you to think deeply about the world you live in. To paraphrase David Lloyd, politics and social protest literature is for "...people who don't switch off the news." This exciting genre of literature, which pulls no punches, will encourage you to look closer at the world around you and see it through the eyes of others. It's a module that encourages keen debate about thought-provoking texts. The tasks below will give you a glimpse into the world of political and social protest literature.

Mr McDowell

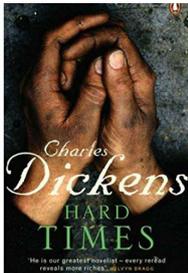
Book Recommendations

'Brave New World' Aldous Huxley



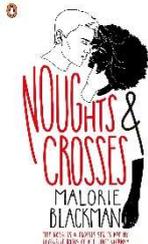
This novel evokes an interesting vision of the world in the future. It explores ideas of class in a powerful manner, in which humans are genetically created in order to fulfil a function in society, from the 'Alphas' to the 'Epsilons' (Alphas being the highest classes, the first letter of the alphabet, and Epsilons being the lower classes, the fifth letter of the alphabet).

'Hard Times' Charles Dickens



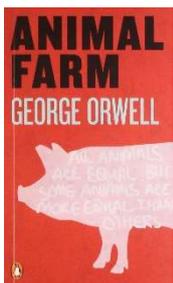
I hope that you won't be put off by the fact this is a Victorian novel. It is an engaging reading which expresses ideas about education, class, gender, abuse of power and the human spirit. Although the language will be difficult to begin with, you will become accustomed to it and it is a worthy read.

'Noughts and Crosses' Malorie Blackman



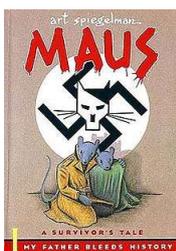
If you want a book that is perhaps less of a challenge to access with regard to the language, but still exploring a range of political and social protest themes, this is very much worth a read. Now a BBC television show.

'Animal Farm' George Orwell



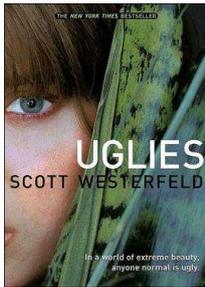
At first glance, this may seem a simple story about animals taking over a farm, freeing themselves from their oppressive rulers. But dig deeper and you can see that this is an exploration of freedom of speech, abuse of power, inequality and a powerful message against totalitarian governments.

'Maus' Art Spiegelman



Continuing the theme of animals representing bigger ideas, 'Maus' is a fascinating graphic novel that offers an allegorical interpretation of Nazi Germany and the treatment of the Jews. A challenging, thought-provoking read for a 'comic strip'.

'Uglies' by Scott Westerfeld



'Uglies' is a 2005 science fiction novel. It is set in a future dystopian world (a common theme in politics and social protest writing!) in which everyone is considered an "ugly," but then turned "Pretty" by extreme cosmetic surgery when they reach the age of 16. It tells the story of teenager Tally Youngblood who rebels against society's enforced conformity, after her friends Shay and David show her the downsides to becoming a "Pretty," even though it is obvious to most people.

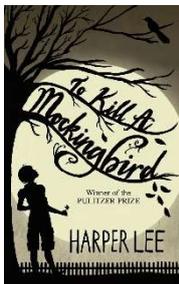
'The Hate You Give' by Angie Thomas



'The Hate U Give' is a 2017 young adult novel by Angie Thomas. It is Thomas's debut novel, expanded from a short story she wrote in college in reaction to the police shooting of Oscar Grant. The book is narrated by Starr Carter, a 16-year-old black girl from a poor neighborhood who attends an elite private school in a predominantly white, affluent part of the city. Starr becomes entangled in a national news story after she witnesses a white police officer shoot and kill her childhood friend, Khalil. She speaks up about the shooting in increasingly public ways, and social

tensions culminate in a riot after a grand jury decides not to indict the police officer for the shooting.

'To Kill a Mockingbird' by Harper Lee



This novel would be on my top ten list of novels to read for any teenager. But don't let that put you off! 'To Kill a Mockingbird' is a novel by Harper Lee published in 1960. Instantly successful, widely read in high schools and middle schools in the United States, it has become a classic of modern American literature, winning the Pulitzer Prize. The plot and characters are loosely based on Lee's observations of her family, her neighbours and an event that occurred near her hometown of Monroeville, Alabama, in 1936, when she was ten.

Despite dealing with the serious issues of rape and racial inequality, the novel is renowned for its warmth and humor. Atticus Finch, the narrator's father, has served as a moral hero for many readers and as a model of integrity for lawyers. The historian J. Crespino explains, "In the twentieth century, To Kill a Mockingbird is probably the most widely read book dealing with race in America, and its main character, Atticus Finch, the most enduring fictional image of racial heroism."

Read one of the above texts and write a 700 word exploration of why you think this is a political text. Refer to episodes in the book, characters and what you think the author was highlighting/their message.

Recommended Viewing/Listening

Novels That Shaped The World by the BBC

A three part series that explores a range of explosive novels that, as the title suggests, shaped the world. Essential viewing which might expose a book or two that you would be keen to read. It explores feminist texts in episode 1, post-colonial texts in episode 2 and texts that explore class issues in episode 3, with readings from all of the books. **This is really important viewing and must be watched in term 5. Create a timeline of books for all three episodes (the show explores books in chronological order).**

The School of Life: Literature.

This offers an introduction to a range of authors, their background and their literary figures such as Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, George Orwell or Virginia Woolf, this is a good place to start. I personally recommend the four in the list above, but you might be keen on exploring Albert Camus or Voltaire, two interesting philosophical writers.

Mostly Lit: Podcast

The hosts are relatable and their enthusiasm and passion for books is contagious. It is a laid-back listen and focused on a younger audience.

The Stories That Changed My Life: Podcast

Regular guests share the stories that have made a mark on them. Priding itself on being a 'books podcast for the non-bookish', this is well worth a listen.

Massolit Lectures

This is a website the school subscribes to and has a range of short lectures on a host of topics, authors and texts. Often, I tend to 'geek out' on these lectures, as there is something fascinating about hearing university professors talk so passionately and knowledgeably about their subject. You might want to look up more about texts you read in GCSE such as 'Lord of the Flies', 'Macbeth' or 'A Christmas Carol'. ***You will need to log on with your school email.***

A final word...

This is a novel situation year 11 (excuse the pun...) and what we think would benefit you the most is if you could explore the vast expanse that is the world of literature. Dip your toe into a few books, poetry anthologies or audio books. I've recommended some in the second and third page of this sheet, but feel free to broaden your horizons. As an aside, 'Audible' are offering free streaming of a collection of their audio books whilst schools are closed. <https://stories.audible.com/discovery>

I know that GCSE English Literature may have made you feel that studying literature is all about understanding writers' techniques and writing about them, but at A level it is as much about exploring ideas, concepts, themes and what the author was trying to relate to you, the reader. It is, perhaps, a much more satisfying qualification for exploring literature.

The best thing you can do is delve into some reading before you hit A level English Literature. If in doubt, feel free to email Mr McDowell or Mr O'Neill for book recommendations! Let us know what you are interested in and we will try and help you out! mmcdowell@rmgs.org.uk
poneill@rmgs.org.uk