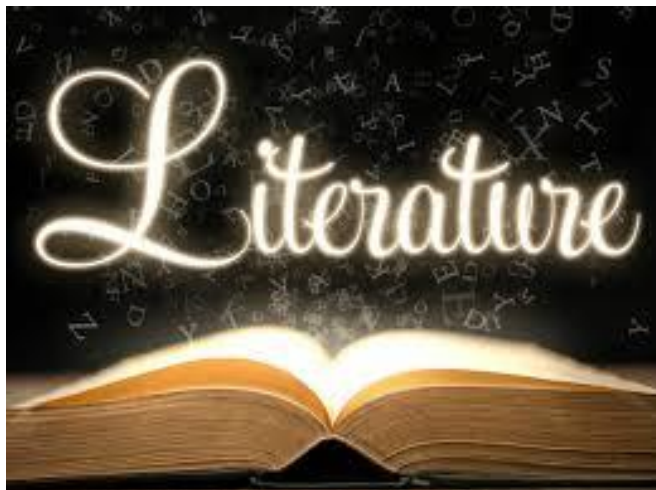




A LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE

Induction Booklet

Summer Checklist:

- ☐ Task 1: Myself as a reader
- ☐ Task 2: The Elements of Tragedy
- ☐ Task 3: Macbeth as Tragedy
- ☐ Task 4: Othello
- ☐ Task 5: Wider Reading Questions

INTRODUCTION

This booklet is designed to help you get started on your A Level English Literature journey.

Welcome to A Level English Literature: Induction & Summer Tasks

Inside, you'll find a range of tasks to complete over the summer, including an opportunity to introduce yourself as a reader, explore key literary genres, and begin working with the texts we'll study in class.

You'll also take a closer look at tragedy—both in theory and in texts like *Macbeth* and *Othello*—and begin your wider reading.

The tasks will give you a strong foundation for the course ahead, and help you develop the independence, curiosity and confidence that are essential for success at A Level. Take your time, think deeply, and enjoy the chance to engage with great literature before we dive in together in September.

La Belle Dame Sans Merci

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge has withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
So haggard and so woe-begone?
The squirrel's granary is full,
And the harvest's done.

I see a lily on thy brow,
With anguish moist and fever-dew,
And on thy cheeks a fading rose
Fast withereth too.

I met a lady in the meads,
Full beautiful—a faery's child,
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild.

I made a garland for her head,
And bracelets too, and fragrant zone;
She looked at me as she did love,
And made sweet moan

I set her on my pacing steed,
And nothing else saw all day long,
For sidelong would she bend, and sing
A faery's song.

She found me roots of relish sweet,
And honey wild, and manna-dew,
And sure in language strange she said—
'I love thee true'.

She took me to her Elfin grot,
And there she wept and sighed full sore,
And there I shut her wild wild eyes
With kisses four.

And there she lullèd me asleep,
And there I dreamed—Ah! woe betide!—
The latest dream I ever dreamt
On the cold hill side.

I saw pale kings and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
They cried—‘La Belle Dame sans Merci
Thee hath in thrall!’

I saw their starved lips in the gloam,
With horrid warning gapèd wide,
And I awoke and found me here,
On the cold hill’s side.

And this is why I sojourn here,
Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.

John Keats



1. Read the poem and try to identify aspects of tragedy

The poem tells the story of a knight ("a knight-at-arms") who is found wandering alone, pale and weak. When asked what is wrong, he explains that he met a mysterious and beautiful woman in a meadow. She seemed magical and otherworldly, and he fell deeply in love with her.

The knight describes how he made garlands for her and how she appeared to respond with affection. She took him to her "elfin grot" (a magical dwelling), where she lulled him to sleep. While dreaming, he saw visions of pale kings and warriors who warned him that the woman had enslaved them too. They looked sick and lifeless, just as he now feels.

When he woke up, the woman had vanished, leaving him alone and abandoned. The knight is now trapped in a state of loneliness and despair, unable to move on, symbolised by the bleak, lifeless landscape around him.

2. Comparison Grid: Macbeth & The Knight

Compare Macbeth and the Knight, focusing on their **character journey** and the **role of the supernatural**. Write clear notes for each, with quotations from the poem if you can!

Focus	Macbeth	The Knight (<i>La Belle Dame Sans Merci</i>)
Starting Point (How are they presented at the beginning?)		
Encounter with the Supernatural (What happens?)		
Desire / Motivation After the Encounter		
Turning Point (When things begin to go wrong)		
Final State (What are they like at the end?)		

3. Aspects of Tragedy

Hamartia What is the knight's fatal flaw?	
Hubris Is there any pride or overconfidence in the knight's behaviour?	
Peripeteia Where is the moment of reversal or downfall?	
Anagnorisis Is there a moment of realisation or truth?	
Catharsis Do we feel pity or fear for the knight's fate? Why?	

4. Reflection

How is this different from the ways you have studied poetry at GCSE?

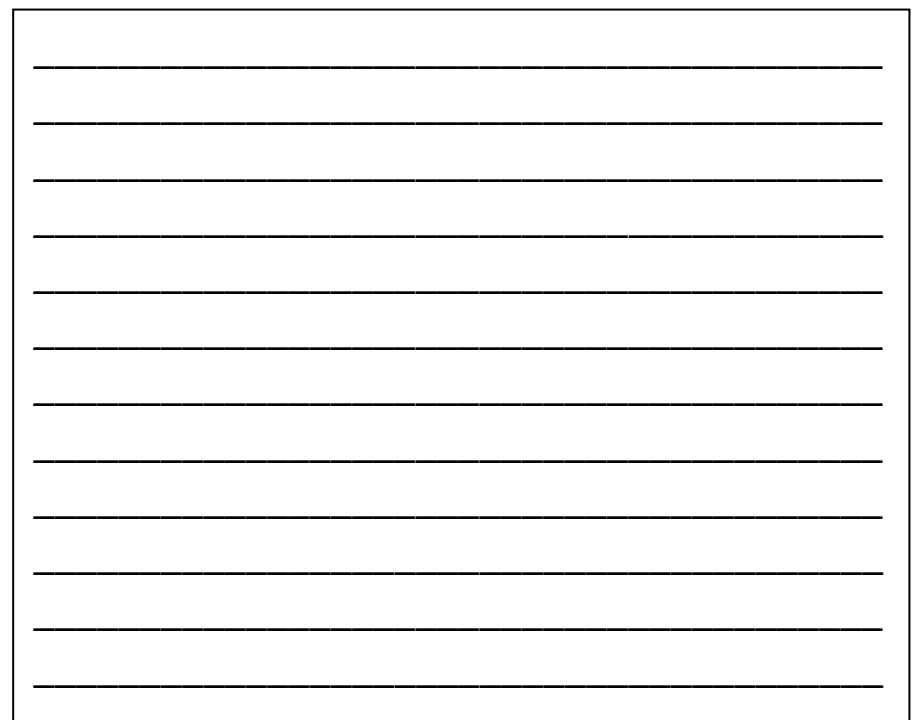
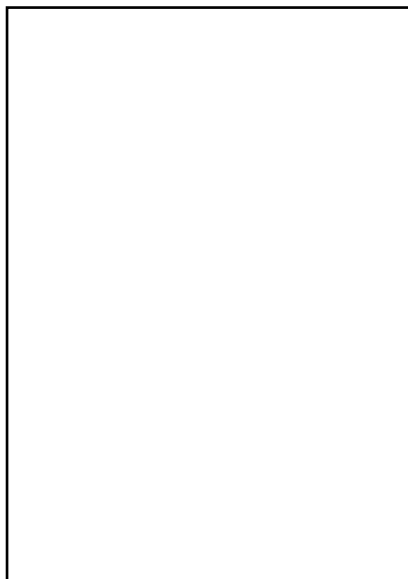
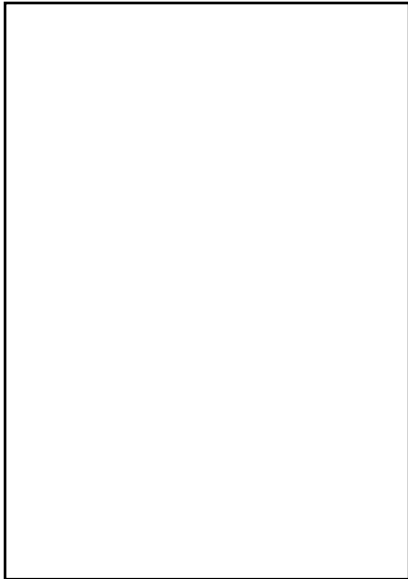
A Level English Literature: Induction Homework

Task 1: Myself as a Reader

Introduce yourself as a reader and give your teacher an idea of where your interests lie. You should write about two books you have read and enjoyed. include:

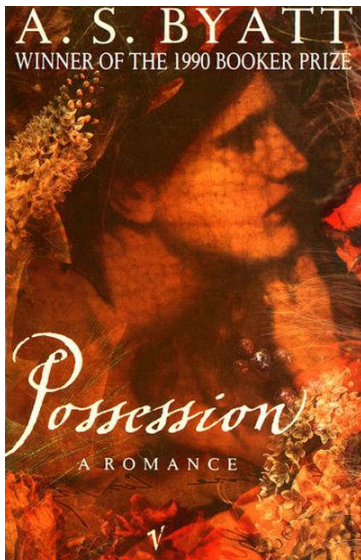
- A brief outline of the texts.
- Your personal response to them.

You can see an example of this on the next page

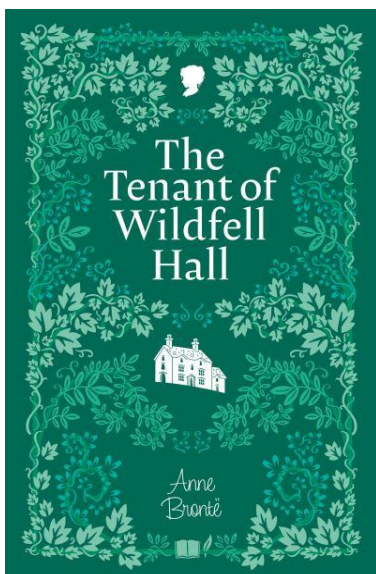


Introducing Myself as a Reader

I've chosen two books that have really stayed with me. They are very different in style and story, but both remind me why I love reading and why literature matters.



The first is *Possession* by A S Byatt. It's a novel about two modern academics who discover a secret connection between two Victorian poets. I really like the way Byatt creates the actual voices of the poets. She doesn't just tell us about them, she writes their letters and their poetry so convincingly that you start to believe they were real. The poems feel like they belong in a real anthology, each with its own distinct tone and style. It made me realise how much skill and imagination goes into writing across different forms. It also made me think differently about how writers can craft narratives and different voices.



The second book is *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Brontë, which has an interesting use of narrative voice and feminist ideas. It is sometimes overlooked because of her more famous sisters, but it's a novel that tells the story of a woman who leaves her husband to protect herself and her child, and how society reacts to that choice. It feels surprisingly modern in the way it deals with ideas like personal freedom, morality and judgment. I admired how calm and steady Helen's voice is throughout the novel, even when everything around her is chaotic or unfair. Brontë explores interesting ideas about who has power in relationships and society in general, and how women's

voices are shaped or silenced in literature.

Task 2. The Elements of Tragedy

Instructions:

Research each of the following key terms linked to tragedy. Write a clear, concise definition in your own words.

Key Term	Your Definition
Tragic Hero	
Hamartia	
Hubris	
Peripeteia	
Anagnorisis	
Catharsis	
Fate and free will	
Tragic Villain	
Tragic Victim	
Suffering	
Downfall	
Supernatural	

Task 3: Macbeth as Tragedy

You have already researched the key elements of tragedy. Now apply this knowledge to **Shakespeare's *Macbeth***. Identify and explain how *Macbeth* fits the tragic genre.

Use the table below to organise your ideas. For each element of tragedy, explain **how it appears in *Macbeth***.

Element of Tragedy	How is this shown in <i>Macbeth</i> ?
Tragic Hero	
Hamartia (fatal flaw)	
Hubris	
Peripeteia (turning point)	
Anagnorisis (realisation)	
Catharsis (effect on audience)	
Fate vs Free Will	
Supernatural	
Suffering	
Downfall	

Success Criteria

- ✓ I can correctly define and apply key tragedy terms
- ✓ I can link ideas clearly to *Macbeth*
- ✓ I can explain rather than just describe
- ✓ I use specific references or examples

Task 4: Othello: Create character profiles for Othello, Iago and Desdemona.

Othello is the Shakespeare text that we will study for A level. It is of course another tragedy. Prior to the start of the course I would like you to make yourself as familiar as possible with the plot. Please use the two links below to support this, as well as any additional research that you would like to do.

<https://www.rsc.org.uk/shakespeare-learning-zone/othello/story/plot>

<https://www.playshakespeare.com/othello/synopsis>

Othello

Desdemona

Iago

Task 5: Wider Reading -Read the article on Tragedy and answer the questions.

Tragic Theory – A Brief Overview

Dr Sean McEvoy explains the key theories of tragedy, showing how much ideas have changed over time. He reveals how drama reflects the times in which it is written, and questions whether tragedy is still possible in modern times.

Tragedy is art at its most profound and serious. By art here I mean theatre, writing, cinema, television, painting, even music. Tragedy is art which confronts suffering, pain and death and attempts to craft a response to those things. It has been such an important part of Western culture that there have been many attempts to impose strict definitions on what can and what cannot be counted as tragedy, in order to claim its status and power for one particular view of the world. It has even been claimed that the modern world is so degraded that something as noble as tragedy is no longer possible. But we still keep producing works of art that face the worst things humans have to encounter. We still need tragedies.

Aristotle's Definitions of Tragedy

The earliest, and perhaps most influential definition of tragedy was propounded by the Greek philosopher Aristotle. His lecture notes on tragedy were collected together and published as the *Poetics*. He was writing more than a hundred years after the great days of Athenian tragedy and it's clear that his account of the genre can only be applied consistently to some of the plays that have survived. He thought Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* was the most perfect example of a tragedy. For Aristotle, a tragedy had to have a main character, the protagonist, who was basically good but had to have some wickedness in them. If they were entirely good the audience would be disgusted at the injustice of their fall; if entirely bad the audience would rejoice at their demise. Neither of these responses are what Aristotle regarded as the tragic response. The protagonist makes some kind of error of judgement (*hamartia* in Greek) which leads to disaster; because he or she has to be of elevated social status, the loss affects a whole community. The protagonist does not always die, but the disaster that strikes produces feelings of pity and fear in the audience:

pity for the protagonist, and fear at the power of the gods or fate. These emotions are, according to Aristotle, 'purged' or 'cleansed'; the Greek term he uses is *catharsis*. No-one is completely sure what this means. Some have suggested he means that powerful emotions which are not healthy for the mind are usefully discharged in response to tragedy, particularly those emotions (pity and fear) inappropriate for citizen warriors. Others suggest that he is saying that the experience of watching the play teaches us the appropriate emotional response to suffering so that we leave the theatre with a better sense of proportion about what is worth crying about. Above all there was a sense that tragedy was good for you. Aristotle also wanted to underline the convention that the action of Greek tragedies happened in one place, with only one main plot. Everything had to happen in a single day, since the intensity and coherence of the experience is broken if sleep intervenes. These three requirements later became known as the unities of space, action and time.

Playwrights Going Their Own Way

Plenty of Greek tragedies don't conform to what Aristotle said, especially those of Euripides. *Alcestis* (amongst others) has a happy ending. No-one in *Women of Troy* makes an error of judgement since the main characters are simply the victims of the vengeful Greeks after the fall of the city. But Aristotle's pre-eminent status as a philosopher meant that these rules were used in the 16th and 17th centuries as a model to construct plays around and as a stick to beat plays which refused to comply with them. Shakespeare cannot have been ignorant of Aristotle and was happy to stick to some of the unities in *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Tempest*, but in his tragedies he goes his own way. He was certainly familiar with the Roman Seneca's

versions of Greek tragedy, and with the mediaeval idea, found in Chaucer, that tragedy concerned the fall of great men, but there is no common form or idea of tragedy in his plays. Rather he sets out to explore how the particular beliefs and ambitions of political leaders, in a particular social and political context (whether feudal Scotland or ancient Rome) lead to suffering and death. 'Men/Are as the time is', as Edmund says in King Lear (Act 5 Scene 3 lines 31-2) and Shakespeare

lived at the particular time when the modern world was emerging out of the medieval one. The conflict between the old world and the emerging one can be tragically internalised in one character, as it is with Hamlet or Othello, or it can be fought out between different characters, as when a representation of feudal heroism (Mark Antony in Antony and Cleopatra) meets his nemesis in the cold, efficient and modern Octavius Caesar.

Questions

Find and Retrieve

1. What does McEvoy say tragedy "confronts"?

2. Which philosopher developed one of the earliest definitions of tragedy?

3. What does the term hamartia mean?

4. What are Aristotle's three unities?

Explain and Interpret

5. Why does Aristotle believe a tragic protagonist cannot be completely good or completely bad?

6. What does Aristotle mean by catharsis?

7. How does McEvoy suggest tragedy is still relevant in modern times?

8. In what ways does Shakespeare "go his own way" compared to Aristotle's ideas?

Analyse Language and Methods

9. How does the phrase “art at its most profound and serious” present tragedy?

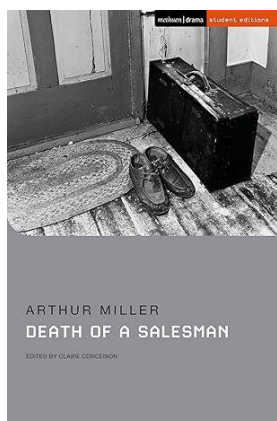
10. What is the effect of the repetition of “We still...” in the opening paragraph?

11. How does the metaphor “a stick to beat plays which refused to comply with them” shape the reader’s view of Aristotle’s rules?

Evaluate and Respond

12. Which view of tragedy in the extract do you find most convincing — Aristotle’s or Shakespeare’s — and why?

Year 12- Reading List

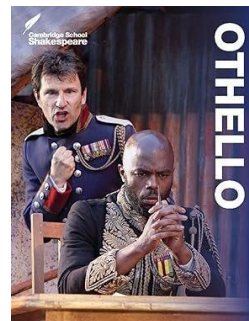


Course Texts to buy: Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller.

Please purchase the Modern Drama Student Edition edited by Claire Conceison and published by Bloomsbury as it has study guide material in the introduction.

***Othello* by William Shakespeare**

We recommend *Othello* (Cambridge School Shakespeare) Paperback. Again, this has helpful student notes throughout.



Required Reading: We will be using *Jamaica Inn* by Daphne Du Maurier as a core text for our Critical Theory Unit. You can read it over the summer if you would like to. Please ensure you have read this before the end of September.

For greater depth, you would benefit from reading *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte and *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte.

Independent Reading is a crucial aspect of A Level literature as you will need to choose your own texts for your NEA essays. You are encouraged to read widely and find texts that interest you.

This is a list of texts that might give you a starting point for your own independent reading in preparation for your NEA. Many of them have been used for NEA by previous students.

Prose

- A Passage to India, E.M Forster
- A Thousand Splendid Suns, Khaled Hosseini
- Heart of Darkness, Joseph Conrad
- The Wasp Factory, Ian Banks
- A Clockwork Orange, Anthony Burgess
- 1984, George Orwell
- Jane Eyre, Charlotte Bronte
- Rebecca, Daphne Du Maurier
- The Time Machine, HG Wells
- Great Expectations, Charles Dickens
- A Room with A View E.M Forster
- Mrs Dalloway, Virginia Woolf
- The Bell Jar, Sylvia Plath
- Wide Sargasso Sea, Jean Rhys
- Persuasion, Jane Austen

- Sense and Sensibility, Jane Austen
- The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, Muriel Spark
- The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, Anne Bronte

Poetry:

- Still I Rise, Maya Angelou
- Wilfred Owen
- Alfred, Lord Tennyson
- Christina Rossetti
- The World's Wife, Carol Anne Duffy
- Rudyard Kipling
- Thomas Hardy
- The Terrorist at my Table by Imtiaz Dharker
- Ariel, Sylvia Plath