QMGS ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

Bridging the Gap

A Level English Literature Transition Materials

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History of English Literature

A historical framework helps to make sense of your reading. The table below is divided by time period. It is by no means comprehensive.

Early Medieval Literature	Early medieval literature in England is written primarily in Latin and in Old English. Genres: elegy, riddle, epic, devotional Works: *Beowulf* (anonymous), *The Wanderer* (anonymous)
High Medieval Literature	High medieval literature in England is written primarily in Latin and in Old French. Genres: romance, saint's life, history, love lyric Works: *Historia Regum Britanniae* (Geoffrey of Monmouth)
Late Medieval Literature	Late medieval literature in England is written primarily in Middle English. English is established as a literary language. Genres: romance, saint's life, fabliau Works: *Canterbury Tales* (Geoffrey Chaucer), *Gawain and the Green Knight* (anonymous)
Early Renaissance Literature	Early Renaissance literature in England is written primarily in English. This is a period of translations from Latin and Greek and of great dramatic works. Genres: drama (tragedy, comedy), romance, sonnet Works: *Hamlet* (William Shakespeare), *The Faerie Queene* (Edmund Spenser), *Astrophel and Stella* (Philip Sidney)
Late Renaissance Literature	The Civil War and the Restoration are important influences. Genres: epic, Restoration comedy, ode Works: *Paradise Lost* (John Milton)
Augustan Literature	This period establishes much of our literary culture, with newspapers and periodicals becoming commonplace among educated people. The novel has its origins here. Genres: satire, novel (picaresque, romance, gothic) Works: *Dunciad* (Alexander Pope), *Gulliver's Travels* (Jonathan Swift), *Tom Jones* (Henry Fielding)
Romantic Literature	The works of this period place an emphasis on imagination and feeling above all else. Genres: lyric poem, novel (gothic, bildungsroman) Works: *Lyrical Ballads* (William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge)
Victorian Literature	Victorian Literature grapples with many of the questions about the place of humanity in the world that developments in science and technology brought. Genres: novel (detective, realist, gothic, science fiction) Works: *A Study in Scarlet* (Arthur Conan Doyle), *Middlemarch* (George Eliot), *Dracula* (Bram Stoker)
Twentieth Century Literature	Twentieth century literature deals with Britain's changing place in the world. Genres: novel, lyric Works: *The Waste Land* (T.S. Eliot)

What makes a successful English student?

It is not about being a humanities or a scientist kind of person.

Many of the skills, if not all, are transferable: observation, analysis, organisation of evidence and ideas.

The ability to hold opposing views in your mind at one time; what Keats called 'negative capability'!

The willingness to entertain challenging ideas and ideologies; to be objective; to listen to *resistant readings* of texts and treat them with due respect and consideration.

The ability to bring personal experience to the classroom without letting it cloud your judgements.

A passion for words and language in general- abstract though that sounds.

A willingness, and a desire to read widely- for fun and pleasure as well as for the exam.

The ability to optimise the dynamic between teacher and student- understanding that different teachers will have different methods and approaches.

Giving every text the chance to justify its existence; not write them off as not your type or your bag.

Some of your best work could be on books not considered your favourite (the same goes for teachers and what they are tasked with by the board!).

Take ownership of your learning; take responsibility and use feedback on essays to drive you forwards.

Aspire to a constant process of *retrieval*; *interleaving*; reformatting notes and looking after your folder/exercise books- with an eye to the final run-in and the end-of-course assessments.

Do not forget or neglect the importance of your own literacy when talking about works of literature or non-fiction; you have to be clear in your own linguistic expression; you have to work on evolving your critical and creative styles over the two years of the course. Compare work from September in Year 1 with the final half term and you will see what we mean!

In summary, then…

Remember to do the following and you will thrive next term:

- Be committed
- Know the course outline
- Be ready and willing to work outside lessons
- Use good and reliable source texts for contextual/critical material
- Be organised; manage your time effectively
- Be open if you are struggling; seek advice
- Keep challenging yourself; go beyond
- Communicate well with you subject-specialists
- Plan ahead on assignments
- Take care of texts and hand-outs; give them some TLC
- Get involved in discussions (best part of the subject) but be sure to listen and make good notes that will make sense in a year's time
- Think about your wider well-being and health
- Do your best….and remember that no one can ask for more than this

Study and classroom skills

Be aware that A Level is hard and that superficial similarities between it and the GCSE can make its challenge difficult to see. However, the successful A Level student, in any subject, is the student who works. That means that good organisation and note-taking, along with wider-reading and re-reading, are (at this level of study) no longer optional, but necessary.

Depending on the preference of your teacher, you may keep a folder or complete work in an exercise book. Either way, it is your responsibility to organise your work, taking enough pride in it to present it well. Keeping a note of the date and of the main subject of each lesson will help you to navigate your work; laying out notes and essays clearly will help you to read through them at a later date. Be prepared for a teacher to inspect your book or folder at will and for him or her to hold you accountable for its contents.

You should build a habit of reviewing your learning independently. Your teachers may have done this for you during your GCSE studies by using short quizzes and by providing summaries of lessons or units of work. You need to do this for yourself from now on. For this reason, adopting a note-taking system which requires you to re-read and reflect on your class notes on a regular basis, is important. Your teacher may have a preference, but if not then you ought to use the Cornell Notes system, in which the margin is used to add summary comments and questions which will aid recall and navigation.

Awareness of the future that lies before you is important, as is being wise to the fact that each lesson is part of a sequence. Should you miss one, whether through illness or due to a co-curricular activity or sports fixture, your teacher will expect you to find out what you have missed and to copy up notes or work from a peer. In the same way, you should (as a matter of course) redraft any essays on which you are given feedback. Feedback which is not used is feedback which is wasted.

Key stage 5 expects independence and self-awareness to a degree that you may find demanding at first. To help, you should familiarise yourself with the exam board specification (available on the OCR website), so that you know what you are learning and why you are learning it. That knowledge will allow you to identify for yourself what you need to do in order to succeed and to seek help where necessary. You should be the first one to recognise that there is a problem and be the first one to act. Do not wait for your teacher to come to you.

Remember the school motto asks you to be generous with your time and your energy, in the understanding that this is the sure way to making the most of life: *quas dederis solas semper habebis opes*, it is only what you give that you shall keep.

Intelligent Reading

You have been reading for a long time and moved away from breaking words down into sounds (phonemes) like "d. o. g. Dog!" a long time ago. At the point of being able to read fluently, it becomes a passive skill; that is, one which your brain does not have to work on consciously. This is why motorway drivers are able to glance at a sign and know if they at the right junction, or why you only need to glance at the sign on the bathroom door to know if it is for 'men' or 'women'.

We use our brain passively when reading stories too. When we do this, our eyes and brain process the physical letters on the page (graphemes) and make sense of them with our extensive historic knowledge of words. When reading passively we follow the narrative presented, understand the characters and may appreciate some of the more obvious signs of the writer's craft, such as a cliffhanger. Beyond that, we do not appreciate the written text in detail.

An A Level student needs to become an **active reader**. When reading actively, we are not just following the narrative, but we are critically evaluating its effectiveness. The process of reading actively can be summed-up through two key questions:

WHY is this important?

and

HOW has its importance been achieved?

Why is this important?

As you read passively, important moments and features of the text will stand out. The first stage of reading actively is to consider *why* they are important.

For example, consider a character in a murder mystery who is described in negative ways and has the habit of fidgeting as they are spoken to about the murder victim. **Why** have they been described in this fashion? **Why** are they fidgeting?

How has its importance been achieved?

Once you have identified important parts of the text, it is time to begin picking apart *how* they have been given a sense of importance.

Consider Character X again. Was it the object-led sentence structure or the direct accusation of from another suspect which drew the reader's attention to the fidgeting? Is the negative description meant to prejudice the reader towards them from the outset?

By asking yourself these questions, you are making your brain work more actively and, thus, you will have more and better things to say when it comes to writing.

A note on re-reading texts

It should be obvious that you are unlikely to spot all of the important parts of a text, or to be a truly active reader if you only read a text once.

As an A Level English student, you **must** read your set texts multiple times. It is only through this immersion into the text that you can truly hope to understand it.

A framework for reading:

Plot

What happens in a story? What engages us as readers/viewers? How does a writer unfold the events that take place before our eyes? What is happening in terms of sequence or release of information? What is crucial and what is peripheral in terms of importance? How much time and space are covered by the plot?

Character

Do you care about the people who are involved in these events? Do you identify with them in any way? How has the writer crafted these constructs through language and structural devices: clothing, speech, symbols and motifs; interactions with other figures; behaviours and motives?

Dialogue

Who talks the most and why? How does the author contextualise these interactions? What are the conventions of talk and how can you analyse the speech in a range of texts: fiction or non-fiction?

Setting, atmosphere, mood

Where do events take place and in what time-period? What impact do place, time, weather, colours and objects have on the progress of a story? And what is the infamous *pathetic fallacy*?!

Theme

What is the text about? (Not to be confused with plot or message, however.) What is the flesh on the bones of the events? What human experiences and emotions are in play?

Imagery

Figurative language is crucial to all exits and you will need to be able to apply key terms like simile and metaphor. Why do certain things reappear in texts: objects, words, sentence types? And what effect do these patterns have on the emerging meaning of the text?

Diction

A posh word for words but fundamental to the subject, of course. You will need your passion for language here. Why has the author retained that word and what does it bring to the party?

Structure

Part of your set of higher-order thinking skills and generally seen as a trickier skill than picking out word and phrases for analysis. What patterns can we see? What is the impact of sequence, time-frames, repetitions, juxtapositions (a favourite word at A level, of course) and the relationship of part to whole?

Style

What is the DNA of the author; their finger print, so to speak? What do you notice in terms of typical word choices, grammatical structures and literary techniques?

Register

A strange word but it alludes to the levels of formality or informality in the piece of writing. Is it simple or complex? Is the language contemporary, dated or even archaic?

Annotating texts

Depending on your experience at GCSE, you may have annotated copies of texts a lot, or very little. This section aims to look at *what* you should be annotating, and *how* to do it.

Remember that for all A Level English disciplines, the exams are 'closed text'. This means you will *not* have copies of your texts in the exam hall. Therefore, there is no limit to how many annotations you can make, and keeping your texts pristine serves no purpose.

It is suggested that you make annotations in pencil, to allow you to correct mistakes however, you might find that the paper used in some editions of texts are not conducive to using pencil and you will have to resort to pen. Some students find that the use of highlighters can be beneficial, and others prefer to use post-it notes for more complicated notes.

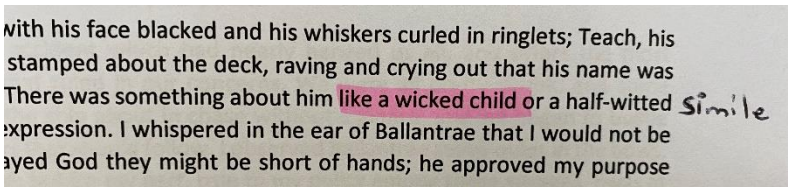
Why should I annotate?

The process of annotating a text keeps a record of your thought processes as you read. By making annotations you are encouraging your brain to be more active and thus you will read it more closely. A well-annotated text can be incredibly useful when you are preparing for an examination.

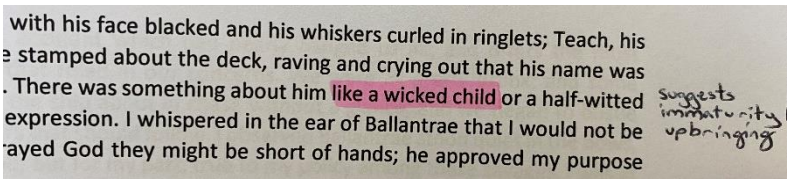
What should I annotate?

You will need to make annotations for all of your texts; poetry, prose, drama, non-fiction and spoken language. *What* you annotate may change between texts, but the process is similar regardless.

Annotations can be made for any number of features in a text. However, you should be wary of making annotations which are too obvious or unnecessary. For example:



Instead, it is often more useful to annotate texts with wider ideas or interpretations:



When should I annotate?

Sometimes your teacher will give you explicit annotations to make whilst at others you will be expected to annotate yourselves. Consider what you are learning about **characters**, **settings** and **themes** as a place to begin.

Other Resources

Library @LibraryQMGS

It is as necessary for a student of English to read as it is for an athlete to train. The library is your gymnasium.

Our librarian, Mrs Walker, has collected a rich range of titles together in a small space, including a short-loans section which is specifically for Sixth Form students of English. Make sure that you use it. When you have no work for supervised study, use the library to find a book and read it. When you are studying one genre or time period, use the library to take out novels and poetry which are related. When you find yourself overwhelmed, use the library to find easy reading.

John Milton, the seventeenth century poet and political thinker, wrote 'read any books whatever come to thy hands, for thou are sufficient both to judge aright and to examine each matter'. Milton was defending the free press here, but his words serve as good advice to A Level students, all the same: read everything and think about everything you read.

Massolit

Massolit (www.massolit.io) is a website which creates video lectures for a lot of subjects. The English department at Queen Mary's Grammar School has a subscription to the site, and it is used frequently in the course of A-Level teaching. The strength of Massolit is in the expertise of its presenters – most are current university professors.

You will be given an individual login once the new year begins, but for now you can log-in to the website using the login details below:

You should spend some time watching some of the lectures which interest you **and you will be expected to discuss what you watched in the first weeks of the term.**

Lunchtime Lectures

Throughout the school year, the English department will be hosting a number of lectures where teachers (and hopefully some guests) will give talks about particular texts, ideas or conventions in English. Keen A Level scholars will see these as opportunities to broaden their knowledge beyond the classroom syllabus.

More information will come out once the school year begins.

Preparing for transition to A Level

Clearly, the work in an English A Level is going to be harder than that of GCSE. The texts are likely to be more challenging and the expectations are going to be higher. This part of the transitional material will help you 'bridge the gap' between where you are and where you want to be, much like a real bridge crossing a river.

You should aim to complete all of the tasks over the next few pages to the best of your ability ahead of beginning year 12 in September.

It is important that you bring evidence of your work with you when term begins, as it will form a part of your first few weeks of study (and because you want to impress your new teachers).

What to do if you are struggling

As you progress through your A Level studies, you will almost certainly be faced with occasions where you find the work difficult or complicated, or when situations outside of school impact your ability to be able to meet a deadline.

These instances are natural and, unfortunately, unavoidable. However, most of them can be overcome with one simple word: **communication**.

Put simply, if you are struggling with any of the work in this booklet, or any of the work over the next two years, it is important that you speak to your teachers and allow them to support you – it is what they are there for!

Whether you are continuing your studies at QMGS, or are joining the school for the first time in year 12, the contact details for members of the English department are included in this guide – please reach out to them if you need support.

Key Terms

Below is a list of key terms you should know as you begin your A Level English Literature study. You should write out a definition/explanation for each term, using the internet or a dictionary to find any terms you don't know.

Allegory	Meter
Alliteration	Modernism
Ballad	Narrative voice
Caesura	Oxymoron
Catharsis	Parody
Elegy	Pastoral
Enjambment	Pathetic fallacy
Epic poem	Pathos
Epistolary	Poetic justice
Epithalamium	Postmodernism
Farce	Proxemics
Foreground (verb)	Realistic drama
Form	Refrain
Genre	Rhythm
Gothic	Romance
Hamartia	Satire
Hubris	Semantic field
Hyperbole	Semantics
Interleaving	Signifier / signified
Intertextuality	Sonnet
Ludic	Symbol
Lyric poem	The areas of a stage
Magic-realism	Trope
Masque	Verfremdungseffekt
Metaphor	Writing back

Reading profile

It is time to consider your reading habits. As already mentioned in these materials, you may not have read much outside of your English lessons. This is OK, and although you will need to read widely for A Level, it is important to be honest with yourself in this process.

1. Use the headings below to create a timeline of yourself as a reader, starting with the stories you remember from your youth and moving forwards to the texts you studied at GCSE:
    a. Pre-school
    b. Primary school
    c. Key Stage 3
    d. Key Stage 4
2. Look back at your timeline and try to analyse it:
    a. How would you define yourself as a reader in terms of topic interests and genres?
    b. Can you see a pattern in your reading development?
    c. Does your reading history divide into distinct stages?
    d. When did you do the most reading, or most enjoy it?
3. Reflect on your reading habits now, at the beginning of Key Stage 5 and try to answer the questions below:
    a. What do you read?
    b. How often, and for how long at a time do you read?
    c. When and where do you read?
    d. Have your reading tastes changed recently?
    e. Does reading have high priority in your life?
    f. Do you have a plan of books you are going to read?
4. Looking back at the previous tasks, how satisfied are you as a reader? If you feel that you could be more pro-active, regular, selective or conscious in your reading, set yourself some short-term targets for how you could improve your reading habits.

You may find out some interesting things about yourself as you complete this profile, but you will also use it when introducing yourself at the beginning of the term.

Book reviews

Book reviews are a brilliant way of evaluating the success and impact of a book and it is useful for an A Level English student to review most of the books they read over the course, especially the set texts and applicable wider reading.

Recently, the website 'Good Reads' has become a popular repository of independent reviews. It is free to sign-up and you can even share your reviews with your classmates.

When writing a review, you should consider:

1. The title and author of the book
2. When genre it belongs to
3. How you came to choose it, or why you chose to read it now
4. In what ways did the book fulfil or disappoint your expectations?
5. How does it relate to anything you have read, seen or experienced before?
6. What is the setting and situation, and who are the main characters?
7. Which themes and issues are explored?
8. What are the books strengths and weaknesses? Support these points with evidence.
9. Would you recommend the book to others? Why/why not?

You will be asked to share your thoughts and reviews on some of your recent reading when you begin the course, but it will be useful for you to review the set texts and wider reading you complete over the two years.

Additional preparation

Before the end of summer, you should also aim to do at least four things from the following list:

- read a novel from before 1914
- read a novel from after 1914
- memorise one poem from the Poetry by Heart website
- spend half-an-hour in exploring one room in a local or national museum
- read the synopsis of one Shakespeare play and then watch it (preferably a staged version, rather than one made for film or television)
- read the biography of someone that you admire
- read one article on the BBC (or other news outlet) website everyday (not just the news headlines)
- sit down and explain to yourself why you want to study English
- watch one BBC documentary series on art, politics, history or music
- watch one quality drama series from the BBC, ITV, Channel 4 or HBO (not reality TV)

Below you can see some lists that will help you. They should not limit, and they do not prescribe, reading.

Novels before 1914

- Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*
- Jane Austen, *Persuasion*
- Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*
- William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*
- Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

Novels after 1914

- E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India*
- Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*
- Philip K Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*
- Maggie O'Farrell, *Hamnet*
- Franz Kafka, *The Trial*

Some plays by Shakespeare

- *Othello* (tragedy)
- *As You Like It* (comedy)
- *The Tempest* (romance)
- *Richard III* (history)

Notes

This space has been left blank for you to make notes during your transition work.

The English Department and Their Areas of Interest

Mr Martin Fadden
Head of English

- Modernist literature
- Anglo-Irish writing
- Oracy skills in the classroom
- Linguistics and socio-linguistics

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Mr Paul Dryhurst
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- Medieval and Renaissance literature
- Latin-language poetry and prose
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Mrs Doreen Anderton

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- Gothic literature through the ages
- 20th century American literature

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- Feminist interpretations of dystopia
- Representations of liminal space and areas of transition
- Children's literature
- International fairy tales, folklore and fantasy

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Ms Kate Morgan
Head of PSHEE/Assistant Head of Year

- Literature and politics of the 1930s
- Historical, political and social context in 19th & 20th century literature
- Fantasy and fandom
- Sociolinguistics

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Mr Luke Newell
Assistant Head of Year

- Film, media and graphic narratives
- Contemporary poetry – on stage and on the page
- Creative writing and the craft of the writer

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Mrs Helen Walker
Librarian

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- Diversity and representation
- The work of Sir Terry Pratchett

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Mr Ivor Williams

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- Campus novels
- Literary journalism

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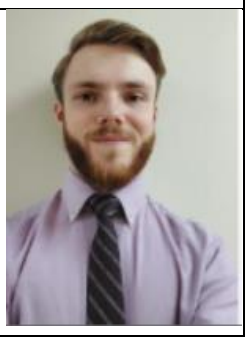
Mr Ben Whitehead

- Historicism
- Developing oracy

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