



Step Up to English Literature A Level

Congratulations on making the brilliant decision to enrich both your mind and your soul with A Level English Literature. This document will introduce you to the course and provide you with activities for the next three weeks. There will then be a second document with even more stimulating, thought-provoking, challenging, and ultimately rewarding content in three weeks' time.

Here's how that six weeks of content looks at a glance:

Pack	Session	Approximate Time (minimum)
1	1 - Overview	45 minutes
	2 - Drama	3 and a half hours
	3 - Poetry and Contexts	1 and a half hours
2	4 - Prose	2 and a half hours
	5 - The art of the essay	2 and a half hours
	6 - Gaining intellectual independence (setting up your summer)	45 minutes

There is so much you can be doing independently to prepare yourself to be a brilliant A Level English Literature student (and, therefore, a brilliant human being) right now, so each session will come with a range of additional pointers towards ways of challenging yourself, getting creative, or immersing yourself in a new aspect of culture. Ultimately, this document is just a stepping stone: it is up to you to explore further and find your own path.

Session 1: Overview

(approximately 45 minutes)

This first session will help us get to know a little bit about you and help you to get a really good sense of the types of things covered in the English Literature A Level course. It might also get you thinking about why studying literature is such an enlightening, rewarding, and essential experience...

Ideally, you should complete this session using our interactive [Google Form](#).

For a less internet-intensive version (without so many videos), you can see the key content and questions on the next few pages and can email your responses to: English@sjcr.net

About You

1. First Name:



2. Surname:
3. Preferred name (that is, the name you would like to be known by in school):
4. School attended for GCSEs:
5. Now the tricky one: what is your favourite book, poem, or play and why?

About the Course

we study the **Edexcel A Level in English Literature**.

Qualification at a glance

The Pearson Edexcel Level 3 Advanced GCE in English Literature consists of three externally examined papers and one non-examination assessment component. The qualification requires the study of eight literary texts plus unseen poetry.

Students must complete all assessment in May/June in any single year.

Component 1: Drama		*Paper code: 9ET0/01
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Externally assessed • Availability: May/June • First assessment: 2017 	30% of the total qualification	
Overview of content Students study: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one Shakespeare play and one other drama from either tragedy or comedy – both texts may be selected from one or both of these categories. • critical essays related to their selected Shakespeare play. Students' preparation is supported by <i>Shakespeare: A Critical Anthology – Tragedy</i> or <i>Shakespeare: A Critical Anthology – Comedy</i>. 		
Overview of assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written examination, lasting 2 hours and 15 minutes. • Open book – clean copies of the drama texts can be taken into the examination. The Critical Anthology must not be taken into the examination. • Total of 60 marks available – 35 marks for Section A and 25 marks for Section B. • Two sections: students answer one question from a choice of two on their studied text for both Section A and Section B. • Section A – Shakespeare: one essay question, incorporating ideas from wider critical reading (AO1, AO2, AO3, AO5 assessed). • Section B – Other Drama: one essay question (AO1, AO2, AO3 assessed). 		

For the Shakespeare, section, we currently teach the brilliant study in the ephemeral nature of power, the effects of aging, and the fragility of life itself that is King Lear (although we have also done Othello in the past...)

6. Which Shakespeare play did you study for GCSE?

How well do you feel like you 'get' Shakespeare? *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

"it was Greek to me." (Julius Caesar, Act 1, Scene 2)



When I hear Shakespeare, I "hear my soul speak" (Tempest, Act 3, Scene 1)

- 7.



And for the 'other drama' half of the paper, we study the searing account of sexuality, control, and insanity in mid 20th Century New Orleans, *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams.

8. What (if any) plays have you been to see at the theatre?

Component 2: Prose		*Paper code: 9ET0/02
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Externally assessedAvailability: May/JuneFirst assessment: 2017	20% of the total qualification	
Overview of content Students study: <ul style="list-style-type: none">two prose texts from a chosen theme. At least one of the prose texts must be pre-1900.		
Overview of assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none">Written examination, lasting 1 hour and 15 minutes.Open book – clean copies of the prose texts can be taken into the examination.Total of 40 marks available.Students answer one comparative essay question from a choice of two on their studied theme (AO1, AO2, AO3, AO4 assessed).		

For the Prose exam, we look at the theme of 'Science and Society'. We delve into Mary Shelley's seminal work of anxiety, terror, over-vaulting ambition, and the importance of empathy: *Frankenstein*...and we compare it with Kazuo Ishiguro's understated but profoundly unsettling (or life-affirming, depending on your interpretation - that's what the A Level is all about!) *Never Let Me Go*. It's a sci-fi dystopia that feels nothing like a sci-fi dystopia.

If you had to pick one, what would you say is the most important aspect of a novel? *

- A character or characters I can really relate to
 - An exciting and intriguing plot
 - Beautiful and powerful descriptions and choices of expression
 - An immersive setting which lets me temporarily escape the world around me
 - An accurate reflection of the realities of life
 - An exploration of profound and significant ideas
 - Other...
- 9.



Component 3: Poetry		*Paper code: 9ET0/03
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Externally assessedAvailability: May/JuneFirst assessment: 2017	30% of the total qualification	
Overview of content Students study: <ul style="list-style-type: none">poetic form, meaning and languagea selection of post-2000 specified poetry and <ul style="list-style-type: none">a specified range of poetry from: <i>either</i><ul style="list-style-type: none">a literary period (either pre- or post-1900) <i>or</i><ul style="list-style-type: none">a named poet from within a literary period.		
Overview of assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none">Written examination, lasting 2 hours and 15 minutes.Open book – clean copies of the poetry texts can be taken into the examination.Total of 60 marks available – 30 marks for Section A and 30 marks for Section B.Two sections: students answer one question from a choice of two, comparing an unseen poem with a named poem from their studied contemporary text and one question from a choice of two on their studied movement/poet.Section A – Post-2000 Specified Poetry: one comparative essay question on an unseen modern poem written post-2000 and one named poem from the studied contemporary text (AO1, AO2, AO4 assessed).Section B – Specified Poetry Pre- or Post-1900: one essay question (AO1, AO2, AO3 assessed).		

The poetic movement we look at is the Romantics. That's the likes of Blake, Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth, Byron, etc. By examining a range of works by these connected writers, you get a much more nuanced understanding of their ideas than you do from three poems at GCSE. It can be tricky, but students get a lot out of this section.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5QmJofRAB9M>

10. Watch the video above. Are you more Romantic or Classical?



Non-examination assessment		*Code: 9ET0/04
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Internally assessed, externally moderatedAvailability: May/JuneFirst moderation: 2017	20% of the total qualification	
Overview of content Students have a free choice of two texts to study. Chosen texts: <ul style="list-style-type: none">must be different from those studied in Components 1, 2 and 3must be complete texts and may be linked by theme, movement, author or periodmay be selected from poetry, drama, prose or literary non-fiction.		
Overview of assessment Students produce one assignment: <ul style="list-style-type: none">one extended comparative essay referring to two texts (AO1, AO2, AO3, AO4, AO5 assessed)advisory total word count is 2500–3000 wordstotal of 60 marks available.		

The coursework is a really independent and exciting part of the course (it's what the current Year 12 have mainly been working on very independently during the period of the school closure!) You get to choose (pretty much) any two texts and come up with your own question for an extended comparative essay.

11. If you were writing it now, what two texts would you choose to compare and why?

Why Study Literature?

Some academic subjects and disciplines seem to have a very clear-cut purpose leading to a specific career path. That's lovely for them. English is not like that. It has myriad, often nebulous, but always deeply enriching purposes and can propel us down any number of twisting and intriguing paths. (If that scares you, perhaps you're in the wrong place, or maybe we can comfort you by saying it equips you with 'transferable skills' and is officially classified as a 'facilitating subject' by Russell Group universities.)

Here is John Green (yes, the author of 'The Fault in Our Stars', 'Paper Towns', etc.) talking very fast about the function and purpose of reading literature...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSYw502dJNY&t=9s>

... and here's what Career Ninja has to say about the benefits of studying English (written primarily with a focus on university study)...

<https://www.careerninja.co.uk/careers-advice/article/the-importance-of-studying-english-1017208>

12. Which of the benefits of studying English mentioned in the video and the article do you think is the most important?
13. How has reading and/or studying English helped you understand the world better so far in your life? (This is a non-compulsory question, but we'd love to hear some interesting answers...)
14. Do you have any additional comments or questions?



Session 2: Drama

(at least 3 hours 15 minutes, possibly much more if you get into it)

Set aside a good chunk of time for this one, because we're off to the (virtual) theatre!

Again, the best way to submit your response for this is on our [Google Form](#), but you can also do it by hand/word processed document and email to English@sjcr.net

During the time that theatres are shut, many of the big ones are making videos of their past productions available online.

Shakespeare's Globe's YouTube channel

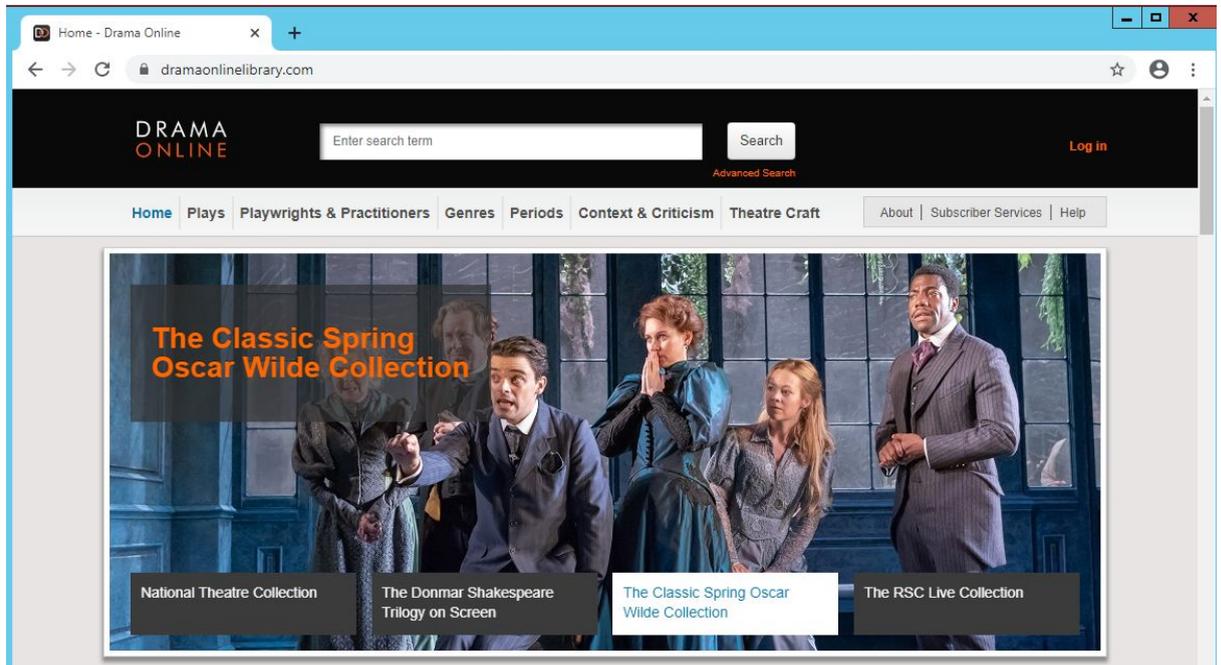
(<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCwN-jwNNNQN-8sfKG-gg8uA>) has a new (old) play every two weeks, as well as some excellent videos with the directors, cast and crew discussing their interpretations and experiences of the plays.

The National Theatre are doing something similar with a new play appearing on YouTube

(<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUDq1XzCY0NIOYVJvEMQjqw>) for a week every Thursday.

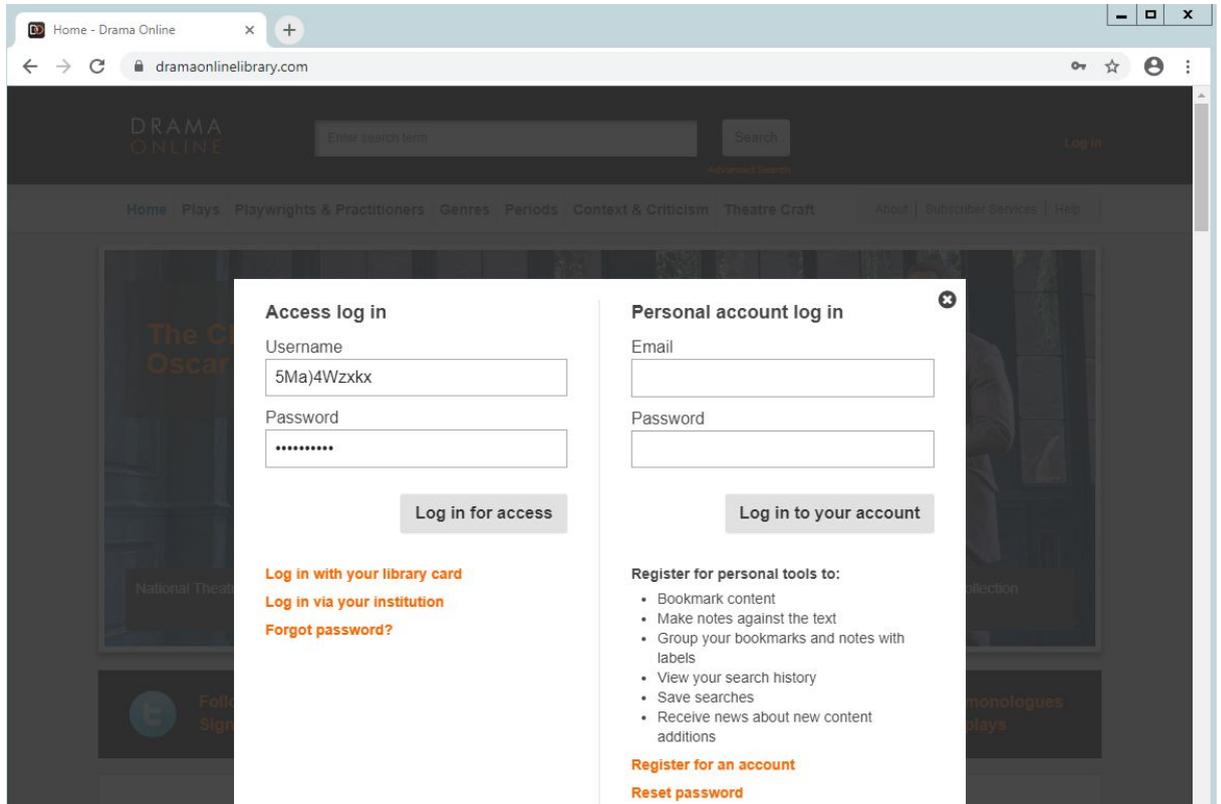
On top of this, for the duration of national school closures, a larger catalogue of National Theatre productions are available (and not just for a week at a time) through a school log-in on <https://www.dramaonlinelibrary.com/>. This is the one we will be using today. These log-in details are only for use by students and staff (including incoming students) and should not be passed on to other users.

- 1) Go to <https://www.dramaonlinelibrary.com/> and click the orange 'Log in' link in the top right-hand corner

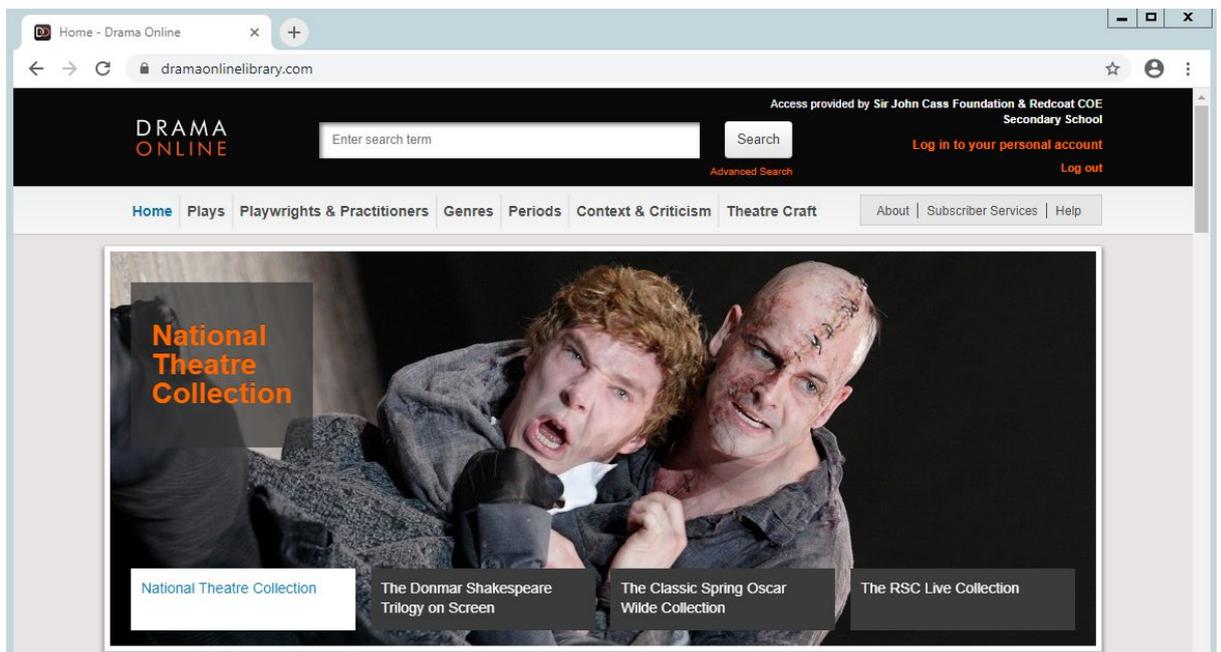




2) Enter the username **5Ma)4Wzxkx** and the password **0Vbx2Je&u)** under 'Access log in' and click 'Log in for access'

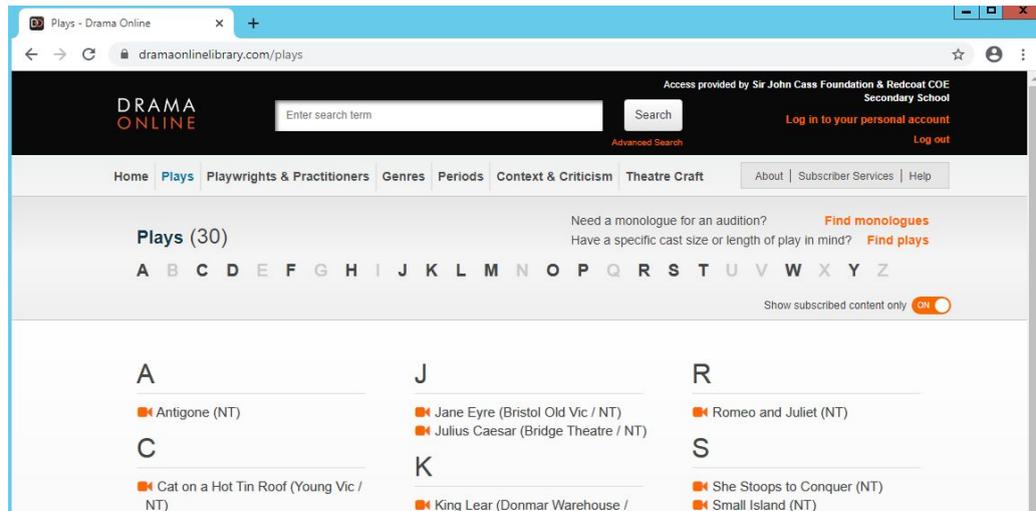


3) Click 'Plays'





- 4) For ease of navigation, click the toggle 'Show subscribed content only'. This will remove all the plays which we don't have access to from the list. Sometimes this toggle button does not appear – you can still find the plays using the full list, but try it in a different browser if you really need it!



Now choose your play! Some of them come with age-related guidance as they contain nudity, swearing, or adult content.

For the 'Drama' paper on A Level English Literature, you will study the plays *King Lear* by William Shakespeare and *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams, so you could definitely do worse things with your time than to watch the available versions of those two plays.

However, you will watch those (or other versions of them) during the course anyway, so it would really be even better preparation to choose some different theatre.

We are all going to watch 'Twelfth Night', starring the inimitable Tamsin Greig as Malvolia (a modern twist: in Shakespeare's original, the character is male and called Malvolio).

Three questions to respond to after watching:

1. This play is a 'comedy'. That does not simply mean that it has jokes in it (although there are plenty of moments which, even 400+ years after Shakespeare wrote it, still raise a smile). Do some research. What is the traditional literary definition of a 'comedy' play?
2. What elements of the play seem to undermine the optimistic spirit we might ordinarily associate with 'comedy'?
3. How was the experience of watching this play without studying it different to your previous experience of studying Shakespeare (for exams and 'assessments')?

Challenge: Listen to an Oxford University English Literature lecture on a Shakespeare play you know!

[Romeo and Juliet](#)

[Macbeth](#)

[Much Ado About Nothing](#)



Challenge: Watch more plays!

Everything available on that website is worth a watch, but the following come highly recommended:

Title	Why you should watch it	Time
<i>King Lear</i>	Our set Shakespeare text for the Drama paper and an absolute beast of a tragedy. This production stars the venerable Sir Derek Jacobi and uses a stripped back blank stage to focus our attention on the sheer humanity of the characters - a key concern of Shakespeare's play which strips away all the trappings of power to reveal humanity as 'a bare, forked animal'	2hrs 37mins
<i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i>	Our other set text for the Drama paper. This production features the awesome Gillian Anderson as Blanche DuBois, the fading Southern belle whose world is collapsing in a tailspin, reflected through the ceaselessly revolving stage of this intense production.	2hrs 47mins
<i>Frankenstein</i>	Another of our set texts covered here, although this is a fairly loose adaptation of Mary Shelley's novel. It does, however, stay very true to two fundamental drivers of Shelley's work: 1) the sympathy we feel for the 'monster' 2) the duality of the monster and Victor Frankenstein, the scientist who creates him, as reflected by the incredible fact that the two lead actors in this production (Benedict Cumberbatch and Jonny Lee Miller) swapped parts on alternate nights. Both versions are available on the site. The physical theatre and symbolic staging are astounding.	1hr 50-55mins
<i>Cat on a Hot Tin Roof</i>	Were it not for the nudity (from the start, but never in a particularly sexualized way), this would be the play we recommended that everyone watch to prepare for A Level English Literature. It's by Tennessee Williams, and works as a brilliant companion-piece to <i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i> . It explores sexuality, a descent into madness, and the 'mendacity' of the world. You do, however, need to be mature to watch this one!	2hrs 31mins
<i>Jane Eyre</i>	Another adaptation of a classic novel (and one which students often choose for coursework). This is a coming of age tale and a meditation on the limitations created by class and gender roles in the early 1800s. This production uses a symbolic set and an ensemble cast to race through the protagonist's life from the moment of her birth. The depth and breadth of the astonishing novel can never be fully translated to the stage, but something of its incendiary intensity is admirably conveyed here.	3hrs 10mins
<i>Hamlet</i>	Alongside <i>King Lear</i> , this is generally considered Shakespeare's defining tragic achievement. "Oh, what a piece of work is a man" muses the bard's most introspectively eloquent hero as he struggles with the nature of human existence in his discomfort with the violent course set before him: to avenge his father's death. This production, starring Rory Kinnear, turns Denmark into a police state to reflect modern anxieties around surveillance.	3hrs 32mins
<i>One Man, Two Guv'nors</i>	If <i>Hamlet</i> strikes you as a bit heavy, then maybe this is more like it: James Corden in a knock-about farce featuring audience interaction (who brings a hummus sandwich to a play?) and some inspired musical and physical silliness. With its roots in the Italian 'Commedia dell'arte' genre, though, this is 'literature' too. And blimey, it's fun!	2hrs 53mins



We'd love to hear your thoughts (from formalized review to single sentence response) on what you watch. Email English@sjcr.net



Session 3: Poetry and Context

(1 and a half hours)

Again, the ideal way for us to receive your responses is through our [Google Form](#), but you could also email them to: English@sjcr.net

Before we get into the poetry part, we are going to watch the documentary '*The Art of Gothic: Britain's Midnight Hour*', 'Episode 2: The City and the Soul' on iPlayer which is perfect for our contextual understanding of the Romantics, and *Frankenstein* (and even a bit of *King Lear* in terms of the ideas of what England 'used to be'!)

[Four - The Art of Gothic: Britain's Midnight Hour, The City and the Soul](#)

This is Episode 2. Episode 1 is worth watching as well as it defines the traits of the Gothic more specifically, but it is in this one that really nails our set texts. Within the first half hour it covers: *Frankenstein*, Coleridge (whose Rime of the Ancient Mariner is heavily referenced in *Frankenstein*, and who was the literary partner of Wordsworth), and Blake.

Watch from the start - the first thing it covers in detail is the English Department Head, Mr Knight's favourite painting: 'Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump' by Joseph Wright of Derby; then it segues into *Frankenstein* and keeps going with relevant literary context for the next 20 minutes or so.

The second half is still interesting, and deals with the ideal of a lost, idyllic past which is very important for the Romantic poetry that we study and for *Lear*, but it focuses rather more on architecture, and you will be forgiven for switching off after 35 mins or so.

Three quick questions:

- 1) Where did Mary and Percy Shelley declare their undying love and decide to elope?
- 2) What did Blake say was the "tree of death"?
- 3) What does the narrator say was "undermined as people flocked to the cities in search of jobs"?



Now, here's a poem which you may well be familiar with from your GCSE study (if you did AQA's 'Power and Conflict' cluster). It's on the A Level 'Romantics' selection as well...

London

BY WILLIAM BLAKE

I wander thro' each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow.
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,
In every Infants cry of fear,
In every voice: in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear

How the Chimney-sweepers cry
Every black'ning Church appalls,
And the hapless Soldiers sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls.

But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlots curse
Blasts the new-born Infants tear
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.

Here's a video of Akala and Mr Gee discussing the poem, for anyone who doesn't know it well:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02m6hrk>

But we don't want you to do that sort of academic analysis right now. **You have a choice of tasks to bring your understanding to life. Choose one of the following:**

- 1) Write a comparison of this poem with a modern rap/song about urban life. Alternatively, adapt Blake's words into a rap of your own and create a voice recording of you performing it!
- 2) Write an imitation called 'Lockdown London' describing what you see and reflect on as you wander through the strange, altered version of the city in which we find ourselves currently living. Experience Simon Armitage's poem 'Lockdown' [here](#) first.
- 3) Write a humorous parody of Blake's poem called 'The Countryside' in which you explore anxieties about rural life.

Challenge tasks:

- Deepen your understanding of Blake's work in a more academic way by watching these short talks from university lecturers available on Massolit (login details on last page):

[Professor John McCrae of the University of Nottingham discusses 'London'](#)

[Dr Ross Wilson of Cambridge University discusses Blake's collection 'Songs of Innocence and Experience'](#)



- Find and read at least three poems by any of the following modern poets: Patience Agbabi; Simon Armitage; Carol Ann Duffy; Daljit Nagra; Sinead Morrissey; Tishani Doshi; Seamus Heaney

That’s your three first weeks’ worth of brain-expansion. Next time, we’ll be looking at...

Session 4: Prose

Session 5: Essay writing

Session 6: My summer of independent intellect

In the meantime, here are some more great resources we can give you access to:

Website	Username	Password	What you will find there
https://www.massolit.io/	jcs011@jconlineresources.org	JCSQualitative (<i>case sensitive</i>)	Mini-lectures for English Literature, History, Psychology, Government and Politics, Philosophy, and Classics. All created and delivered by university lecturers but recorded in manageable chunks of about 8-15 minutes each.
https://www.jstor.org/	SirJohnCass	KGK9tj3p	A huge library of scholarly articles and essays on just about every academic topic. This is what the best university students use to do their research.

And, because the greatest thing any student (especially one with an interest in English Literature) can do to improve their brain is just READ, here’s a list to get you started. See where it takes you...

Author	Book
Achebe, Chinua	Things Fall Apart
Atwood, Margaret	The Handmaid’s Tale
Austen, Jane	Pride and Prejudice
Banks, Iain	The Wasp Factory
Barker, Pat	Regeneration
Brontë, Charlotte	Jane Eyre
Brontë, Emily	Wuthering Heights
Burgess, Anthony	A Clockwork Orange
Carter, Angela	The Bloody Chamber
Conrad, Joseph	Heart of Darkness
Dickens, Charles	Bleak House
Eugenides, Jeffrey	The Virgin Suicides
Faulks, Sebastian	Birdsong
Fitzgerald, F. Scott	The Great Gatsby
Hardy, Thomas	Tess of the D’Urbervilles



Heller, Joseph	Catch 22
Ishiguro, Kazuo	The Remains of the Day
Kesey, Ken	One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest
McCarthy, Cormac	The Road
McEwan, Ian	Atonement
Mitchell, David	Cloud Atlas
Morrison, Toni	Beloved
Orwell, George	1984
Plath, Sylvia	The Bell Jar
Smith, Zadie	White Teeth
Stoker, Bram	Dracula
Tartt, Donna	The Secret History
Wilde, Oscar	The Picture of Dorian Gray
Woolf, Virginia	Mrs Dalloway