

# Preparation for A-Level English Literature



# Introduction

Welcome to A-level Literature! This pack contains a mini introduction to all the units that we study at A-level. You will not get through it all! The idea of this pack is for you to have some ownership; you can choose what you fancy exploring.

There's a range of research, things to watch and things to read. Almost all of the recommended reading and watching is available to access online for free. You may choose to buy the kindle book or order a paper copy online (good luck!) but it isn't necessary.

Within each topic, there's some context and genre research and some recommended reading/watching of similar texts. I suggest you choose a topic at a time, choose a few things to read and watch. Make sure you make notes somewhere and keep them safe!

We've included a selection of reading, watching and listening. To get the most out of this, I suggest you choose a nice selection; don't fool yourself into thinking that watching all the film versions of 'similar texts' is just as good preparation for A-level as reading around genres and reading so actual books. It's not!

Enjoy!

## General Preparation and Reading

Academic Writing

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/gothedistance/academicwriting>

Audio Series of the Classics

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p06w4v4x>

Open Book

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000h7m3>

The Novel (BBC Radio 4)

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p005463z>

Audio Classic Short Stories

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p06w4v4x/episodes/player>

## Shakespearean Comedy

At A-level, we will read and study *The Taming of the Shrew* as part of our 'Love through the Ages' work.

In preparation, it would be useful to:

### Grasp the Genres

#### Shakespearean Comedy

<https://www.nosweatshakespeare.com/shakespeares-plays/play-types/comedy-plays/>

<https://www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/an-introduction-to-shakespeares-comedy>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vSndKGKThHg> (5 mins)

#### Shakespeare was inspired by Commedia Dell'Arte

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h\\_OTAXWt8hY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_OTAXWt8hY) (10 mins)

<https://www.britannica.com/art/commedia-dellarte>

## Understand the Context

### **Upstart Crow**

In this excellent TV programme starring David Mitchell as William Shakespeare, we are introduced to Shakespeare's life, the Elizabethan context and the plot of many of his plays through entertaining television!  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episodes/b0959g26/upstart-crow?seriesId=b07bp62s> (30 mins each)

### **Cunk on Shakespeare**

Philomena Cunk presents a witty 30 minute show on Shakespeare, his life and writing.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9YeCpHoy9EQ> (30 mins)

### **In Our Time (BBC Radio 4)**

#### **Shakespeare's Life**

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00547ct> (45 mins)

## Watch or Read another Shakespearean Comedy

Knowledge of other Shakespearean comedies will help you understand the genre and draw parallels with them and *The Taming of the Shrew*. You can also choose to write about one of the below for your coursework.

### **Much ado about Nothing**

Available soon from: <https://www.rsc.org.uk/news/bbc-culture-in-quarantine>  
Learning Resources <https://www.rsc.org.uk/shakespeare-learning-zone/much-ado-about-nothing>

### **As You Like It**

Register for free trial to watch (<https://www.marquee.tv/>)

### **Love's Labour's Lost**

Register for free trial to watch (<https://www.marquee.tv/>)

### **A Midsummer Night's Dream** (Video File also attached)

Some related learning activities from the Royal Shakespeare Company:  
<https://www.rsc.org.uk/shakespeare-learning-zone/a-midsummer-nights-dream>

In Our Time (BBC Radio 4) show on A Midsummer Night's Dream  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m00046rp>

# Poetry through the Ages

At A-level, we study a collection of poems as well as prepare to respond to unseen poetry.

In preparation it would be useful to:

## Know the different poetic forms

Research the following forms and read the examples:

1. Allegory - "Time, Real and Imaginary" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge
2. Ballad - "As You Came from the Holy Land" by Sir Walter Raleigh
3. Blank verse - "The Princess" by Alfred, Lord Tennyson
4. Elegy - "Elegy Written in a Country Courtyard" by Thomas Gray
5. Epic - "The Odyssey" by Homer
6. Free verse - "The Waste-Land" by TS Eliot
7. Haiku - "How Many Gallons" by Issa
8. Limerick - "There Was a Young Lady of Dorking" by Edward Lear
9. Lyric - "When I Have Fears" by John Keats
10. Narrative - "The Raven" by Edgar Allen Poe
11. Ode - "Ode to a Nightingale" by Percy Bysshe Shelley
12. Pastoral - "To a Mouse" by Robert Burns
13. Sonnet (English & Petrarchan). "Sonnet 116" by Shakespeare & "London, 1802" by William Wordsworth

## Have knowledge of the different literary periods

Research the following literary periods or groups of poets. Find out the form they usually used, the themes often found in their poems, contextual factors that influenced their writing and key poets. I've included a website or radio programme for each but you can do your research elsewhere if you choose.

### Renaissance

<https://www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/love-poetry-in-renaissance-england>

### Metaphysical Poets

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00cbqhq> (BBC Radio 4)

### Cavalier Poets

<http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/cavintro.htm>

### The Gothic

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0054792> (BBC Radio 4)

### The Romantics

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00546ws> (BBC Radio 4)

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p004y24r> (BBC Radio 4)

## Take an Open University Course

### Approaching Prose Fiction

<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/literature/approaching-prose-fiction/content-section-0?active-tab=description-tab>

### Introducing Homer's Iliad

<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/introducing-homers-iliad/content-section-0>

## Approaching Poetry (Intermediate)

<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/literature/approaching-poetry/content-section-0?active-tab=description-tab>

## Read other works by some of our set poets

### William Blake

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/poetryseason/>

### Robert Burns

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/poetryseason/poets/robert\\_burns.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/poetryseason/poets/robert_burns.shtml)

### Lord Byron

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/poetryseason/poets/lord\\_byron.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/poetryseason/poets/lord_byron.shtml)

### John Donne

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/poetryseason/poets/john\\_donne.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/poetryseason/poets/john_donne.shtml)

### Christina Rossetti

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/poetryseason/poets/christina\\_rossetti.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/poetryseason/poets/christina_rossetti.shtml)

## Listen to programmes about poetry

The Poet Laureate has gone to his Shed

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p085jg48/episodes/downloads>

Poetry Season

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/poetryseason/>

## 1920s America

We will be studying *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald in our work on 'Love through the Ages'. To prepare, you could:

## Research the context of America in 1920s

### America in Colour

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kjqZwAAUDk>

### The Class Ceiling

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m000bpvx/novels-that-shaped-our-world-series-1-3-the-class-ceiling>

## Read a Similar Text

*The Sound and Fury* by William Faulkner

*Passing* by Nella Larsen

*This Side of Paradise* by F. Scott Fitzgerald

# Southern Gothic

For you're a-level, you will study A Streetcar Named Desire. To prepare, research the genre, context and/or read similar texts.

## Genre

<https://oxfordre.com/literature/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-304>

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jul/04/southern-gothic-fiction-harper-lee-go-set-watchmen>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9HwvpXvLZQM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9VzRhVLxIGU>

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

## Tennessee Williams

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00p8dkb>

## Context

Documentary about texts and films set in South America

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00p8dkb>

## Similar Texts

Read one of these Tennessee Williams's plays.

The Glass Menagerie

[https://www.pval.org/cms/lib/NY19000481/Centricity/Domain/105/the\\_glass\\_menagerie\\_messy\\_full\\_text.pdf](https://www.pval.org/cms/lib/NY19000481/Centricity/Domain/105/the_glass_menagerie_messy_full_text.pdf)

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof

<http://shsdavisapes.pbworks.com/w/file/attach/76523768/Cat%20on%20a%20Hot%20Tin%20Roof.pdf>

Night of the Iguana

<https://coldreads.files.wordpress.com/2014/08/iguana.pdf>

The Rose Tattoo

[https://archive.org/stream/in.ernet.dli.2015.170966/2015.170966.The-Rose-Tattoo-And-Camino-Real\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/in.ernet.dli.2015.170966/2015.170966.The-Rose-Tattoo-And-Camino-Real_djvu.txt)

# Dystopian

We will be studying The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood. I recommend that you DON'T watch the series and DON'T read the sequel as they make studying the text quite confusing!

To prepare you could research:

## Margaret Atwood

The Novel: A Female's World?

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m000b8mf/novels-that-shaped-our-world-series-1-1-a-womans-place>

## Genre: Dystopian Fiction

Why is Dystopian Fiction so Appealing?

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3csyv0r>

In Our Time: Melvin Bragg on Utopias

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p003k9fz>

## Similar Fiction

### Brave New World

Everyone is made in test tubes and society is controlled with pleasure.

E-book: <https://www.idph.com.br/conteudos/ebooks/BraveNewWorld.pdf>

Audiobook: [https://stories.audible.com/pdp/B002V1BVK4?ref=adbl\\_ent\\_anon\\_sc\\_pdp\\_pc\\_0](https://stories.audible.com/pdp/B002V1BVK4?ref=adbl_ent_anon_sc_pdp_pc_0)

Discussion: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00jn8bc>

### 1984

You are always being watched, media is controlled and manipulated by the government and society is controlled with fear.

Ebook: <https://www.planetebook.com/free-ebooks/1984.pdf>

Audiobook: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=scqLliarGpM&disable\\_polymer=true](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=scqLliarGpM&disable_polymer=true)

### The Power by Naomi Alderman

Women rule the world.

*As it was published in 2010, you'd have to buy this in order to read.*

### Fahrenheit 451

Books are banned. Firefighters don't put out fires; they burn books.

Ebook: <https://www.fsusd.org/cms/lib03/CA01001943/Centricity/Domain/2034/Fahrenheit%20451.pdf>

Audiobook: <https://archive.org/details/Fahrenheit451-Audiobook/Fahrenheit+451-Part02.mp3>

## Dystopian Watching

### Noughts & Crosses

Malorie Blackman's book is more like a teen romance but the new BBC series has turned it into a scarily possible dystopian.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p082w992>

### Black Mirror

*\*This is to help with your understanding of the dystopian genre. Binge watching the entire series is not adequate preparation for A-level Literature! I recommend you choose 1-2 episode for work purposes.\**

A fairly disturbing series available on Netflix. Each episode is standalone and creates a dystopian world in which technology is damaging. Read the blurb first to see if it's for you. I recommend Series One Episode Three in which your entire memory is on a disk in your brain which you're able to re-watch and even play for others. Series 4 Episode 2 is probably quite relevant to you as teenagers! A mum has a device put in her daughter's eyes which enables her to see and hear everything he daughter does. Not only that, she can also control how much she can see and hear.

# Carol Ann Duffy- Modern Poetry

We will be studying Carol Ann Duffy's 'Feminine Gospels' collection.

Research her life and influences here:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/carol-ann-duffy>

<https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/carol-ann-duffy>

Find 5 of her poems online (NOT from the Feminine Gospels collection) and see if you can start to identify tone, style, political messages, language use etc that is typical of Duffy's work.

## Post-1945 Literature

At A-level, you will learn how to approach unseen prose written after 1945. Understanding the context by watching or listening to some of the programmes below and/or reading some of the key texts from the period would help you prepare.

### Context of late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> Century Literature

Masculinity in Literature in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (BBC Radio 4)

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00546lx>

Multiculturalism (BBC Radio 4)

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00545hw>

Feminism in the 20th Century (BBC Radio 4)

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00545b0>

The Empire Writes Back

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m000bhgt/novels-that-shaped-our-world-series-1-2-the-empire-writes-back>

### Key Books Post-1945

*As these are newer books, you will struggle to access these on the internet for free. You may be able to get some.*

The Catcher in the Rye by J. D. Salinger

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest by Ken Kesey

Revolutionary Road by Justin Haythe

The Bell Jar by Sylvia Plath

Oranges are not the only Fruit by Jeanette Winterson

The Buddha of Suburbia by Hanif Kureishi

The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy

Atonement by Ian McEwan

The Help by Kathryn Stockett

Girl, Woman, Other by Bernardine Evaristo



The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini