

# Progressing from GCSE English: wider reading & literary criticism

A level English Literature studies how writing enables the exploration of the human condition through a plethora of themes: love, tragedy, loss, loneliness, bravery to name a few. Placing an emphasis on interpreting texts through a critical lens, students will be able to develop their understanding of how writers and speakers craft language and will look at connections between texts as well as the significance and influence of context.

Reading, discussing and writing are key. You will be expected not just to read, but to develop the skill of thinking critically about what you read and of analysing texts to work out how the author's use of situation and language create powerful impressions. In addition to 'set texts' which you have to study, you will be expected to explore your own interests: indeed a willingness to read a range of literary and non-literary texts will be essential. This wider reading list aims to bridge the gap between the GCSE programmes of study and those of A Level.

**Make notes while you read: keep a note of what you liked and what you didn't like; what you understood and what you didn't understand and what reminded you of something else that you had already read. You'll be doing your future self an enormous favour.**

## Fiction

*Frankenstein* – Mary Shelley

*Dracula* – Bram Stoker

*The Handmaid's Tale* – Margaret Atwood

*The Lovely Bones*- Alice Seabold

*The Great Gatsby*- F. Scott Fitzgerald

*Things Fall Apart*- Chinua Achibe

*God of Small Things* – Arundhati Roy

*1984*- George Orwell

*Wuthering Heights* – Jane Eyre

*Wide Sargasso Sea*- Jean Rhys

*Purple Hibiscus, Americanah* - Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

*Heart of Darkness*- Joseph Conrad

*The Colour Purple*- Alice Walker

*The Bell Jar*- Sylvia Plath

*To Kill a Mockingbird*- Harper Lee

*Brave New World*- Alduous Huxley

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* - Oscar Wilde

*Tess of the d'Urbervilles*- Thomas Hardy

*The Word for World Is Forest*- Ursula Le Guin

## Plays & Poetry

Poetry is challenging to read, especially independently, but reading poems from Anthologies is a good place to start. Read a couple of lines until you find a style or a poet that you like. Good anthologies include: *Touched with Fire*, *Poems on the Underground*, *The Rattlebag*, and *Staying Alive* series. Read modern poetry in the Poetry Review or the shortlisted TS. Eliot poetry prize collections.

The Metaphysical Poets: *A selection* (John Donne)

Henrik Ibsen: *A selection*

Robert Browning: *A selection* (Porphyria's Lover, The Laboratory)

Seamus Heaney: *A selection*

Sylvia Plath: *A selection*

Ted Hughes: *A selection*

Shakespeare (particularly the tragedies)

Keats: *A selection*

*Goblin Market* - Christina Rossetti

*Paradise Lost*- John Milton (Chapter I & II)

*The Iliad*- Homer

*The Odyssey*- Homer

*Telling Tales*- Patience Agbabi

## Non-fiction

*Essais*- Montaigne

*In Cold Blood*- Truman Capote

*Stasiland* - Anna Funder

*Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*- Anne Frank

*Women and Power*- Mary Beard

*Educated*- Tara Westover

*We Should All be Feminists*- Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche

*No One is Too Small to Make A Difference* - Greta Thunberg

*The Swerve: How the Renaissance Began*- Stephen Greenblatt

## Critical perspectives

Take any book that you have enjoyed reading and see if what interpretation(s) you can take from looking at it through the lens of any of the critical approaches below.

### **Feminist and Gender Criticism**

This approach "examines how sexual identity influences the creation and reception of literary works". Originally an offshoot of feminist movements, gender criticism today includes approaches, including the so-called "masculinist" approach. Feminism's central idea is that the patriarchal attitudes that have dominated western thought have resulted, consciously or unconsciously, in literature "full of unexamined 'male-produced' assumptions." Feminist criticism attempts to correct this imbalance by analysing and challenging such attitudes - by questioning. Other goals of feminist critics include exploring how literature reflects or rejects the social forces that have historically kept the sexes from achieving "total equality."

<http://writersinspire.org/content/feminist-approaches-literature>

Laura Mulvey- *The Male Gaze*:

<https://www.asu.edu/courses/fms504/total-readings/mulvey-visualpleasure.pdf>

Judith Butler- *Gender Trouble*:

[http://lauragonzalez.com/TC/BUTLER\\_gender\\_trouble.pdf](http://lauragonzalez.com/TC/BUTLER_gender_trouble.pdf)

Toril Moi: Feminist, female, feminine

"I'm not a feminist but...": How feminism became the F word

[http://www.torilmoi.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/Feminist\\_Female\\_Feminine-ocr.pdf](http://www.torilmoi.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/Feminist_Female_Feminine-ocr.pdf)

### **Eco criticism**

This is the study of literature and the environment from an interdisciplinary point of view, where the presentation of nature, environmental concerns and location are explored.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/0013838X.2010.518038>

### **Marxist Criticism**

This focuses on the economic and political elements of literature. Marxist criticism often argues that all literature is political. It is frequently criticised as judgmental, but Marxist criticism "can illuminate

political and economic dimensions of literature other approaches overlook." There is a sense that text is separable from the literary times which produced it.

A Very Short Introduction: Marx [https://archive.org/details/marxveryshortint00sing\\_0](https://archive.org/details/marxveryshortint00sing_0)

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-954X.1977.tb03233.x?journalCode=sora>

## Post-colonial

This focuses on the cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism, focusing on the human consequences of the control and exploitation of colonised people and their lands. Post-colonialism is a critical theory analysis of the history, culture, literature, and discourse of European imperial power.

<https://study.com/academy/lesson/post-colonialism-in-literature-definition-theory-examples.html>

Frantz Fanon- The Negro and Language (Extract from *Black Skin White Masks*)  
[http://abahlali.org/files/fanon\\_on\\_language.pdf](http://abahlali.org/files/fanon_on_language.pdf)

*The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*- Neil Lazarus, 2004.

## Psychological Criticism

This approach reflects the effect that modern psychology has had upon both literature and literary criticism. Fundamental figures in psychological criticism include Sigmund Freud (Freudian approach - psychoanalytic theories: wish-fulfilment, sexuality, the unconscious, repression, language, dreams and symbols) and Carl Jung (Jungian approach - whose theories about the unconscious are also valuable to literature).

A Very Short Introduction: Freud <https://epdf.pub/freud-a-very-short-introduction-very-short-introductions.html>

Freud's Interpretation of Dreams, 1900

Freud's psychoanalysis: [https://www.d.umn.edu/~rvaidyan/mktg4731/Freud\\_Division\\_Of\\_Mind.pdf](https://www.d.umn.edu/~rvaidyan/mktg4731/Freud_Division_Of_Mind.pdf)

<https://literariness.org/2016/04/16/freudian-psychoanalysis/>

## Authorship & intentionality

Death of the author: La mort de l'auteur- Roland Barthes:

[https://monoskop.org/images/3/38/Barthes\\_Roland\\_1968\\_1984\\_La\\_mort\\_de\\_l\\_auteur.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/3/38/Barthes_Roland_1968_1984_La_mort_de_l_auteur.pdf)

Birth of the Reader- Foucault

## Other

**Oxford University Press: Very Short Introductions:** this series offers concise and original introductions to a wide range of subjects.

A Very Short Introduction: English Literature

<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/english-literature-a-very-short-introduction-9780199569267?cc=gb&lang=en&>

A Very Short Introduction: Romanticism

<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/romanticism-a-very-short-introduction-9780199568918?cc=gb&lang=en&>

A Very Short Introduction: Tragedy

<https://epdf.pub/tragedy-a-short-introduction.html>

A Very Short Introduction: Shakespeare

<https://www.veryshortintroductions.com/view/10.1093/actrade/9780198718628.001.0001/actrade-9780198718628>

## It doesn't have to be all Greek to you...

Much of English Literature has developed from two sources: the bible and Greek Mythology.

Exploring the following stories will give you a strong foundation.

<http://www.museumnetwork.org/myths/index.html>

An Introduction to greek tragedy:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSr6mP-zxUc> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSRLK7SogvE>

## TED

<https://www.ted.com/watch/ted-ed>

Paper people: Harry Baker- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQBzOfIagXU>

Ken Robinson: Changing Educational Paradigms

[https://www.ted.com/talks/sir\\_ken\\_robinson\\_do\\_schools\\_kill\\_creativity](https://www.ted.com/talks/sir_ken_robinson_do_schools_kill_creativity)

10 talks for when you wish you had time to read:

[https://www.ted.com/playlists/273/talks\\_for\\_when\\_you\\_wish\\_you\\_ha](https://www.ted.com/playlists/273/talks_for_when_you_wish_you_ha)

The power of fiction:

[https://www.ted.com/playlists/346/the\\_power\\_of\\_fiction\\_1](https://www.ted.com/playlists/346/the_power_of_fiction_1)

How Fiction can help us better understand our reality:

[https://www.ted.com/talks/christian\\_wickert\\_how\\_fiction\\_can\\_help\\_us\\_better\\_understand\\_our\\_reality](https://www.ted.com/talks/christian_wickert_how_fiction_can_help_us_better_understand_our_reality)

How books can open your mind:

[https://www.ted.com/talks/lisa\\_bu\\_how\\_books\\_can\\_open\\_your\\_mind](https://www.ted.com/talks/lisa_bu_how_books_can_open_your_mind)

We Should All Be Feminists:

[https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_ngozi\\_adichie\\_we\\_should\\_all\\_be\\_feminists](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_we_should_all_be_feminists)

The Danger of a Single Story:

[https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_ngozi\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story)

## Radio 4

Bibliotherapy: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/collection:p02h15xg/p083x2r1>

The Verb: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000h2kq>

*In Our Time* with Melvyn Bragg:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/598SVYJ2smP8qJlpH29y7Vj/podcasts>

## Shakespeare

Sheldrake on Shakespeare- James Sheldrake offers some short and digestible podcasts on Shakespeare's plays: <https://sheldrakeonshakespeare.com->

Akala: Hip Hop & Shakespeare:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DSbtkLA3GrY>

The Oxford Union Debate: Kanye is more relevant than Shakespeare (8 parts)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dZhx1CPY2xs>