



Year 12 English Literature AS Level Preparation activities/ reading

Unit 1- Prose and Drama

On the Unit 1 side of the course, we will read a 20th century play and a 19th century novel.

A Streetcar Named Desire

To prepare for reading this play I would encourage you to research and read widely on New Orleans in the 1940s. Understanding the era is critical for ensuring success when analysing this play. In addition, I would recommend reading (or at least extracts of) the Donald Spoto biography on the playwright Tennessee Williams entitled *The Kindness of Strangers*.

As this is a drama, ideally you should watch a stage adaptation to aid your understanding. Currently The National Theatre are streaming their critically acclaimed 2014 production starring Gillian Anderson. If possible, also watch the 1951 Kazan film starring Vivien Leigh.

Sense and Sensibility

Our second text is *Sense and Sensibility* by Jane Austen. This can be accessed and read free online.

In order to fully appreciate the era in which Austen was writing, I would suggest researching Regency England. In particular read up on: The Gentry, early 19th century society and marriage/courtship.

You may find online chapter summaries as a support for the text when you first start reading.

Unit 2 - Poetry

On the Unit 2 side of the course, we will study two poetry collections.

Owen Sheers

The first collection is 'Skirrid Hill' by Owen Sheers. The first thing you could do to prepare for this is buy the collection of poems (available online) and begin reading and thinking about them. It will be so valuable to have prior knowledge of the text before we begin studying them in class! If you wish to, you could begin making notes on the poems, thinking about themes, ideas, language and techniques. Much of our time will be spent considering how the poets create meaning through their use of language and devices, which is something you can begin to consider at home. Another key element of the course is considering how context (background) affects the way we consider texts. As such, you need to have a good working knowledge of the poet, his life and work, so start doing some research on this. On reading the poems, you may



also want to do some specific contextual research into the subjects of each poem. Some specific areas you may wish to research are:

- ⇒ Sheers' family and romantic life
- ⇒ The decline of the steel industry in Wales
- ⇒ The issue of Welsh national identity

Seamus Heaney

The second collection we will study is 'Field Work' by Seamus Heaney. This collection of poems was written by the Irish poet in the mid 1970s, in the midst of the Irish Troubles. I would again suggest you buy and read the poems, perhaps making some notes on how meaning is created, themes and ideas. To prepare yourselves with contextual knowledge, start by researching the life, work and background of the poet, Seamus Heaney. Many of the poems address his married life, so this is a particular area to explore. Further to this, the majority of the poems in the collection in some way address the following areas that I would suggest you research:

- ⇒ The events of the Irish Troubles in the 1970s
- ⇒ Anglo-Irish relations in the 20th Century
- ⇒ Religious conflict (Catholicism and Church of England / Protestant)
- ⇒ The geographical and political division of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland

Written Tasks

We do not require completion of any written tasks prior to commencement of the course. You may wish, however, to practise composing written responses to individual poems in the form of a close reading. There is an excellent guide on how to do so below:

<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/undergraduate/modules/fulllist/second/en227/closetreading/>