

A Level English Literature at Chigwell School

English is arguably the most vocational subject around. It equips us with the ability to deconstruct language, synthesise and prioritise information from a range of different sources and to communicate ideas in the written and spoken word. Complementary to many other A level subjects, the studying of English also engages the imagination and provides us with the opportunity to explore some of the most profound expressions of human emotion and endeavour.

We study the AQA (B) syllabus because we believe it allows an intellectual flexibility and curiosity that prepares students for independent learning at university and beyond but studying English.

At AS students will be examined in two units:

Unit 1: Aspects of Narrative

This is a two hour (open text) examination in which students write on a minimum of two novels and two poetry texts. In recent years the text choices have included Ian McEwan's 'Enduring Love', F. Scott Fitzgerald's 'The Great Gatsby', the poetry of John Keats, Thomas Hardy and Alfred Lord Tennyson.

Unit 2: Tragedy

This is a coursework unit in which students produce two essays focusing on how the genre of tragedy is explored in a range of drama texts. In recent years the text choices have included Shakespeare's 'Antony and Cleopatra' and 'Hamlet', in addition to Tennessee Williams' 'A Streetcar Named Desire'.

The department prides itself on the strong uptake of English to A2 level – a very small percentage of students leave after the Lower Sixth year. Accordingly, our commitment to wider reading and critical debate is integrated in our teaching practices from the offset and students find that they are well equipped to deal with the rigours of the 'stretch and challenge' aspect of A2 study.

At A2 students will be examined in two units:

Unit 3: The Gothic

This is a two hour (closed text) examination in which students write on a minimum of three texts, although the department makes the study of four texts compulsory. In recent years the text choices have included Webster's 'The White Devil', Shakespeare's 'Macbeth', Chaucer's 'The Pardoner's Tale', and Angela Carter's 'The Bloody Chamber'.

Unit 4: Independent Criticism and Comparison

This is a coursework unit in which students produce two essays, one of which requires students to write comparatively about texts and one of which requires students to critique a text from a specific theoretical standpoint (as laid down by the examination board's pre-released critical anthology.) In recent years comparative essays have looked at post-colonial literature or Kitchen Sink drama like John Osborne's 'Look Back in Anger' drawing connections between this seminal piece and the work of Williams, Ibsen and Strindberg. Literary theory has been closely applied to the work of the metaphysical poets.

We have high expectations of our A Level students; they are, after all, academic role models for students in the years below. Consequently, we expect that they will be fully involved in the literary society, in contributions to and the editing of school publications and in sharing with others their love of wider reading. In recent years the English department has put on productions of sixth form set texts like Brian Friel's 'Translations' and Shakespeare's 'Macbeth' in addition to organising highly inspiring residential trips to Dublin, Belfast, Hardy's Wessex.