

The Story of English at KLA

Students begin this story in Victorian London, studying *Oliver Twist*. Oliver, and his origins in the workhouse, show the political nature of narrative – as well as being excited by archetypal characters, especially the ominous Bill Sikes, we see that novels and literature can be more than just story and relate to discussing the context of the day. The use of an abridged text provides our way in, although we are also keen to offer the students extracts from the original text, seeking to widen their vocabulary which we also build explicitly throughout the course. The pace of this narrative is augmented by our Reading for Pleasure texts, which has a dual purpose – to instil a love and excitement of books, and model fluent reading that can captivate readers. We want our Year 7 students to find their own voice in English, and this work is supplemented with our Writing curriculum which combines explicit skills and grammar sharpening with extended writing about intriguing settings and experiences. We also bring the novel to life with some dramatic presentation of key scenes. Confidence of expression and articulation will be key in our study of English, and this work builds on *Oliver Twist*'s focus as an origin story, as well as the basic developmental chronology of plot. Socialisation in our new school is important and this work seeks to support the students getting to know one another.

From this introduction to English at secondary school, students then travel back in time to consider how storytelling has been shaped through generations and across cultures, as a vital method of exchanging knowledge, values and lived experiences. Students will revisit the myths and folklore of ancient worlds and civilisations, opening windows not just into the past but to the wider world as we explore different cultural perspectives. This journey into our diverse surroundings finds us shift our focus to storytelling through global poetry, completing a study of the three core literary genres. Giants in the field of contemporary poetry such as our current 'Poet Laureate' Simon Armitage, Maya Angelou, and Chinua Achebe are explored alongside towering figures from our literary heritage such as William Blake, with students connecting how global, timeless experiences and issues are chronicled using the poetic form. These poems – like many tales from our ancient past – use animals as metaphors to expose complex, real world issues and our writing focus changes to discursive, on the theme of animal rights. All the while, students will practise their own narrative writing, using their imagination to create tales inspired by these stories.

After this experience of myths and legends, students immerse themselves in the fantastical world of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Another exciting and engaging text, this is our students first encounter with Shakespeare at secondary school. The play has been chosen for its accessibility and sense of fun – we want the children to enjoy the confusion and slapstick nature of the play! We discuss Shakespeare and his time, to embed early the knowledge that the students will need later on, and we are keen to show the context of the world that Shakespeare is writing in. Our writing unit builds on this, again emphasising the students' own voices as they communicate in a variety of personal transactional styles. Again, we find the opportunity to link to speaking and listening skills with the dramatic presentation of soliloquies.

Year 8 spirals back to Victorian London again – this time with the enigmatic, cultural icon at the centre of the *Sherlock Holmes* short stories. Students build from their experience of abridged texts in Year 7 and now read unabridged versions of classic Holmes mysteries. Again, literary context is important, and we study the grimy London that Holmes inhabits, to help students understand some of the unfamiliar vocabulary that they will encounter. Holmes' deductions become a metaphor for the active reading we encourage our students to undertake – we want them to enjoy solving the crimes. The ambivalence of Holmes' character is the focus of the assessment here – more complex than the villainous Sikes, Holmes has both admirable and questionable traits. This nuance and

apparent contradiction is something we want the students to wrestle with. As ever, Reading for Pleasure continues apace. Students' own writing builds on the skills of Year 7 setting work by developing descriptions of rounded characters and structured narratives, as well as the dramatic incorporation of those characters into a Holmes and Watson scene.

After Christmas, students fast-forward from the Victorian era to the 20th century, encountering George Orwell's classic, *Animal Farm*. We examine how the symbolic use of animals echoes the Year 7 work on myths and here the concept of allegory is introduced. Although the text may appear simpler to the first encounter with *Oliver*, its ideas and social messages are now more sophisticated and nuanced. The political nature of the text sharply anchors with the global voices explored in Year 7 and is a vehicle to learn about the power of persuasive rhetoric, which the students emulate in the writing of their own persuasive speeches. Again, we push the notion of individual voice.

Mirroring the structure of Year 7, we return to Shakespeare at the end of the academic year, progressing from the simple comedy of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to the complex tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*. Through the course of Key Stage 3, the characters that students meet become increasingly three-dimensional, and this is certainly true of the play's protagonists. Is Juliet brave and formidable, or reckless and foolish? How does Romeo transform from a peaceful gentleman to a ruthless killer? Students' exposure to unfamiliar and challenging language also increases, as classes closely examine key extracts from the play and unpick the meaning of Shakespeare's words. The poetic style of speech and use of sonnets through the text lends itself to a writing unit focused on producing different forms of poetry and creative expression. This practice is, as before, supported by refining grammar skills and deconstructing writers' methods, which allows students the tools to articulate their ideas.

Year 9 begins with the dark imagination of Susan Hill and her novel *The Woman in Black* as we embark upon our adventures into the Gothic genre. Students will track the chronology of the genre and explore great works of fiction through time alongside the whole text. Their academic writing will flourish ahead of GCSE as they explore Hill's methods, evaluating her use of both language and structure. Additionally, their creativity will expand as they mimic gothic conventions in their own narrative tasks, where they will build tension and suspense to captivate and unsettle the reader. Written in the style of an early 20th century Edwardian text, the study of this novel is underpinned by knowledge of nineteenth-century writers covered in years 7 and 8. In this unit, students will see how texts inform and influence one another, recognising that writing is consciously crafted for effect.

In Term 2, students will further explore the conventions of genre, turning their attention to war in poetry. The revered voices of writers like Owen and Sassoon tell the stories from the trenches and the impact of their experiences in battle. This learning builds upon the earlier introductions to poetry in both Year 7 and 8, with greater challenge and a wider range of examples. Crucial terminology about the rhythm, form and figurative language of poetry aptly prepares students for the Power and Conflict poetry at the heart of their GCSE course. The concept of a world at war forms the perfect segue to a unit in the second half of this term, focusing on ideas of dystopia in fiction. A carefully curated anthology of high-quality extracts secures knowledge and understanding of this fascinating and enduring genre. We encourage students to make links between the real landscapes of war and the dystopian settings that feature in these imaginative texts. Dystopian elements are visible in our world of today, evident through our changing climate, poverty, and abuses of power, making this topic relevant and current. The experience of handling 'unseen' extracts and responding to them provides ideal practice for English Language at GCSE, developing the necessary skills of comprehension and inference.

Our Key Stage 3 curriculum paves the way to success at Key Stage 4. Inevitably attention will move to success in external exams and their outcomes, and we support our students by interleaving exam practice throughout their GCSE course. However, we are keen to ensure that the study of English does not become reductionist and retains the excitement of earlier years. At the end of Year 9 we introduce Russell's play *Blood Brothers*. A text which builds on the social concerns of Dickens in Year 7, Orwell in Year 8, and the war poets in Year 9, this acts as a foil to some of the literary language of before. As well as understanding the political points Russell makes on class, and the social context behind them, we want students to engage with the relevance, comedy and impact of a modern drama.

Year 10 begins back in the same streets as Year 7 and 8, this time following the misanthropic character of Scrooge. The villainous Sikes might have changed into a less violent form – but Dickens' repugnance for his protagonist at the start of the novella is clear. We reapply the context of *Oliver Twist's* workhouses, and study the transformation of Scrooge. There is a view of hope in Literature and what it might be able to achieve in this text that we want students to recognise. Our work on this text is augmented with the regular practice of English Language skills – summarising the text and blending language analysis. Students ask "what?", "how?" and "why?" in their study of language, and are encouraged to form critical, evaluative opinion on what they read, drawing on their experience of Key Stage 3.

The Power and Conflict poetry develops the study of war poetry from before. The understanding of key war poems from Year 9 acts as a reference point and supports the reading of ambitious poems like Owen's *Exposure*. However, the notion of conflict moves beyond the physical and is now defined as also psychological (see the mad duke who cannot stop his obsession with his last duchess) as well as cultural (exactly whose history do we study in Jon Agard's *Checking Out Me History?*). The integration of context and terminology from before informs a discussion of this work, and through the poetry, students build their skills of linguistic analysis.

Students have developed an appreciation for Shakespeare's works through *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet*, and now examine *Macbeth* at GCSE. Students will be familiar with the context of the Jacobean age and the playwright's language. Now they apply this to one of the most famous Shakespeare plays of all time. As well as analysing the writer's methods, we explore the themes and questions that the writer poses. How does power affect a person? Can ambition become a corrupting force? What happens when an individual tries to determine, rather than accept, their fate? Many of these ideas reach across texts and we encourage students to engage critically with such interesting aspects of the human condition.

The end of Year 10 mock acts as a benchmark to begin our study in Year 11. The students will be spending this year revisiting and refamiliarising themselves with the texts and techniques from before, as well as having the opportunity to express their own thoughts in their speaking and listening topic – building from Year 9.

However, there is a development and maturity in the Year 11 voice that allows deeper thinking. Now, in each text, students are encouraged to develop their own thesis – picking apart dual interpretations and forming opinions themselves on the "big ideas" in texts. This is work that began back in Year 8, understanding the ambiguity around Holmes' character, and with the confidence of expression built up throughout the course, it is now time for students to express their own evaluative voice.

It is hoped that this voice, confidently expressed, and based on understanding of and sensitivity to language and literature, will serve the students well for the rest of their lives.