



Why study  
English  
Literature?

## Why study English Literature?

Here's what the current Upper Sixth have to say:

"... it has broadened my horizons ... and began my ambition to be a published writer."

"For me, my favourite thing about Literature is the way it opens your mind. It really does."

"The course content covers a **wide range of Literature** so there is bound to be something that **appeals** to you, be it novels, plays or poetry."

"I feel I've developed a greater appreciation for classic literature and poetry which I would have rebuffed beforehand."

**"...it also gives you the ability to be constructively analytical and helps you see arguments from several angles."**

Of the English A levels offered at King's, Literature is the most highly regarded by universities.

"My speaking, writing and thinking skills have all been improved by this subject."

### What is studied?

For LT1 (**Poetry and Drama 30%**) you study two poets – one core text and one partner text. At the moment we are looking at **Sylvia Plath** (you will remember *Blackberrying* and *Mirror* from the *Best Words* anthology) and **Ted Hughes** as the partner text (he wrote *Roe Deer*.) They are two of the most influential poets of the twentieth century and there is a wealth of interesting background material including Plath's journals, various biographies, Plath's thinly veiled autobiography, the novel entitled *The Bell Jar*, as well as editions of both their letters.

The Drama element is **David Mamet's** controversial *Oleanna* set in an American Ivy League university, which premiered on Broadway in 1992. Surface themes include sexual harassment and political correctness but closer study confirms that power, communication, education and tragedy lie at the heart of a text which also acts as a useful introduction to minimalist style.

### LT2 is **Prose and Creative Reading 20%**.

For the prose element you will study a novel/selection of short stories and a partner text. Examples are **D.H. Lawrence's *Three Novellas*** (all about unconventional relationships) and ***On Chesil Beach* by Ian McKewan** about a couple's honeymoon night...

For creative reading you are given a choice of books to read, and, taking a main theme/idea as a springboard, you produce your own writing inspired by the book and a commentary on what you have written. Students have produced very successful sequences of poetry about the experiences of being lost, inspired by the loss of innocence in **L. P. Hartley's *The Go Between***, on the American Dream, inspired by ***The Great Gatsby* by F.Scott Fitzgerald** and short stories with unreliable/dual narrators based on ***Alias Grace* by Margaret Atwood** (which uses a real life murder mystery as its subject.)

"I've discovered a passion for poetry and writing after studying the intricacies of the works of Plath and Hughes."

"English Literature has really helped in all my subjects with my writing skills and essay technique and vocabulary."

We study LT4 (**Poetry and Drama 2 - 30%**) before LT3 because it is an exam based element and it means there is an opportunity to re-sit.

**Milton's *Paradise Lost***, though difficult, has proved very popular, and the story of the devil corrupting Adam and Eve has inspired many excellent power point presentations on the themes and historical and cultural background – often illustrated by Gustave Doré's amazing engravings and those by William Blake. One of the current upper sixth even found a thrash metal band who had been inspired by Milton and incorporated it into his presentation!

Jacobean drama – in the form of **Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*** (packed with evil characters and macabre scenes) – is the partner text for **Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure***. Just who will face the hangman's noose?

LT3 is coursework : a **Period and Genre Study – 20%**. If you do well in LT4 and carry over good marks from LT1 and LT2 you can really focus on this and hence have a degree of control over your final grade.

Students are relishing **Margaret Atwood's** dystopian novel ***The Handmaid's Tale*** which imagines a world where sterility is rife and drastic measures are implemented. It is very convincing. We are also looking at **Geoffrey Chaucer's** view of his mediaeval contemporaries – he comments on his times by pretending to praise various members of society when he is actually being very critical. If you look on you tube you'll discover he's an immensely influential figure and rappers seem to like him especially. The other choices range from **Huxley's *Brave New World*** to **Philip Larkin** (remember *Afternoons?*) who had a bleak (and often very irreverent!) view of the times in which he lived. Just look at what he has to say about parents!!!

**“English, now being one of the few subjects with a coursework element, gives a sense of personal control over what you are doing. Although testing your organisational abilities, the sense of achievement is greater, knowing you have done it primarily independently.”**

“Taking English Literature was something of a last minute decision when I was choosing my options, but after being introduced to a wide range of works ... I was inclined to apply for a degree course in the subject and now I love nothing more than the seemingly infinite sources of knowledge and opinions...”

The most rewarding experience was finding that poetry is not boring at all. On the contrary, I found it engaging and strangely interesting. I genuinely enjoyed writing my own poem and was surprised to find it was a reasonable quality. (Jamie's poem *Nimbus* is in this year's Granthamian and on the back page of this hand-out!)

“...there's a lot of control over examinations. If you perform well in the winter modules, then marks can easily be obtained through coursework, which can greatly improve your overall mark whilst sitting only two examinations in two years.”

“... it covers subjects ranging from mythology to philosophy ...”

“Studying English has given me the opportunity to widen my creative boundaries in the company of great authors like Plath and Milton. It is more than a subject – it is a way of life.”

“English Literature has encouraged me to be more creative. I find myself wanting to write creatively outside the curriculum.”

“It has given me the ability to write succinctly, coherently and confidently.”

# Nimbus

**Puppets of Aeolus.**

**You are the cause of life and death,**

**Prosperity and poverty,**

**Yet we hardly notice you at all,**

**To you the sky is the limit,**

**Forever –**

**In limbo.**

**Some mornings you live among us**

**But mostly you prefer to rule from afar.**

**Immortal molecules of an on-going cycle,**

**The most abundant but influential of crystals;**

**The patchy Atlas of the stratosphere.**

**You do not fool me with your nebulae or provocative flashes.**

**You would give me the same protection you gave Icarus.**

**Your omnipresence intrigues me.**

**Why must you only shield the highest of deities?**

**I seek your secrets but am blinded by the sun,**

**Recruited to keep back what you're hiding.**

**Darkness too, commences its shift in veiling these shadowy enigmas,**

**Keeping me at bay.**

**You appeared over those burning cities,**

**A dense mushroom of despair.**

**Afraid of the Great Sahara**

**You precipitate where you are wanted least.**

**I long for the places your aura cannot reach.**

**By Jamie Kightley**