



Transition Pack for A Level English

Hopefully you have picked English A Level because you enjoy reading, but we know for many students that is not always the case. It is important that you enjoy interpreting a text, having ideas about it, considering its context, and analysing it. These are all skills you would have developed in GCSE English Literature, but at A Level you have to do this in a different way.

The main difference between GCSE and A Level English Literature is that for our course, we are looking at the texts through the lens of a genre. We have to consider how a text fits within a genre; this transition pack is here to get you ready to do this by ensuring you have started to explore both of the genres we look at: crime and tragedy.

The **tragedy** side of the course is closed book, like your GCSE. You read three texts: Shakespeare's Othello, Miller's Death of a Salesman and a selection of poetry by Keats. You look at the role of the tragic hero, explore the difference between modern domestic tragedies, traditional Shakespearean tragedies and tragedy within poetry. Ultimately, this side of the course is an opportunity to explore pity, fear and the human condition, as well as how writers engender these emotions within us as readers and audiences. Within this transition pack, you will be asked to complete a set of tasks which will help you build up some knowledge of where tragedy originated and then to begin your own research into the genre.

The **crime** side of the course is open book, although with two of the texts being novels, it is unlikely you will want to be flipping through them to plan your essays. We will read Dickens' Oliver Twist, McEwan's Atonement and a selection of poetry by Browning, Crabbe and Wilde. When studying crime, we analyse the presentation of the criminal, the victim, and the crime itself. We begin to develop ideas on justice and punishment, how writers decide to ensure their criminals are appropriately punished and how they create mystery in their crime texts. Within this transition pack, you will have to complete some research into the conventions of the genre and read three of the five poems we will study in order to complete your extended task.

As part of the course, you will have 2 texts given to you and you will have to purchase the other 4 (you will buy these texts through school at the start of Y12). All students doing A Level English Literature are also expected to sign up to book club – this is a subscription fee of £23 per school year.

We are really excited for you to be studying A Level English Literature, and we hope you find these tasks accessible. If you need any help with them, please e-mail one of the following contacts:

Mr Tunwell (tragedy): AMT@churchdownschool.com

Mr Collins (crime): WJC@churchdownschool.com

ENGLISH LITERATURE: TRAGEDY

Paper 1 – Aspects of Tragedy

Tasks to be completed		
Tragedy Genre – Research activity		
Before identifying or inventing tragic figures, it's essential to explore what defines a tragic hero and how this figure has evolved from Aristotle to the modern era. Read the following articles about the features of the tragedy genre and make notes on the key elements of the genre. Article 1 Article 2 Key concepts to understand: hamartia, hubris, peripeteia, anagnorisis, pathos, catharsis, fate vs. free will.		
What makes a tragic hero tragic? - Application activity		
Write a short reflection (300–400 words) explaining what makes a tragic hero tragic. Use at least one classical tragic figure (e.g. Macbeth) and contrast them with a more modern figure (e.g. Willy Loman, Tony Montana, Rue from Euphoria). Consider the following: • How do their flaws contribute to their downfall? • How does their story engage the audience emotionally? • What insight does their story offer into human nature or society?		
Death of a Salesman – Research Activity		
Read the following summary of 'Death of a Salesman', your first tragedy text: Death of a Salesman Summary Then complete a table like the one below to show your understanding of the play, and how it fits into the genre.		
Term	Definition	<i>Death of a Salesman</i> example
Hubris		
Hamartia		
Tragic Hero		

Suffering (pathos)		
Catharsis		

'To What Extent is *Death of a Salesman* a tragedy?' – Application Activity

Using your notes and the complete table, write a short essay (no more than 500 words) to answer the following question:

To what extent is *Death of a Salesman* a tragedy?

Your response should:

- Refer to tragic conventions
- Use examples from the play
- Include ideas from your modern comparison
- Consider themes like capitalism, fatherhood, failure, and societal pressure

Work to be submitted to Mr Tunwell:

1. Tragedy Genre	
2. What makes a tragic hero?	
3. <i>Death of a Salesman</i>	
4. To what extent is <i>Death of a Salesman</i> a tragedy?	

ENGLISH LITERATURE: CRIME

Paper 2 – Elements of Crime Writing

Crime Timeline – Research Activity

Complete the crime writing timeline on the following page in as much detail as possible.

My Last Duchess – Application Activity

Re-read 'My Last Duchess' by Robert Browning and answer the questions below in full sentences.

1. To what extent can the Duke's account of the Duchess's behaviour be seen as a confession of a crime?

2. How does Browning use dramatic monologue to conceal and reveal criminal intent in "My Last Duchess"? Consider the reliability of the narrator and how the structure allows for ambiguity.
3. In what ways does the Duke's treatment of the Duchess reflect psychological abuse or coercive control as a form of criminal behaviour?
4. Does the poem present a critique of patriarchal power and its relationship to crimes against women? Examine the social context and how it influences the Duke's actions.
5. How does the Duke's manipulation of art and language parallel the control and objectification involved in criminal acts?
6. Is there enough evidence in the poem to infer that a murder has taken place, and if so, what are the implications of the lack of justice? Explore how the poem handles ambiguity and what that says about societal attitudes toward power and crime.
7. How does Browning portray the theme of moral corruption, and can this be equated with criminality in the poem?
8. What role does silence—both the Duchess's and the Duke's about certain details—play in concealing or revealing a crime?
9. Could the Duke be seen as a psychopath or sociopath, and how does this classification help frame the poem as a crime narrative?
10. How does the setting (Renaissance Italy, the art gallery, the noble household) reinforce or obscure the criminal elements in the poem?

Unseen extract – Analysis Activity

Read the short extract from a piece of crime writing below and write a short essay (2 paragraphs/no more than 500 words) to answer the questions below.

What elements of crime (from your Crime Timeline research task) are presented in this extract? How are they presented?

The court was full to overflowing, the public benches packed. Charlie and Rod stood pressed against the doors poised like greyhounds in the slips. You never got over it, Charlie thought, your blood pressure went up with the tension and excitement. Better than any film, better than any book. There was just nothing to beat it, watching the drama of the court, eyes on the face of the accused when the word rang out. Guilty. The look of the relatives, as they flushed with joy, relief, exhaustion. And then the tears. These were the final moments when he knew why he was in his job. Every time.

Alan Keyes stood, face pale, eyes down, his police minder impassive. Charlie's throat constricted suddenly as he looked at him, looked at his hands on the rail. Normal hands. Nothing ugly, nothing out of the ordinary. Not a strangler's hands, whatever they were supposed to look like. But the hands, resting on the rail, hands like his own, one beside the other resting on the rail, resting on the ...those hands had ...Charlie did not think of himself as hardboiled but you did get accustomed. But nothing prepared you for the first time you saw the man in front of you, ordinary, innocent until proved guilty, however clear his guilt was, nothing prepared you for the sight of a man like Keyes, there in the flesh, a man who had strangled three elderly women. Nothing. He couldn't actually look at Keyes at all now. The lawyers sat together, shuffling papers, fiddling with box lids, not looking at one another, not murmuring. Just waiting.

Work to be submitted to Mr Collins:

1. Crime timeline
2. My Last Duchess Questions
3. Unseen extract analysis

Crime Writing Timeline

	Pre-19 th Century (early roots)	Early influences (19 th century)	Golden Age (1920s-1930s)	Hardboiled era (1930s-1950s)	Police Procedural and Psychological Thriller (1960s- 80s)	Modern Global Crime Fiction (1990s-present)
Key features of the genre at this time						
Famous examples of texts from this time						
Common crimes seen within these texts						
Historical context. What was crime like in this period? How were the texts responding to their context?						

Optional Additional Tragedy Tasks

Please note, there is no expectation of completing all the following tasks. However, any of it that you can do will obviously better prepare you to begin your English A Level!

Aristotle's *Poetics*

[Read the Aristotle's Poetics - LitCharts](#)

This is a very detailed summary of the book Aristotle wrote about tragedy and the tragic genre. It is not necessary knowledge for the course, but it is incredibly interesting. Aristotle is one of the most well-known philosophers to ever exist – so you might be asking yourself why he wrote about poetry and tragedy! The reason Aristotle wrote about the form of a tragedy is because he was fascinated by the power of poetry and the impact it could have upon society. Therefore, in ‘poetics’ he considers how ‘poetry’ (a broad term for performed literature) can be best presented and structured to be impactful for the audience.

Please make notes on any aspect of this LitChart that you find interesting and explore. I would suggest focusing on the sections:

- Plot Summary
- Terms
- Themes
- Chapter 4: Tragedy Definition and Analysis (Page 27)
- Chapter 7: The Best Kinds of Tragic Plot (Page 32)
- Chapter 8: Other Aspects of Tragedy (page 34)
- Chapter 12: Comparative Evaluation of Epic and Tragedy (page 41)

Death of a Salesman

As you have read a summary of the text for the compulsory tasks, completing a detailed timeline of what happens will prepare you well to begin the text in the new year.

Othello

You will be studying Othello next year. Completing a detailed timeline of key events will help you grasp the tragic arc and character development, especially following your GCSE studies of Macbeth or other Shakespeare plays. You could consider: How the tragedy moves from order → disorder → catastrophe? Or the rise and fall of Othello as a tragic hero, Iago's manipulation and its tragic impact, the tragic ending and what it reveals.

Optional Additional Crime Tasks

READING CRIME: The best way to spend your time over summer is to absorb yourself in the genre of crime fiction and read lots of it. For example, if you weren't involved in Y11 book club, we read *One of Us is Lying* which is a great book aimed at teenagers which has all the elements we explore in crime. If you did read this book, what about writing an analysis of how elements of crime were presented? You could do this for any book you have read which involves a crime of some sort – it might be a moral crime rather than a legal one. The final page of this document offers a suggested A Level reading list.

MORE CRIME: A great place to start is where the crime genre originated – detective stories – the most famous being Sherlock Holmes. They are all out of copyright so are available for free online or on a reading app like Kindle (also free!).

ANALYSING CRIME: Why not apply your new understanding of the crime genre to one of your GCSE texts? Write an analysis of how one or all the texts you studied at GCSE can be considered crime writing. For example, how can we view Mr Birling's treatment of Eva Smith as a criminal Act?

FURTHER BROWNING READING: See below a list of further reading on the three poems. For basic websites like Sparknotes, LitCharts, Gradesaver, just Google the poem title and they will come up. The articles I suggest are normally written by academics:

- a. [This one](#) has some interesting analysis and ideas on MLD.
- b. [This one](#) explores the balance of power between men and women in both MLD and PL.
- c. [This one offers](#) Browning's words on the poem MLD.
- d. [This one](#) discusses the true motive in PL
- e. [This one](#) has line by line analysis of PL if you're unsure about it
- f. [This one](#) goes through key elements in bullet point analysis

CRIME EXTRACT ANALYSIS: If you enjoyed analysing the unseen crime extract, you can carry out the same tasks (exploring presentation of criminal/victim/crime/justice/punishment/mystery etc) on any crime text. Here is a [link](#) for a website full of crime novel openings which you can read to analyse or just enjoy

Pre-A Level English Literature Reading List

Reading some or all of these texts will broaden your understanding of literature and introduce you to a range of themes that texts explore.

<i>Great Expectations</i> by Charles Dickens Dickens' bildungsroman shows us the clear class divisions at play within Victorian London. We follow the journey of Pip on his way to his fortune at the hands of an unknown benefactor.	<i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> by Margaret Atwood A dystopian novel which could be called 'speculative fiction' instead of Science Fiction. Deals with the sub-human treatment of women and the roles they play in society
<i>Half of a Yellow Sun</i> by Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie A heartbreaking novel set against the backdrop of the Nigerian Civil War in the 1960s, it tells the story of Ugwu, who moves to the city to work as a houseboy for a university professor. The story is a powerful exploration of the impact of war on ordinary people.	<i>The Paying Guests</i> by Sarah Waters This novel tells the tale of a mother and daughter in 1920s London who must take on lodgers to afford their house. The result of taking on these paying guests is a devastating love affair and a terrible crime.
<i>The Great Gatsby</i> by F Scott Fitzgerald Set in the world of the roaring 1920s in America, this tale deals with the highs and lows of living a dream-like life full of impossible love	<i>Brighton Rock</i> by Graham Greene Following the story of a gang war that rips its way through Brighton where a man has been killed. This taut novel shows the results of a life lived on 'the dangerous edge of things'.
<i>East of Eden</i> John Steinbeck: Exploring Steinbeck's Salinas valley (where he grew up), this saga follows two families on a journey of character development and tragic consequences.	<i>Rebecca</i> by Daphne Du Maurier The novel concerns an unnamed young woman who impetuously marries a wealthy widower, only to discover that he and his household are haunted by the memory of his late first wife, the title character.
<i>Never Let Me Go</i> by Kazuo Ishiguro The novel takes place in a dystopian version of late 1990s England where the lives of ordinary citizens are prolonged through a state-sanctioned programme of human cloning.	<i>A Study in Scarlet</i> by Arthur Conan-Doyle Dr Watson meets Sherlock Holmes for the first time and narrates his investigation of a murder at Lauriston Hall and his amazing deductive capabilities.
<i>Poor</i> by Caleb Femi Femi's poetry collection reflects on his experiences as a young man growing up in 21st Century South London. He explores what life is like for young people and explores issues around race, gender and social inequality.	<i>The Secret History</i> by Donna Tart The novel begins with the murder of a college student and works backwards to explore the events leading up to his death. It explores group dynamics and how people can be led into immoral behaviour.

Happy reading!

If you read all of these and want more recommendations, get in touch with a member of the English department. They will be happy to help!

