

## English literature

### “Clarity is just questioning having eaten its fill.”

Jenny Xie

English Literature A Level allows students to explore a wide variety of literature at a profound and sophisticated level, well supported by expert teaching and learning strategies. It is a subject for anyone who loves questioning received wisdoms and articulating moments of clarity and wonder.

The following information outlines OCR's A Level in English literature, which is offered at St Swithun's.

#### **Component One – Poetry and Drama pre-1900: 40% of the A level**

This is the 'traditional' grounding aspect of the course that offers a foundation of excellent canonical knowledge from which creative thinking can spring.

Works of poetry and drama are studied with a view to developing critical literary skills. The unit is separated into two sections and in both, students will be required to know some of the ways in which individual texts are interpreted by different readers, and the ways in which texts relate to each other and the social, historical, cultural and literary contexts. It is assessed with a closed text examination; the essays are written without copies of the texts.

Section A involves the critical, close analysis of a play by Shakespeare.

Section B involves the comparative study of one set of poetry with one drama text. Recently we have chosen to study Chaucer or Milton alongside Ibsen. In the examination, students produce an essay comparing their two texts in the light of a question focusing on the success of their texts in relation to wider literary aims and concerns.

#### **Component Two – Comparative and Contextual Study: 40% of the A level**

This is the widest and deepest part of the course where we study a genre of literature in a great detail. Students have maximum choice over their wider reading as well as a long filmography that supports their understanding of the genre at a cultural level. Candidates learn to compare texts and gain confidence in their use of literary critical concepts and terminology. Candidates are required to study two novels from a specified topic, with options ranging from *Women in Literature* to *The Gothic*. Some of the possible texts include:

*Girl, Woman, Other; Beloved; Mrs Dalloway; Tess of the D'Urbervilles; The Picture of Dorian Gray; Rebecca; The Bloody Chamber; and Dracula.*

In the first part of the examination for this unit, students will approach an unseen prose extract from within their chosen topic area. The inclusion of this 'supported unseen' helps promote wider reading throughout the course because the more familiar a candidate is with literature from within their topic area, the more confident they will be about approaching the unseen text in the examination.

In the second part of the examination, students will produce an essay comparing their two set texts. This is a closed text examination; the essays are written without copies of the texts.

### **Component Three – Coursework 20% of the A level**

This is the most magical part of the course where the time spent in independent thinking and reading allows students' writing to flourish. They emerge from the coursework process ready to write with renewed fluency and accurate analysis in examination conditions. This unit requires candidates to study three modern texts from across the genres of poetry, drama and prose.

Task one offers a choice between a critical piece or a re-creative piece with a commentary and task two is a 'linked texts' essay focusing on connections between two texts. Students are offered as much choice as possible for this part of the course. Recent choices have included: *The Vanishing Half*, by Brit Bennet; *Translations* by Brian Friel; *Angels in America* by Tony Kushner; *Hold Your Own* by Kae Tempest; and *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison.

Our students tell us that English Literature gives them a voice. As Ophelia said, "We know what we are but know not what we may be."

Mrs NAOMI ANSON  
head of English