Reading List for A Level English Literature.

Over the course of the 2 year A Level course, you will study 8 texts. These are:

- Tennessee Williams – A Streetcar Named Desire
- Margaret Atwood – The Handmaid’s Tale
- Carol Ann Duffy – Feminine Gospels
- F Scott Fitzgerald – The Great Gatsby
- AQA Anthology of Love Poetry Through the Ages
- Shakespeare – Othello
- Chaucer – The Miller’s Tale
- One other text of your choice from a shortlist to be provided.

We will be studying them in the order they are given above.

Of course, it would be good to read these to make sure you are well prepared for when you start at college. We will, however, be studying them in class so it is not essential to have read them beforehand. What would stand you in really good stead would be to have done a bit of reading around the text – to read other books by the same author, or written at the same time or about similar themes and ideas. To help you with this, we have put together the following list of suggestions. We do not expect you to read all of these – that way madness lies! – but the more you have read the more ideas you will have about the contexts of your set texts which will be really useful on your A Level course.

Unit One: Love Through the Ages.

Othello:
Read Shakespeare’s other Tragedies –
- Hamlet
- King Lear
- Macbeth

Read other Shakespeare plays which revolve around love –
- Romeo and Juliet
- The Winter’s Tale
- As you Like It
- Antony and Cleopatra

These are all very different both from Othello and from each other.
Read the short story by Italian writer Cynthio which provided Shakespeare with the basis of his plot. You can find the story free a number of sites if you google for it online.

Poetry Anthology
Read as much poetry as you can by as wide a range of writers as possible – again there is a lot available online. Look particularly for any poems by:
Shakespeare, Andrew Marvell, Keats, Wordsworth, William Blake, Christina Rossetti, Thomas Hardy,

The Great Gatsby
Read more Fitzgerald
- The Beautiful and the Damned (this is the one probably most similar to Gatsby)
- Tender is the Night
- A Diamond as Big as the Ritz

For The Jazz Age:
- Ernest Hemingway - The Sun Also Rises
- Toni Morrison - Jazz
The American Dream or similar idea
- Theodore Dreiser - An American Tragedy
- Charles Dickens: - Great Expectations.

The idea of the “end of an era”:
- Evenly Waugh: Brideshead Revisited
- Kazuo Ishiguru: The Remains of the Day
- Tennessee Williams – A Streetcar Named Desire
- Arthur Miller: Death of a Salesman
- John Steinback: The Grapes of Wrath.

Unit 2: Texts in shared Contexts: Literature – from 1945 to the present day

The Handmaid’s Tale.
Other Margaret Atwood:
- The Testaments. A recent novel, written as a sequel to The Handmaid’s Tale, so obviously highly relevant.
- The Edible Woman
- The Heart Goes Last

Dystopias and alternative/near-world fantasy:
- Anthony Burgess - A Clockwork Orange
- Aldous Huxley - Brave New World
- George Orwell - 1984
- Russell Hoban - Riddley Walker
- Margaret Atwood - The Heart Goes Last
- Cormac McCarthy - The Road
- Philip K. Dick - The Man in the High Castle
- Kazuo Ishiguru – Never Let Me Go

You could also contrast this with ‘near future’ societies about utopias – especially by female writers – eg
- Charlotte Perkins Gilman - Herland
- Marge Piercy - Woman on the Edge of Time

A Streetcar Named Desire:
Other plays by Tennessee Williams e.g.
- Cat on a Hot Tim Roof
- The Glass Menagerie

Other drama:
- Arthur Miller - A View from the Bridge
- John Osborne – Look Back in Anger
- Henrik Ibsen – A Doll’s House.

Mental illness:
- Ken Kesey - One Flew over the Cuckoos next
- Charlotte Perkins Gilman - The Yellow Wallpaper

Modern Literature about change and coping with change in society:
- Kazuo Ishiguru: The Remains of the Day
- Sam Selvon – The Lonely Londoners

Feminine Gospels:
Other works by Carol Ann Duffy –
- Mean Time
- The World’s Wife
- Love Poems.

Other (relatively) modern Poetry:
- Philip Larkin: The Whitsun Weddings
Other Literature about women/women’s place in society:

- Margaret Atwood – Surfacing
- Anything by Jane Austen
- Marge Piercy – Fly Away Home
- Shelagh Delaney - A Taste of Honey (play)
- Henrik Ibsen – A Doll’s House (play)
- Charlotte Perkins Gilman – Herland
- Monica Ali – Brick Lane

Non-Examined Assessment.

Your coursework will be one essay comparing and contrasting Chaucer’s The Miller’s Tale with one other text of your choice from a shortlist you will be given.

You could read any other of Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales, but The Knight’s Tale is the one which would be most helpful for your study of The Miller’s Tale as it comes immediately before it in The Canterbury Tales.

Updated March 2020.