

A Level Literature.

Hello!

Mr Buckley and Miss Cruse here, welcoming you to A level Literature at Buxton Community School.

Many of you may have already decided that you want to study Literature at A Level, some of you may still be thinking about it and some of you may be waiting until the GCSE results before you make your mind up. No matter which of those categories you are in, you are all very welcome.

What we would like to do is provide you with some information and work that will help prepare you for studying Literature at A level. Don't worry, none of the tasks are specific to the A Level course- we will start that in September. What the tasks will do is give you a feel for the difference between Literature at GCSE and Literature at A Level. This should help you settle in to the course effectively when we start back in September.

On the following pages, you will find some information about the A Level course, some guides towards reading and some tasks that will help develop your appreciation of literature. Any of the articles you are asked to read are saved as PDFs with the appropriate title.

If you have any questions, please feel free to email us:

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We look forward to seeing you in September.

Course overview

We follow the AQA English Literature A Specification. Don't worry too much about remembering this at the moment. We will go in to it in much more detail in September.

The course is made up of two exam papers and an NEA.

Each exam paper is worth 40% of the overall marks and the NEA makes up the other 20%

Paper 1

Love Through The Ages.

For this paper you will study:

A Shakespeare play

Unseen Poetry

A novel

An anthology of love poetry.

Paper 2

World War 1 and its Aftermath.

For this paper you will study:

A novel

Literary extracts

A play

An anthology of World War 1 poetry.

NEA

For the coursework, you will study a play and then compare it to a novel of your choice (with guidance from us.) You will compare the two texts based on the presentation of a theme.

Reading for pleasure.

Wouldn't it be brilliant if we could start our course in September talking about what we had read over the summer? In the first couple of weeks of Y12, we'd like each of you to be able to give a short presentation on your favourite novel.

Underneath are some links to various websites with suggestions for things you may like to read. What we would like is for you to select a novel you have not read before and to just read it for pleasure.

Aside from the enjoyment of just reading a novel, the more widely you read, the more you will be able to develop an understanding of how writers can shape meanings through the language they use, the way they structure a text and the way they develop character and theme. A novel can also help develop our appreciation of the world we live in.

Task 1

Please listen to the following TED talk:

https://www.ted.com/talks/tomas_elemans_the_inspiring_truth_in_fiction

Once you have done so, we would like you to look at the following links and choose a novel or two that you would like to read over the summer:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/494P41NCbVYHIY319VwGbxp/explore-the-list-of-100-novels-that-shaped-our-world>

<https://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/blog/50-great-21st-century-novels-for-6th-formers>

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/series/the-100-best-novels>

Task 2

One of the things we would like to do is to help you make the transition from studying a text at GCSE to studying texts at a more advanced level. Most of the time at GCSE, the work you will have done will have been focused purely on the novel or play you were studying.

You will have read either A Christmas Carol or Jekyll and Hyde.

Depending on which novel you studied, please read either:

Dickens and Realism by John Mullan

Or

Navigating Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde's London.

Both articles get you to think about how the writer was influenced by the time they were writing in and how their work highlights the society they were living in.

You will have thought a bit about context at GCSE. These articles will allow you to develop that contextual understanding further. As you read the article, consider how it fits in with your understanding of the novel from studying it at GCSE.

Once you have read the article, we would like you to listen to the following lecture:

<https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/romeo-and-juliet>

You have all studied Romeo and Juliet and it will be interesting for you consider the views put forward in the lecture. Did you feel the prologue to the play ruined the rest of it for you or did it add to your enjoyment?

Dickens and Realism John Mullan

His descriptions of London streets are almost tangible, yet his plots rely on ludicrous and fortuitous coincidences. He confronts his readers with the harsh realities of 19th-century life, yet his characters are more cartoon caricature than psychologically complex. So, asks John Mullan, is Dickens a realist?

Is Dickens a realist writer? In our common references to his fiction, we hardly seem to know. 'Dickensian' is sometimes a word for the seamy side of Victorian life. Here we think of Dickens as a writer who revealed the miserable 'reality' concealed in the slums and workhouses of a great imperial nation. But 'Dickensian' also refers to the novelist's gift for the grotesque, even the monstrous. Writing his stories for publication in weekly or monthly parts, Dickens was driven to make his characters instantly recognisable and utterly memorable. The likes of Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations* or Uriah Heep in *David Copperfield* are certainly unforgettable, but they are surely distorted shapes of humanity.

Social realism

The 'realist' Dickens is often thought to be the writer who refuses to flinch from the real effects of poverty. In *Oliver Twist*, for instance, Dickens takes his genteel reader to a locality that he claims to know. On the Thames near Rotherhithe

there exists, at the present day, the filthiest, the strangest, the most extraordinary of the many localities that are hidden in London, wholly unknown, even by name, to the great mass of its inhabitants.

This is Jacob's Island.

Crazy wooden galleries common to the backs of half a dozen houses, with holes from which to look upon the slime beneath; windows, broken and patched: with poles thrust out, on which to dry the linen that is never there; rooms so small, so filthy, so confined, that the air would seem too tainted even for the dirt and squalor which they shelter; wooden chambers thrusting themselves out above the mud, and threatening to fall into it - as some have done; dirt-besmeared walls and decaying foundations; every repulsive lineament of poverty, every loathsome indication of filth, rot and garbage

It was a real place, really visited by the author. But Dickens's prose makes it also a place from a nightmare, where even the force of his hyperbole can hardly do justice to his indignation.

Think of the opening of *Bleak House*, where we get a November afternoon in London.

As much mud in the streets, as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet or so long, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snowflakes - gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun.

'One might imagine': it is a scene that confesses to be fanciful, yet this vision of a city returned by its own gloom and filth to some primal epoch, a city that has managed to extinguish solar warmth and light, is irresistible. To do justice to reality, description has to be fantastic.

Fascinating villains

So too with some of Dickens's grotesque characterisations. He is sometimes criticised for his villains, 'baddies' pure and simple, their very features twisted. Yet these monsters are as 'real' as our childish nightmares. Readers of *The Old Curiosity Shop* fret at the sentimental depiction of the virtuous Little Nell, but few deny the vividness of the novel's dwarfish, repulsively fascinating villain, Quilp. He looks like a living Mr. Punch and has the energy of pure ill-will. He drinks extraordinary concoctions of boiling alcohol and ferociously chain-smokes cigars. His accessory Sampson Brass supposes that he spends his leisure hours 'making himself more fiery and furious [...] heating his malice and mischievousness till they boil'. Quilp's malignity burns with incandescent vigour. He keeps turning up with some new trick, even if it is only to hang upside down from the top of a coach and make horrible faces at the travellers inside. 'Such an amazing power of taking people by surprise!' He is not, we might say, a 'real' person but he is an aspect of humanity.

Expressive names

Dickens's distortion of human features in order to get at essential human characteristics is represented by the improbable but wonderfully expressive names that he invents. For Dickens, to get the name was to get the character. In his notes for *David Copperfield*, you can see him trying out different possibilities. David's intimidating step-father goes from Mr. Harden to Murdle to Murden before he becomes, unforgettably, Mr. Murdstone: hard and murderous. Just right, perfectly evoking a child's fears. Dickens's names are sometimes close to telling you what a character is (the frozen Sir Leicester Dedlock in *Bleak House*, the utilitarian Gradgrind in *Hard Times*) and sometimes more poetically expressive (the lovably foolish Traddles in *David Copperfield*, the vampire lawyer Vholes in *Bleak House*). No wonder that some of Dickens's names have become words for types of character. An article in the *Guardian* complains that New Labour enthusiasts 'have a Gradgrindian commitment to facts and data'. A columnist in the *Daily Mail* describes the Chief Executive of the Football Association as an 'Artful Dodger'. And ever since his first appearance in *A Christmas Carol* in 1843, Scrooge has been a synonym for a life-denying miser.

Unrealistic genres

A Christmas Carol is, of course, a ghost story, composed for that time of year when the family might amuse itself with an amiably chilling story, written to be read aloud. It is characteristic of Dickens that he should breathe new life into this unliterary genre - the supernatural tale. The journals that Dickens edited, *Household Words* and *All The Year Round*, made ghost stories their speciality, especially at Christmas. Dickens wrote other examples, like 'The Haunted Man' and 'The Chimes'. Here he looks like an anti-realist. He not only adopts an unrealistic form, but in *A Christmas Carol* does so in order to make a moral fable. This most famous of his tales for Christmas is apparently doubly anti-realist. It employs the supernatural, and it shows a man being transformed overnight from vice to virtue. If we use the word 'realistic' to mean 'likely', then this is entirely unrealistic.

Yet the brilliance of the story is to contain within its fable-like form fragments of vivid social realism. Scrooge is forced to see the world as it really is and has been, from the scenes from his own childhood to the domestic interiors of his employees and relations. The tipsy party games played by Scrooge's nephew and niece and their friends are like Victorian family video clips, even if they are shown us by a spirit. Dickens redeemed other popular, supposedly 'unrealistic' genres. By the 1830s, middle-class readers were lapping up the so-called 'Newgate Novels' of Harrison Ainsworth and Bulwer Lytton. These narrated the exploits of notorious criminals. Moralists complained that they romanticised crime. *Oliver Twist* can be seen as Dickens's response to this literary fashion, a response that insisted on the unwholesome quality of what it showed. Dickens added a preface to the novel insisting that 'the very dregs of life' may 'serve the purpose of a moral'. Dickens's moral design always requires a certain quite conscious avoidance of what a sociologist of today might think likely. Oliver, the parish boy, is strangely untainted by his life amongst desperate paupers and calculating criminals. His very habits of speech make him sound like the good middle-class boy that he is destined to become.

Improbable plots

Dickens's sense of design leads him to use, indeed to highlight, some improbable plot turns. The path untainted through corruption of *Oliver Twist* is revealed to be an elaborate scheme by his half-brother, Monks, to rob him of his birthright. There is a lost will, in which the man who was father to both Oliver and Monks left the bulk of his property to Oliver. The truth is proved by a ring and a locket that Oliver's mother possessed when she died in the workhouse. It is like the providential discoveries at the end of a romance. The parish boy gets his inheritance and the villain gets his just desserts. (Monks emigrates and eventually dies in prison.) Dickens's fiction provides us with poetic justice. Near the end of *David Copperfield*, David and his friend Traddles are being given a conducted tour of a prison by Mr Creakle, the rascally schoolmaster who has become a magistrate. Creakle, 'in a state of the greatest admiration', presents the institution's two model prisoners, Twenty Seven and Twenty Eight, who inhabit adjacent cells. They are Uriah Heep and Steerforth's malignly creepy butler, Littimer. These two villains have ended up next to each other. David feels 'resigned wonder', 'Of course!' is the reader's response. Both characters specialised in the sinister pretence of servility, so being famous 'penitents' together was a natural (even if not probable) fate.

Underlying reality

This is fiction that reveals the hidden shape of things. It uses every flamboyant staging device, every possibility of caricature, to do so. Dickens's contemporary George Eliot thought that realism should be like a Dutch painting of a domestic interior: sober, modest, attentive to the ordinary things in life. By her standards, Dickens is no realist. But we would not be so captured by his grotesquerie and exaggeration and gift for the fantastic if these did not so often and so truthfully show a reality underneath the ordinary surface of life.

Navigating Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde's London

Lydia Lutton suggests that a close analysis of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde in relation to its social and historical contexts can be revealing both of the text and of the period in which it was written.

In this tale of the dangers of alienating body from soul and deed from conscience, Jekyll's sense of self-division has been viewed as analogous to, or fostered by, divisions existing within British society. 1880s London was a city of stark contrasts: geographic segregation, economic divisions and political tensions.

By the 1880s London was an immense world-city, culturally and economically important, yet socially and geographically divided and politically incoherent. London was the largest city in the world, numbering 4 million inhabitants. In many ways the bustling, growing and multi-layered city of London gives Hyde an anonymous freedom as he is able to hide his despicable behaviour and go unnoticed by the many strangers who roam the streets. In addition, the West End of Mayfair had undergone significant renovation in the second half of the century; from a wealthy residential area it had been transformed into the bureaucratic centre of empire, the focus of transport, communication and entertainment. However, this world city seemed fragile and vulnerable with distressing effects felt through the Long Depression (1873-1896), a decline in London's traditional industries, and the absence of a unified and systematic water and health system causing frequent outbreaks of disease. Accompanying this malaise was significant social division.

In the mid 1880s London was also gripped by the threat of Irish Fenian terrorist activities, a threat that was exacerbated by a lack of political organisation. The 'heavy cane' with which Hyde 'clubs' Sir Danvers Carew is reminiscent of a shillelagh, a wooden cudgel associated with the violence.

The symbol of Jekyll's house raises the theme of the double, not only within the character but in terms of divisions within Victorian society. Dr. Jekyll lives in a well-appointed home, characterised by Stevenson as having 'a great air of wealth and comfort.' His laboratory is described as 'a certain sinister block of building ... [which] bore in every feature the marks of profound and sordid negligence.' With its decaying facade the laboratory quite neatly symbolises the corrupt Hyde. Correspondingly, the respectable, prosperous-looking main house symbolises the respectable front Jekyll wants to present to the public. Moreover, the connection between the buildings similarly corresponds to the connection between the personas they represent. The buildings are linked but look out on two different streets: the casual observer cannot detect that the structures are parts of a whole, just as Utterson cannot, or will not, acknowledge the relationship between the two.

Darkness and Fog

Stevenson's 'nocturnal', foggy, lamp-lit city setting is fitting for a society where secrecy and hypocrisy dominate. Most of the characters seem to be coming and going either late at night or in the early hours of the morning. Their activities remain unspecified or unquestioned by the vague, unreliable narrator Utterson, as Enfield admits: 'I was coming home from some place...about three o'clock of a

black winter morning.'

Throughout the novel, Stevenson establishes a link between the urban landscape of Victorian London and the dark events surrounding Hyde. He achieves his desired effect through the use of horror imagery, in which dark streets twist and coil, forming a sinister landscape befitting the crimes that take place there. Terrifying visions of the city also appear in Utterson's nightmares:

'He would be aware of the great field of lamps of a nocturnal city. . . . The figure [of Hyde] . . . haunted the lawyer all night; and if at any time he dozed over, it was but to see it glide more stealthily through sleeping houses, or move the more swiftly . . . through wider labyrinths of lamp-lighted city, and at every street corner crush a child and leave her screaming.'

Hyde appears as an unidentifiable supernatural 'figure' as he 'glide[s]' rather than walks along the city streets. He is a growing presence in Utterson's mind seen in the repetition of 'more', evidence that Utterson's imagination is 'enslaved', and prefiguring his increased influence over Jekyll.

Later, as Utterson rides to Hyde's apartments in Soho, he gets overwhelmed by the dark smog of the newly industrialised city. By the late 19th Century smoke pollution in industrialised London had become so thick that when mixed with fog it produced sky-darkening choking hazes that could last for weeks. The 'chocolate-coloured pall' is once again symbolic, not only its unique colouring reflecting the strange events surrounding the enigmatic Hyde, but also his own usual response to the events in the story.

'A great chocolate-coloured pall lowered over heaven... there would be a glow of a rich, lurid brown, like the light of some strange conflagration.'

Here the fog represents the lawyer's confusion as he struggles to comprehend Jekyll's attachment to Hyde. Furthermore it reflects his prevailing gloomy mood, and the oppressive atmosphere following the death of Carew. In addition, the funereal connotations present in the metaphor 'pall', a cloth covering a coffin, reminds the reader of Carew's shocking murder, but also foreshadows Jekyll's end.

Locked Doors, Secrecy, Evasion and Hypocrisy

Victorians could be said to suppress their true convictions and their natural tastes, sacrificing sincerity to propriety. They presented themselves as being incredibly pious and moral; they talked noble sentiments and many lived quite otherwise. They shut their eyes to what was ugly or unpleasant, pretending it did not exist. They conveniently looked the other way, often believing that candour did more harm than good. This need for secrecy, and wish to 'shut out' harsh reality, is symbolised effectively in the numerous locked doors present in the text: the strange door that Enfield encounters is always locked, Jekyll's laboratory is described as a 'windowless structure' and the three windows in the doctor's cabinet are barred with iron. After the incident with Dr Lanyon the reader is presented once again with the metaphor of the locked door, 'On the 12th, and again on 14th the door was shut to the lawyer', an unwell Jekyll urges Utterson of the need for closed doors, secrecy and silence, 'I mean from henceforth to live a life of extreme seclusion'. He has withdrawn himself to such an extent that the servants in his own household have seen little of him. What was condemned was not sin but *open sin* and in this way, the evasion, or self-deception is hypocritical.

For the characters in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, preserving one's reputation emerges as all-important. The prevalence of this value system is evident in the way that upright men such as Utterson and Enfield avoid gossip at all costs; preferring to remain silent, they see gossip as a great destroyer of reputation. In one of the most significant scenes, Utterson and Enfield are on one of their Sunday walks and speak to an ill Jekyll at his window, 'they saw it but for a glimpse, for the window was instantly thrust down...they turned and left the court without a word.' The men continue in 'silence', afraid and shocked at what they recognise in Jekyll's face. Similarly, when Utterson suspects Jekyll first of being blackmailed and then of sheltering Hyde from the police, he does not make his suspicions known; part of being Jekyll's good friend is a willingness to keep his secrets. Throughout the novel, the characters demonstrate an inability to fully express themselves, or choose to withhold highly important information. For example, in the very first chapter, Enfield claims he does not want to share the name of the man who trampled the young girl in order to avoid gossip. However, after finally naming Hyde, he and Utterson end the conversation abruptly, as they feel discussing the topic any further would be inappropriate for all parties involved. Similarly, Utterson withholds relevant information from the police following Sir Danvers Carew's murder by choosing to keep Hyde and Jekyll's relationship secret. These silences reflect the confines of Victorian morality: while avoiding gossip is an admirable quality, evasion and self-deception are hypocritical to a modern reader.

Violence

Stevenson not only satisfies society's taste for 'shockers' or 'penny dreadfuls' in the horrific tale of Hyde's attack on Sir Danvers Carew MP, he is clearly commenting on the motiveless violence on London's streets, foreshadowing Jack the Ripper's attacks in London's East End in 1888. The attack is gruesome, the 'innocent' old man's bones are 'audibly shattered', the body is 'mangled'. Even the most 'aged and beautiful gentlemen', a respected figure in society, cannot escape. The murder weapon, a cane, is indeed broken in two after being used to beat the victim.

The oppositions between the evil, violent Hyde and others repeatedly blur. In the account of his trampling the child, as in the later account of his attack on Carew, his evil is presented as gratuitous, violent aggression, which Jekyll amplifies by describing Hyde's monstrous depravity as 'drinking pleasure with bestial avidity from any degree of torture to another'. But he is not just an isolated embodiment of rage and cruelty; from the beginning his actions appear to contaminate others. Enfield tells how, after he has captured Hyde, he, the child's family, and even the doctor become possessed 'with desire to kill him...I never saw a circle of such hateful faces', 'we were keeping the women off him...wild as harpies'. Those who confront Hyde seem to turn into his doubles.

Isolation

Jekyll isolates himself to avoid accountability for the actions he considers shameful. Henry Jekyll has apparently had at best limited tolerance for the bonds of friendship. It is unthinkable that a wife or family member should be allowed to share this secret life. Only the bonds of male friendship remain to Jekyll and they will be sacrificed through his creation of Hyde. A decade before the present action, a quarrel with Lanyon over the theories that will produce Hyde breaks 'a bond of common interest.'

Jekyll and Hyde's London is presented as a male space with few women, with little comfort, closed to love's lessons in self-revelation and compromise. While there are two or three servant girls, these are no more than character types: the conventional hag, a faceless little girl running for help - the 'gentle sex' has no part in the action. The lack of women, taken together with the story's lack of specific detail about Jekyll's night-time activities, could be said to imply that Jekyll is indulging in homosexual practices behind the Victorian veil. Moreover, in his will Jekyll calls Hyde his 'friend and benefactor', an

ambiguity that leaves their 'relationship' open to interpretation. Arguably Jekyll replaces the traditional wife with Hyde as he locks himself away in his laboratory in an inversion of the domestic intimacy shared with a partner, describing their relationship using an image of matrimony as 'closer than a wife, closer than an eye'. Stevenson felt that society was not functioning successfully in this comment on the individualising effects of an emerging modern democracy. The Victorian woman was viewed as benevolent, sensitive, caring, and her absence in the text, suggests that these virtues are missing in the city. This is further suggested by the unstable image of Hyde also as a 'child of Hell', a Social Darwinist nightmare of regression to the level of a rebellious child with a lack of moral accountability. Stevenson comments on the damage that can be done by sexual Puritanism present in Victorian society: Jekyll can see no way out of his cycle of pleasure and remorse but to give license to his desires, 'I knew myself...to be more wicked, tenfold more wicked, sold a slave to my original evil.'

Conclusions

In travelling the streets of 1880s London, Stevenson engages with an eternal human conflict: the battle between the desires of the flesh and those of the spirit. The text also incorporates society's fears about the unknown dangers present on the city streets. It can also be read as a prophecy about the advancing powers of Science. It is, however, clearly a trenchant criticism of Victorian society's repressive standards of virtue and respectability.

Article Written By: Lydia Lutton is Head of English at The Marist Senior School, Berkshire

This article first appeared in emagplus 55, February 2012.

Print

Task 3

Please read the article 'Defining Poetry' by Michael Rosen.

In the article, Rosen discusses different ways poetry can bring an idea to life.

Once you have read the article, we would like you to read 'The Tyger discussed. An analysis of Blake's poem.'

This is a poem you may have heard of before and an essay that analyses the poem. As you read the analysis, look at all the ways the poem is being discussed- the use of language, the use of punctuation and the use of structure. These are all things that you will have considered at GCSE. The article is just developing these skills in a more advanced way.

Defining poetry Michael Rosen

emagazine asked Michael Rosen, poet, broadcaster and newly-appointed children's laureate, to explain what poetry is. Simple? Think again!

People often ask me, what is a poem, perhaps because they suspect that a lot of what I write isn't really poetry even though it quite often says on the cover of my books something like 'Poems by Michael Rosen'. Some people are a bit more combative from the off, and say things like, 'What you write isn't poetry, is it?'

Am I bothered?

I have several answers to this line of questioning. One is to say that I'm not really bothered by what people want to call it. If it makes life any easier, just call it 'stuff' and then we don't need to waste any more time bothering about names. After all, when you're eating a tomato, you don't really care terribly much if it's a fruit or a vegetable, do you? You care if it's a good or bad tomato. As I'm sure you've spotted, what I'm doing here is resisting the desire we have to label and categorise. At the same time, I'm criticising the way some people use the categorisations in a loaded, non-neutral way in order to determine whether this or that is good or bad. This is what people do when they talk about 'high' and 'low' culture, or when they try to make distinctions between fiction, documentary, 'docufiction' and 'mockumentary'.

Let readers decide?

Another line of answer is for me to say that a poem is quite simply whatever a group of people think is a poem. Usually, we leave this to a specific group - that's to say a publisher, an editor, some critics, fellow poets and experienced readers. For as long as people have wondered if this or that is a poem, it's the agreement between sufficient numbers of such specific people that has been decisive.

Now, once again, as I'm sure you've spotted, I've dodged the original question. Or if you were to be a little more charitable towards me, you could say that I've answered the question from a position standing outside of writing rather than inside it, looking for extrinsic explanations rather than intrinsic ones. So, by saying it's an agreement between groups of people, I've simply observed how people behave in a sociological way towards writing.

Intrinsic features of poetry?

Someone could then ask me quite legitimately, 'If groups of people decide that this or that is a poem, are there any reasons intrinsic to this kind of writing that makes them come to this conclusion?'

Now, I'm up against the wall. I can't get away with any more ducking and diving. The problem is that if we take the whole body of what has been called poetry anywhere in the world, we have a hugely diverse range of writing types. Quite quickly we can see that there can't be a simple one-factor answer. Some people have tried. The most famous is Coleridge's 'the best words in the best order'.

This sounds all fine and dandy, except that, just as beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so too is 'best' in the eye of the reader. What I think are the best words in the best order, you might think are mediocre words in a terrible order. My poem isn't a poem for you.

A what-is-poetry checklist

So, enough shilly-shallying. Here's my checklist for what leads people to think that what they're reading is a poem.

1. Patterning

Poems nearly always involve some kind of patterning of language where you could say that underlying the writing, there is a design that has some kind of regularity to it, like tartan or a wallpaper design. The most famous and obvious patterning systems are rhyme and rhythm. However, poets like Ogden Nash and John Hegley sometimes use rhyme without a regular rhythm, while other poets, particularly verse dramatists like Shakespeare or T.S. Eliot, use rhythm without rhyme.

But there are other patterning systems to look out for. English is a language that has stressed and unstressed syllables. You can use a pattern of stresses that's regular, just as you do with a conventional piece of music, the beat of music hitting the stressed syllable. Or you can count syllables. This is called 'syllabics' and Sylvia Plath is someone who experimented with this way of writing. It's one way to create pattern without being tied down by an unchanging rhythm.

Other patterning systems are repetition of sounds (alliteration and assonance), a repetition of a phrase or part of a phrase (an 'echo' or 'framing' technique) but also any kind of repetition of image or concept. These systems are much harder to discern and I call them 'secret strings'. Once again, with a highlighter, you can often find deeper meanings of a poem, by drawing lines between words that have links with each other, using their sound or their meaning.

The particular kinds of patterning that we find in poetry are aspects of the cohesion that we find in all language-use. In poetry these patterns are often that much more visible or audible.

2. Pithiness

Most poets try to achieve ways of expressing ideas that compress as much meaning, thought and feeling as they can into a short space of time or space on a page. Sometimes, as with a Shakespeare sonnet, this makes for a particularly dense kind of writing, where each word, phrase or line seems to throw up complex, ambiguous, paradoxical ideas. But another kind of compression can be achieved in a different way, the emotional intensity being created by sound, a bit like in music. This is the principle behind the element of poetry that resembles chanting. If you repeatedly chant a single phrase, you can create sensations of pleasure or sadness or compassion and quickly reach deep levels of emotion.

3. Proximity

A much overlooked aspect of poetry is the way in which poems yoke together ideas and images. In unexpected - and often unexplained - ways, poems will place one idea next to another. This is the process of association. John Donne begins one poem:

Busy old fool, unruly sun...

If you let your mind run over some of the ideas here, you can quickly see how odd this is. How can the sun be a fool? How can it be unruly ('unruly' means boisterous or disobedient)? Easy to see that it's old, but how can it be busy? What is a busy old fool? Are busy old fools unruly? In five words, there are five images, out of which only 'old' and 'sun' would seem to match up in any ordinary way. This laying of ideas next to each other in an unexpected and often unexplained way is part of the process known as 'defamiliarisation'. So, as some have said, poetry makes the familiar unfamiliar and the unfamiliar familiar. If you juxtapose two images that you would not normally see next to each other, you demand of the reader what might be called the 'work of association': the reader has to work out why such two images associate.

4. Pictures

One of the most commented on aspects of poetry concerns the way in which many poems use language over and over again to make analogies. The opening of one of Wilfred Owen's poems is 'Bent double, like beggars...' As you know, the phrase 'like beggars' is a simile. Other ways to cue up similes are to use phrases like 'as', 'as if', 'as when', 'in the way that', 'in the manner of', 'so does/do', and there's a slightly coded way of doing it, by using the comparator 'more'. Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet* says:

More than Prince of Cats, I can tell you.

In a more compressed form, poems create pictures using metaphor and metonymy and, following from what I said about patterning, they create patterns with the metaphors. Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 24', uses the idea of a painting and explores similarities and differences between paintings and love across the whole poem. This is what's called a 'conceit' (that which has been conceived), a process which underlies a great deal of poetry even when it isn't immediately obvious. A poem about trying to walk through a forest can, on reflection, also be a poem about trying to get through a difficult time in your life and so on. A poem doesn't have to say it's a 'conceit' to embody a conceit!

But why bother with metaphors and similes? Because they are one of the most powerful and useful ways in which we can investigate and explain. Wilfred Owen's poems are mostly jam-packed (a metaphor in itself!) with metaphors and similes and I've often asked myself why. I think that it reflects his desperation that people at home should feel and see the full ghastliness of the First World War. He is, in effect saying, over and over again: 'it's like this, it's like this...'

5. Mode of address

One very special thing about poems becomes apparent if we ask the question of any given poem, 'Who is this poem speaking to?' In some poems, you could say that the answer is obvious: 'He's talking to his lover' or some such. But, then we can say, if he's talking to his lover, why has he bothered to write it down and publish it? Surely, if he wants to talk to his lover, he can go and see her, write her a private letter or get on the phone! The 'writerly' answer is to say that poets take on the voices of people and things in hundreds of different ways. Poems are very often imitations of the way people would write or speak if they were speaking or writing to this or that person or thing. The mode of address, then, is itself a kind of metaphor! Robert Browning wrote poems as if they were people in the act of talking. A Duke taking some people round his great house begins:

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,

Looking as if she were alive.

The mode of address of many poems is borrowed from the sound or style of earlier poems. Wordsworth begins, 'I wandered lonely as a cloud'. The idea of beginning a poem with the image of walking out and about goes back at least to medieval times when there was a tradition of poems and songs being about going out into the countryside on a May morning and has been picked up many times by other poets, as with William Blake and the poem that begins 'I went to the Garden of Love'.

So the importance of mode of address in poetry signals the fact that 'voice' is of fundamental importance, perhaps more so than in much prose writing.

6. Scavengers

It's not only voices that poets borrow - they are incurable scavengers. If you write poems, you give yourself the licence to beg, borrow and steal any kind of language from any source: political speeches, notices, advertisements, fragments of songs, any poem in the world history of poetry. T.S. Eliot's early poetry was developed out of a patchwork of references, allusions and borrowed voices from a wide range of sources.

One of the things that makes a piece of writing into poetry is the unexplained way in which poets draw together these borrowed words, phrases, modes of address and allusions. When Alexander Pope wrote his poems many of the phrases he played with were borrowed from translations of Latin poets. Today, many of us might not recognise these without the help of notes. Bob Dylan's songs are dense with borrowed phrases from the Bible, political speeches, proverbs and other people's songs. Carol Ann Duffy's poems are full of other people's voices, like Miss Havisham from Dickens's *Great Expectations* or old school teachers, or the imagined twin sister of Elvis. One of the tricks of poetry is to surprise readers by importing one voice into the context of another.

7. The mix

If you mix these six areas of language-use into one pot, you'll be hard pushed to find a genre of writing other than poetry that can freely use any or all of them within the covers of one book.

Article Written By: Michael Rosen is a writer and broadcaster. He was appointed Children's Laureate in 2007.

From emagazine 37, September 2007

Print

The Tyger discussed

An analysis of Blake's poem.

Let's begin by noticing that this fairly short poem squeezes in no fewer than 13 question marks: it's a poem of perplexity, wonderment and speculation rather than assertion. It twice conjures up the notion (a slightly perplexing one) of 'fearful symmetry', and is itself roughly symmetrical - six stanzas, composed in the auditory symmetry of couplet form, and beginning and ending with the same question, or very nearly so: by the end of the poem, the phrase 'Could frame' has quietly mutated into 'Dare frame'.

Is this reference to symmetry perhaps a hint that one of the things the poem addresses is itself, or more generally the art of poetry? Maybe: if you look elsewhere in Blake's poetry, industrial words like furnace, anvil and hammer are usually associated with his mythical character Los, who is the personified Spirit of Poetry. At the very least, it's fair to say that the poem is in some way about the energies and pains of creation.

Many readers feel that the key question in the poem is:

'Did he who make the Lamb make thee?'

This most obviously means something like: does the God who creates gentle beings also make savagely destructive beings? Or, to give it a more exact theological spin: is the vengeful Old Testament God, Jahweh, identical with the merciful God-man of the New Testament, Christ? But consider, too, the poem's historical context: it was written in the wake of the September Massacres of 1792, when the French Revolutionaries - habitually referred to as Tygers by the horrified English press - slaughtered hundreds of aristocrats and priests. So perhaps the line also implicitly asks: how can a revolution supposedly inspired by humanitarian impulses so rapidly turn murderous?

The more closely you look at the poem, the more jumbled and promiscuous its background mythology seems to be. When Blake asks: 'What the hand, dare seize the fire?', he's pretty clearly thinking of the Greek story of Prometheus, who stole fire from Heaven and in the great mythical emblem of rebellion against gods and fathers (more revolutionaries); but in the strange, beautiful lines:

*When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears.*

Blake seems to be rewriting the revolt of Lucifer and Beelzebub from a work he greatly admired, Milton's epic *Paradise Lost* (yes, more revolutionaries). It's also possible that the mention of 'stars' here

somehow embraces the astronomical classification - recent in Blake's day - of a 19-star constellation christened The Tiger.

The Tyger by William Blake

*Tyger Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?*

*In what distant deeps or skies,
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand dare seize the fire?*

*And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?*

*What the hammer? and what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!*

*When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?*

*Tyger Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?*

Article Written By: Kevin Jackson is a freelance writer and author of *Invisible Forms: A Guide to Literary Curiosities* published by Thomas Dunne Books.

This article first appeared in emagazine issue 11, February 2001

Print

Task 4

We now want to see how you can respond to a poem and how a poem can be used to shape our views of the world around us.

It is fair to say that we are living through a time that none of us have experienced before or could have expected. We would very much like to hear your views and thoughts on what the Covid 19 pandemic has meant to you.

Please read the following poem by the Poet Laureate, Simon Armitage. You might want to print it off so you can annotate as you read it. You may also want to approach it in the following way:

Set a timer for 10 seconds.

- Do a 'snapshot' look at the poem for 10 seconds -- don't try to read it -- and jot down anything you notice about it.
- Do the same again but this time for 30 seconds.
- Now put the poem to one side.
- On three different days over the next week or so, spend about 10 minutes reading the poem and writing about it in any way you want. You might write about what you like or what you are puzzled by or you might just ask questions. It's up to you whether you read over what you wrote on the previous occasion -- there are advantages to both ways. Over the course of the next few weeks you could try the activity both ways.
- On the last day, read the poem again, read over all your writing, then make a few notes or record a voice message exploring how your response to the poem changed and developed.

Lockdown

And I couldn't escape the waking dream
of infected fleas

in the warp and weft of soggy cloth
by the tailor's hearth

in ye olde Eyam.

Then couldn't un-see

the Boundary Stone,
that cock-eyed dice with its six dark holes,
thimbles brimming with vinegar wine
purging the plagued coins.

Which brought to mind the sorry story
of Emmott Syddall and Rowland Torre,

star-crossed lovers on either side
of the quarantine line

whose wordless courtship spanned the river
till she came no longer.

But slept again,
and dreamt this time

of the exiled yaksha sending word
to his lost wife on a passing cloud,

a cloud that followed an earthly map
of camel trails and cattle tracks,

streams like necklaces,
fan-tailed peacocks, painted elephants,

embroidered bedspreads
of meadows and hedges,

bamboo forests and snow-hatted peaks,
waterfalls, creeks,
the hieroglyphs of wide-winged cranes
and the glistening lotus flower after rain,

the air
hypnotically see-through, rare,

the journey a ponderous one at times, long and slow
but necessarily so.

Simon Armitage.

Once you have considered the poem, we would like you to read the article 'The art of an essay.' The article considers what an essay can be and gives you some tips on essay writing. After reading the article, we would like you to do one of two things:

Either

Write a poem of your own with the title 'Lockdown.' The poem should explore your own thoughts and experiences of the Covid 19 pandemic.

Or

Write an essay with the title 'Lockdown.' The essay should explore your thoughts and experiences of the Covid 19 pandemic.

In either, you might consider the impact it has had on you personally and on your friends and family. You might want to consider how society has responded to the crisis and also consider what the future may hold.

It might be interesting for you to do some research around:

The Great Plague

The Spanish Flu pandemic

The Flu pandemic of 1957.

Reading about these will give you an appreciation of the historical, social and geographical context to the outbreaks and how society responded at the time. It is very interesting to consider how social media has influenced the response to the current pandemic. Do you think it has helped your understanding or has it added to confusion and anxiety?

A Loose Sally of the Mind – Putting Forward Bright Ideas in English Literature Essays

Writer, academic and critic Blake Morrison discusses the nature of the English literature essay, going back to the original meaning of the word to discover just how exploratory, tentative and personal it's meant to be.

For most students, an essay is something imposed on them rather than something they choose to do. You might hear someone say 'I've been writing a poem' or 'I've been writing a story', as if these were pleasurable and freely chosen activities, but if someone tells you they've been writing an essay it'll usually be with a groan – the essay will have been set as homework, to be done as duty, rather than as a means of self-expression. But essays – even literary essays – can be as personal to write, as pleasurable to read and as creative as poems or novels. And they're no less a matter of expressing yourself and offering your personal take on the world.

Trying Something Out

'To essay' something – the verb, that is – means to try something out, to have a go. And the noun 'essay' suggests an attempt or endeavour. In his famous Dictionary, Samuel Johnson defines the essay as

a loose sally of the mind, an irregular indigested piece, not a regular and orderly composition.

Of course, when teachers come to mark essays, they do look for order of some kind, the sense of an argument being put forward in a clear and logical fashion. Still, I think Dr Johnson is right – the best essays put forward a bright idea or series of bright ideas, not fully formed perhaps, but stimulating and provocative. An essay isn't the last word. It's tentative, personal and subjective: 'Here's what I think – how about you?'

The most famous exponent of the essay is perhaps the French 16th-century writer Michel de Montaigne, who described his essays as attempts to show 'some traits of my character'. They also expressed his thoughts on politics, religion, morality, love, sex, parenthood, death and much besides. But they were unashamedly personal and this was what made them radical. We tend to think of essays as impersonal. When I was doing A Levels, and then again at university, the use of the first person pronoun was discouraged. You were meant to be objective, which meant adopting a style that was neutral, beige or passive. But essays can't help but be subjective. And the original model for them, Montaigne's, was candid, open, not afraid to say 'I'.

After all, it's your engagement with the text that matters. You do need to be aware of what others think of that text – critics, reviewers, your teacher, your fellow students, the way in which that text was received when it came out and has been received since. But it's what you bring to that text that

matters – your own ideas and responses. Talking about its structure, or its themes, or use of metaphor, or characterisation, all this is also a way of saying how it affects you. And if it hasn't affected you, if it's left you cold, that too is something to explore.

Orwell and Early 20th-century Essays

The literary essay had its heyday in the early 20th century, with writers like D. H. Lawrence, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf and E. M. Forster. Topping all of them was George Orwell. In the current era of post-truth, newspeak and double-think Orwell is essential reading – a man who can help us see through the lies and sham, a man to guide us through the labyrinth of war, post-colonialism, Brexit and Donald Trump. My favourite essay of his is called 'A Hanging'. It recounts an experience he had as a young man while serving in the police force in Burma, at a time when he was already beginning to question the ethics of colonialism. The essay brilliantly describes the scene of the hanging: the guards, the condemned man (whose offence we are never told), a dog that bounds into the yard where the hanging is due to take place and disrupts the proceedings. For most of the essay, Orwell doesn't comment on the morality of capital punishment. But when he notices the prisoner step aside to avoid getting his feet wet in a puddle, even though he has only minutes left to live, Orwell suddenly realises how immoral it is to take another person's life for any reason, even by way of punishment. Of course, the thought may have occurred to him before. The essay is as carefully shaped, and as artful, as any short story. But there's a sense of discovery in it – as though it's through the act of recalling the event, and writing about it, that Orwell is working out what he really thinks. In creative writing showing always works better than telling. And it's by showing what happened, rather than preaching and pontificating, that Orwell gets his point across.

Of course, Orwell's essay tells a story and it's based in life. Critical essays can't do that. They engage with texts. But when Orwell writes about Gulliver's Travels, or boys' comics, or the poetry of the 1930s, or the idiocy of Tolstoy's criticism of Shakespeare's King Lear, you still hear that same voice – of somebody not afraid to have his own thoughts, even if they're out of step with current opinion. Above all, there's a sense that he's connecting the books he writes about with his own life, his own experiences, his own ideas about the world. And you don't have to be in your twenties, thirties and forties to do that. If a sentence in a novel resonates with you, or the line of a poem rings true for some reason, or you come across a simile or metaphor that sends shivers down your spine, then that's worth writing about: it's what the poet or novelist hoped when he or she set down those words – not that their text would be studied for exams, but that someone would be emotionally moved or intellectually provoked by it.

The Extinction of the Essay?

In a recent article for the Guardian, the American novelist Jonathan Franzen suggests that what defines the essay – the expression of opinions or the narrating of personal experiences (or some combination of the two) – is now a staple of social media: of blogs, of posts, of tweets. He asks:

Should we be mourning the essay's extinction? Or should we be celebrating its conquest of the larger culture?

It's a good question, but I don't think that essays and tweets are comparable. That's not just because the most famous tweeter in the world – the man who's given Twitter a bad name – is Donald Trump or because 140 or even 280 characters are too minimal to be called essayistic. It's because tweets

allow little room for nuance. They're assertions not explorations – and exploring is what the essay does best. Blogs are a better comparison: as first-hand testimonies of thoughts, opinions and experiences set down by one person for other people to read, they're the equivalent of essays. And however opinionated, blogs are often vulnerable, tentative and deeply personal – again just like essays.

Criticism, Judgement and Celebration

At one point in Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*, the two main characters, Vladimir and Estragon, exchange insults – 'vermin', 'moron', 'sewer rat' and 'cretin'. The ultimate, unanswerable insult they come up with is 'critic'. The word 'criticism' (like the word 'essay') has negative associations. But literary criticism doesn't preclude positivity: passion, enthusiasm and celebration. It's about championing books by showing what makes them tick far more than it's about attacking them or doing them down. Honest judgment is what we look for in criticism – reasoned, nuanced but personal judgement. Critical essays may be parasitic – they exist in relation to the literature they're feeding off – but they can also be an art-form in themselves. What we value in them is wit, passion, intelligence, provocation, enjoyment – the same qualities we look for in a novel or poem.

Of course, hatchet jobs can be fun too, when someone takes on an established name and calls his or her bluff. But it's a different kind of fun I'm thinking of – the fun of finding new things in a classic text or of finding new ways to talk about that text, through the insights of feminism, or environmentalism, or politics, or simply from personal experience. Books might exist physically as objects without even being opened, but they don't truly exist till someone reads them. The author Alberto Manguel has said that

All writing depends on the generosity of the reader

– the text gives to us and we bring something to it in return. Your task when writing a literary essay is to interpret, explain, elucidate, make sense – but also to connect the book you're reading to your own life. *Mutato nomine, de te fabula narratur* the Roman poet Horace wrote:

Change the name and the story is about you.

Classic texts tell stories that seem to be our stories, as though written just for us. And that's why we, in turn, write about them.

In short, there's nothing weird or elitist or negative about the act of criticism. It's as natural as breathing. It's what we all do when we've seen a film, or heard a new album: 'What did you think of it? I thought this.' And we back up our thoughts by reference to a particular scene or song, and argue our corner against those who disagree with us. That's the basis of the critical essay. And it can be inventive, it can be creative, it can be passionate. Most importantly, whether you use the I-word or not, it has to bear your stamp – it has to have your personality at its heart.

Article Written By: Blake Morrison is a writer of fiction, poetry, non-fiction, journalism and literary criticism. He is Professor of Creative Writing at Goldsmiths, University of London.

The Art of the Essay (emagplus)

In this extract from EMC's The Literature Reader, Judy Simons explores the essay in the digital age – and provides some practical tips.

The critical essay does not conform to a single format which has to be rigidly adhered to. Like other literary genres, it is a flexible medium, a creative space in which academics, students, authors and general readers can share opinions. Literary experience is not constant but changes over time, and modern essays are generous in acknowledging the diversity of readers and their backgrounds. [...]

'The great enemy of clear language is insincerity,' wrote George Orwell. 'When there is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims, one turns as it were instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish squirting ink'. Orwell's *Inside the Whale* (1940) is both a classic example and a clear-sighted assessment of the art of writing critical essays. Wide-ranging in scope, beautifully structured, eschewing jargon or complicated terminology, it addresses its central subject head on. Its insistence on clarity and honesty is sound advice. Believe in what you are saying and do not try to dress up your ideas in highbrow language or rely on clichés.

There are many student guides on the market which provide a template for essay-writing. Websites such as essaydragon.com advise on the different stages of planning, structure and style while a number of university English departments publish online handbooks, which contain excellent practical pointers. There are also helpful YouTube videos, which take you through the composition process step by step. Yet because an essay should always be personal, there can be no absolute prototype. It is helpful to remember that the verb 'to essay' also means 'to try'. Your essay is a means of testing out ideas and polishing the techniques used to structure them.

My own top five tips are:

1. Know your subject. This relies on reading the text for yourself. At A Level you may feel that you have done this exhaustively. Yet, understanding is also about engaging with that text, the story it tells, and whether or not it has the power to speak directly to you as a reader, not just via your teacher. Literature that is set for A Level has usually been selected for its complexity and its potential to enlighten or affect your thinking. So, read and read again!
2. Conduct research. This does not necessarily involve seeking out obscure primary sources, although reading Keats's letters or Mary Shelley's 1831 introduction to *Frankenstein* will offer considerable insights into their works. Rather it means reading around the text, understanding the contexts, including its literary history, and knowing what other commentators have said. Writing an essay is not an isolated activity. When you embark on it, you are entering an ongoing debate about literature, including with other students and with academic critics, whose ideas will help inspire your own. Remember that there is no 'correct' interpretation of a text and that it is perfectly acceptable to disagree with others' opinions. This is an important step in articulating your own position.

3. Answer the question. Most essay topics offer a deceptively simple proposition that demands a more subtle answer; for example, 'How far do you agree with the view that in King Lear, Goneril and Regan are victims rather than villains?'. Your essay should of course sustain a focus on these two characters and the scenes in which they appear. But the phrasing also invites a review of the primary value system embedded in the action, such as the human and social values of family, respect for order, filial obedience, love, charity and kingship. How do Shakespeare's dramatic methods, the juxtaposition with Gloucester's family or the positioning of Lear's speeches excoriating his daughters fit into the play's exploration of power? Is there really scope for ambiguity here? Don't forget that the best essays show evidence of an enquiring mind so you should not be shy about using question marks.
4. Structure your argument. Where an author can be equivocal or abstruse, the critic should be aiming to be clear and to untangle. Planning what you are going to say is essential. You may find that as you make notes on your reading, your proposition evolves in unexpected ways. The key is to organise your points into a logical format that supports your main case. This avoids your ideas spilling out onto the page in a random sequence that results in a disjointed or rambling piece of work. In a comparison piece, for example, you should aim to keep your paragraphs balanced alternately between the texts. Remember too to keep to the prescribed word count. Do not make the mistake of thinking that the more you write the more compelling your thesis will be.
5. Provide the evidence. Every claim you make must be underpinned by reference to the text or to relevant contexts. This is what makes your line of reasoning convincing. You need to be selective about the material you use, but if you have followed points 1-4 above, this should come naturally. Quotations from the text underpin and strengthen your interpretation. They can be used alongside any background information you have, for example about the cultural climate in which a writer's work was produced and the literary conventions of the day. Do not make the mistake of expecting characters in a Victorian novel to behave according to twenty-first century codes. It is the judicious use of reference to characters, scenes, authorial voice and imagery that will ensure your essay comes alive.

The Essay in the Age of Digital Technology

Digital technology has opened up a massive literary resource. It provides access for researchers to a range of materials which were once available only in a specialist library, such as copies of original manuscripts, out of print books and articles and biographical or historical information. It allows for new scholarship and literary discoveries that contribute to the essay's intervention in an evolving live debate.

Wikipedia, Google and other search engines can, however, tempt a reader towards simplistic analysis. A work of literature amounts to more than its surface narrative or plot synopsis. The internet is seductive because it appears to be comprehensive but its information is only as reliable as the person who posted it, and not all online views are equally valid. A critical perspective located via Google can range from incisive analysis by a learned scholar to a barely literate high school essay on Jane Eyre, such as some of those on the Bartleby website. Surfing the internet requires scrupulous discrimination on the part of the consumer, and it should never, ever be used as a sales outlet from which to purchase ready-made, supposedly bespoke coursework essays.

On the plus side, digital media have created a new approach to essay writing, with online magazines such as Electric Lit offering alternative publishing outlets. A whole blogosphere has emerged, populated by enthusiastic litbloggers, who exchange views, reviews and mini-essays. Blogging, where

typical posts are between 800 and 1500 words, affords a spirited, democratic space for literary discussion. As one commentator has noted, 'it does more than an essay because of its playfulness'. Yet its explosive growth has sparked controversy, with some, such as one chair of the Man Booker judges, claiming that blogging will only result in the 'detriment of literature'. Check out the regularly updated Literature Blogs UK Top 10 and make up your own mind.

Rarely do blogs follow the accepted conventions of critical essay writing. They are more casual, allowing for impromptu, open-ended observations that reaffirm a collective passion for literature. They can be quirky, playful or angry. They challenge the specialised rhetoric of the literati and what some see as an ivory tower complacency. Yet many academics, authors and teachers are themselves active bloggers, who find in the blog release from academic conventions and who know they can reach new audiences with a speed and directness that gives their views both currency and significance.

Readers live in the contemporary moment, and the power of present-day media shapes both textual meaning and production. Technology has opened up a world in which literary experience is not confined to the traditional print format. This is why the essay remains such a dynamic form, constantly renewing itself with each external stimulus. Do not give up on its rewards.

This extract is taken from EMC's *The Literature Reader*, a collection of articles by leading academics and writers on a wide range of topics from modernism and experimental literature to Shakespeare and the contemporary novel.

Article Written By: Judy Simons is a Research Fellow at the University of London and Emeritus Professor of English at de Montfort.

This article was first published in emagplus for emagazine 88, April 2020.

Print

Task 5

MOOCS are a fabulous way to develop your understanding of a particular subject you are interested in.

Over the course of Y12 and Y13, you will be asked to complete some MOOCS as part of your A Level experience. They are a really good way to either develop your understanding further of a particular aspect of an A Level you are studying or to explore something that interests you but it not part of the A Level course.

The MOOCS you do will also form an important part of your personal statement when you are applying to university. Universities love to get applications from student who have taken their learning beyond the classroom and the content of their actual A Levels.

We would like you sign in to Unifrog.

You should then scroll down to the box that says MOOCS and click on it.

Scroll down the list of topics until you get to Literature and click on it.

Then look at the list of MOOCS that have already started (don't worry, you can still start.)

There will be a course entitled 'How to read a novel' that is run by Edinburg University.

It would be really good preparation for Y12 if you were to complete the MOOC. You do not need to pay to do the course and you do not need to pay for a certificate. You will get an email confirming that you have completed the MOOC.

Task 6

The final task is just to give you some suggestions of different ways you can access Literature.

You may want to watch a play online:

<https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/learning/schools/secondary-and-fe/on-demand-in-schools>

You may want to listen to a podcast:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/series/books>

<https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/books-and-authors/id331296649?mt=2>

<https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/not-another-book-podcast/id1370122551?mt=2>

<https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/the-literary-salon/id495583876?mt=2>

<https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/simon-mayos-books-of-the-year/id1402579687?mt=2>

You may want to read more about texts that you are already aware of:

<https://www.bl.uk/shakespeare>

<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians>

<https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature>

And finally, you may want to choose a novel to listen to:

https://stories.audible.com/discovery/enterprise-discovery-21122353011?ref=adbl_ent_anon_ds_ds_dml_cntr-4

We hope you enjoy the tasks above and that they further your enjoyment of literature. Make sure that you stay safe and well this summer. We can't wait to see you in September.

Mr Buckley and Miss Cruse.