



GCSE English Literature Virtual Communities

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Welcome



Overview:

- Dispelling myths about poetry
- Helping to shift mindsets
- Engaging with poetry
- Some useful resources

Introducing our new texts for GCSE English Literature

For first teaching from September 2023 (first exam in 2025), we're introducing three powerful and uplifting modern texts by female writers of colour, and a new diverse poetry cluster.

Section A Modern prose and drama:

- Three new texts: *Princess & The Hustler* by Chinonyerem Odimba; *Leave Taking* by Winsome Pinnock and *My Name is Leon* by Kit de Waal
- Three texts will be withdrawn after the last exam in 2024: *The History Boys*; *Never Let Me Go*; *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*.

Section B Poetry:

- Addition of a third cluster of poetry to the anthology called 'Worlds and Lives'.

For more information please visit our designated webpage:

[AQA | Spark something](#) and [Talking about our changes free, on-demand e-Learning module](#)

News should have reached you by now that we have made some changes to the specification.

Here's a reminder of those changes which we don't have time to go into detail or answer questions about today.

Please visit the webpage (link on screen) where you can read all about the changes and should you have questions please contact the team at AQA who will be happy to help.

One of those changes is relevant to today's session however and that's the addition of an exciting new poetry cluster called 'Worlds and lives' which you have the option to teach in earnest from September 2023 for first exam in 2025.


Didn't hear about the changes from us?

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Poetry anthology update

- Each poetry cluster will now be available as **separate booklets**.
- Available in **both print and digital formats**.
- Digital copies of all 3 clusters are available to **download from Centre Services** now. Once logged in, click on 'Resources' and then 'Assessment and training'. Select 'English'. On the filter on the left tick:
 - Qualification: GCSE
 - Category: Assessment material
 - Resource type: Assessment material
 - Specification: 8702 English Literature
 - Sort by: **Newest first**
- **Print copies of *Worlds and lives* (8702/B/3) can be ordered from the summer term 2023** (ready for teaching from September 2023 for first examination in summer 2025).
- Updated [AQA | Exams | Question papers and stationery | Order stationery, anthologies and booklets.](#)

Some reminders in relation to the poetry anthology:

The poetry anthology is now available in a digital format – download from Centre Services (directions on screen)

The new cluster *Worlds and Lives* is available as a downloadable PDF now for those who are keen to take a look, but you can't order print copies until summer next year.

Introducing Worlds and lives

Some highlights:

- **10 of the 15 poems** in this new collection are **published post-2000**.
- It's modern and yet **rooted in the revolutionary spirit of the Romantics**.
- Includes some well-known, familiar names amongst new, current voices.
- More balanced representation - over half are women writers and two thirds are writers of colour.
- It covers **personal and political** themes - opportunities to explore **collective concerns about the world** we live in as well as **universal themes** to which we can all relate as individuals, including ideas about home, heritage, belonging and connection.

Find out more [AQA | Spark something | Poetry | Worlds and lives](#)

Tell us what you think [@AQAEnglish](#)

Familiar names include Imtiaz Dharker, Grace Nichols and new, current voices like Caleb Femi

Reminder that it's a DfE requirement to include Romantic poetry – and we've taken the revolutionary spirit of the Romantics into the present day with poems that cover climate change, protest poems, poems that explore complicated questions about the self and our place in the world/society (and more) - which we hope are all things that will engage young people

Please do let us know what you think by writing to us or going to our Twitter page

Dispelling myths about poetry

- Poetry is too hard
- It's boring...
- It's not just the students...

'Poetry is too hard'

- Number of poems that need to be covered.
- False notion that all have to be 'memorised'.
- How can you write enough about a poem? Especially the short ones!
- Ideas-based approach rather than methods-based.
- Confidence is key.

A quick straw poll of students revealed that they believed poetry is the hardest element of their Literature GCSE. You can sense a panic at the idea that they have to study fifteen poems, and they seem to be under the illusion that they have to memorise every single word of every single one; that literature lessons will become this conveyor belt of poems, ripe for technique spotting and rote learning of words that mean very little. Another worry I have heard from students is how can you write an extended exam response from a very short poem, again, showing that students' first idea is that you can only write about the methods – those techniques that were sought out and identified – rather than the universal ideas that lie in the poems. Confidence is the key here. This course will hopefully give a starting point for building confidence in your students and dispelling the myths around poetry being 'too hard'.

'It's boring...'

- Number of poems that need to be covered.
- False notion that all have to be 'memorised'.
- It has nothing to do with me or my life.
- Confidence.
- Universal ideas (and an ideas-based approach).
- Links to the familiar.
- Cultural capital.

Unfortunately, the very things that make poetry seem hard for some of our students can also send them into the defensive 'it's boring' attitude. Added to this is the stubborn insistence by students that this poem can't possibly have any relevance to the issues, ideas and problems in their lives. How can they? How can something written by some old man 2-300 years ago have any link to my life now? Of course, as teachers we know that the ideas and issues discussed in Literature are universal. Many are incredibly relevant to us today and should fire a spark of familiarity, of recognition, and of passion. This is something else some of the ideas in this course might help with. We will share ideas of how we can show students that the universal ideas discussed in poetry link to our lives in 2022.

It's not just the students...

- Our students are often a mirror of us.
- Jump off that conveyor!
- Report on the Examination (Poetry) 2022: *"This particular paper had the lowest entry of the options offered but there was nonetheless a significant and, inevitably, varied entry."*

It can be a vicious circle: you believe the students may have a negative view of poetry, so you approach the topic with trepidation rather than confidence. They can sense that! There is a huge amount of content in the Literature GCSE course to cover in two years and the temptation of the conveyor belt approach is very strong: here's the next poem, and the next poem, and the next; and our approach to them all will be exactly the same...

When covid affected the exams and there was discussion about us being able to choose an element of the poetry course that would be 'dropped' I remember reading comment after comment of people looking forward to dropping the poetry element. Not any more! Some of the ideas in this course may be familiar, some may be new. If any single one of them helps to reignite a passion for teaching what I believe to be the most accessible, interesting element of the course, I'll go away smiling.

GCSE English Literature Paper 1 (2022)

Option routes	NM	PM	PN
Entry (2022)	58%	28%	14%

2022	Paper 1		
Option	1M	1N	1P
Total marks	30	30	30
Mean mark	16.7	15.2	15.3

Sharing this data for interest.

The top table shows that the most popular route (by significant majority) was the 19th century novel and Modern texts combination of exam papers.

(N=19th century novel M=Modern texts P=Poetry)

Interestingly the mean marks for each paper are similar.

(Have to be cautious about drawing conclusions from data and bear in mind that there will be different entry profiles for the different routes but this is still worth sharing as it might help to dispel perceptions about poetry being harder)

Discussion point

1. Do you find the taught poetry to be the most difficult element of the English Literature GCSE?
 - If so, why?
 - If not, what and why?
2. What methods do you use to engage students in the anthology poetry?

Helping to shift mindsets

- Ideas rather than methods.
- Universal themes.
- 'Big Ideas' rather than historical context.
- Building confidence.
- Links to prior learning.
- Time.

Ideas rather than methods

- There is a risk of comments on poetic construction becoming rather descriptive and offering only limited potential to move up the mark scheme because they interrupt a student's focus on examining words, ideas and meanings.
- What is useful is when students structure their responses around the focus of the task in each paragraph and then address AO2 in service of their ideas; there were some outstanding examples of this technique.
- As with Question 1, comments on poetic construction could be limiting. When discussing *Bayonet Charge*, for example, there were frequent references to enjambment and caesura; this is not per se 'wrong' but a mere observation of the techniques or even a vague comment about 'flow' and 'pace' will not achieve above Level 2 AO2 if it is not tied to meaning.

Report on the Examination (Poetry) 2022

As stated in the report on the examination this year, there is still some temptation for students to apply a methods based focus when discussing poetry, letting the identification of caesura, for example, be the leading point and therefore losing sight of the idea the poet was expressing. Ensuring that we take time to explore the 'story' of the poem and the poet's ideas before we go anywhere near the methods used to express meaning is vital if students are going to engage with the poems. This is all tied in to confidence, cultural literacy, and curriculum as a minimum, so is something that will be included in many of our discussion points in this event.

Ideas rather than methods

- Ideas before methods ALWAYS
- Personal response before a critical one.
 - React
 - Wonder
 - Explore
 - Link

Universal themes or 'Big Ideas'

Statement of importance:

- GCSE English Literature is the study of how writers communicate their ideas about the world, and how readers might respond to these ideas.
- It aims to develop a critical understanding of the ways in which literary texts are a reflection and exploration of the human condition – the study of which develops empathic understanding of human nature.
- High-quality English literature is that which displays recognisable literary qualities and, although shaped by particular contexts, transcends them and speaks about the universality of the human condition.
- GCSE English Literature aims to enable students to appreciate these qualities, developing and presenting informed, critical responses to the ideas in literary texts and the ways writers present these ideas.
- It aims to enable students to make links between a variety of written texts, and between the texts and contexts within which it was shaped.

Underpins the whole qualification

'Big Ideas' rather than historical context

- Questions from Summer 2022
- Big ideas:
 - 'Power of love'
 - 'Conflict'

0	1
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Compare how poets present ideas about the power of love in 'Sonnet 29' and in **one** other poem from 'Love and relationships'.

[30 marks]

0	2
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Compare how poets present ideas about conflict in 'Bayonet Charge' and in **one** other poem from 'Power and conflict'.

[30 marks]

Ultimately, the students are studying an exam text in the poetry, and when they sit the exam the question itself will offer the students a big idea to comment on.

'Big Ideas' rather than historical context

- Increasingly, students are moving away from the addressing of AO3 via social/historical ideas which is most welcome and enables them to write in a way which is so much more engaged with poets' ideas.
- And, at 16 years old, many students understood the power of love to affect your whole being – – it's a universal thing and so much more interesting than historical facts about the poets.
- Advice for Students: It may be interesting for you to know the background to poets and their poems but writing about these in your exam without any links to the poems won't help your response. Answer the question and discuss the ideas to which it refers.

Report on the Examination 2022

Therefore, in our teaching time, we should try to find a balance between useful information that helps students to understand and address the big ideas in the poems and the old fashioned 'historical' context idea which often results in students giving unhelpful and largely uncredited background information that does not link to the ideas being addressed.

Building confidence

- Start early.
- Use of art and songs to encourage independent thought.
- Inspiring a personal response.

Lacking the confidence to put ideas forward.

Activities later that might help students to build confidence in a personal response.

Links to prior learning

- Current affairs
- Curriculum shift
- Grouping by theme
- Linking big ideas together

Evidence is clear that students learn better when they can link ideas to prior learning or make links to issues that directly affect them or are familiar in their lives.

In order to help students we could perhaps consider teaching the poems alongside similar texts and ideas. I will talk more later about current affairs, non fiction and language links, but in the Literature Curriculum could we perhaps consider a move away from teaching all of the poems as one module to grouping them with similar topics and ideas? Could Ozymandias fit alongside Macbeth in the exploration of tyrant leaders? Could we discuss the ideas in Blake's London alongside study of some of the elements in A Christmas Carol? The treatment of women in Farmer's Bride or my Last Duchess when considering the treatment of Eva Smith by the Birlings and Gerald...

Yes, the anthology clusters already group the poems according to a theme – with our new cluster of Worlds and Lives offering even more coverage of relatable themes, issues and ideas – but can we break these down even further and teach according to the big ideas or themes that may be most prevalent in the poems? Grouping some of the Love and Relationships poems that deal with familial love together, for instance.

Time

- Start early
- 'Intelligent backwards planning'
- Give students time to respond:
 - Consider initial personal thoughts and responses before sharing.
 - Every idea is valid.

As mentioned previously, I am acutely aware that there is a great deal of content to cover in the Literature course. When I suggest starting early, I do not mean to start teaching the cluster poems in KS3, or encourage any sort of narrowing of the curriculum. Instead, I mean that introducing some of the confidence building skills in Year 7 and letting students become accustomed to that independent thought and putting forward ideas and suggestions before that self-consciousness of later years kicks in could be a helpful foundation on which to build study of the GCSE texts. Similarly, introducing some of the themes and ideas that they will encounter early in KS3 will help us to be able to create the prior learning mentioned on the last slide, reducing the time needed to cover these ideas as new introductions. Time is also key within lessons and for student. It is vital that students are given time to process the thoughts and ideas that they have about an idea in a poem, and that they learn to take time before they offer answers or explanations.

Discussion point

1. Do you currently teach your poetry cluster as a single / whole unit or do you drip-feed the poems intermittently, throughout the course?
2. Do you link the poetry with other texts you teach? Examples?
3. What have you found that works well for you?

Engaging with Poetry

- Art
- Songs
- Making links
- Playing with structure
- Big questions linked to big ideas
- Current affairs
- Reading aloud

Art

- Abstract art can be used as a discussion point to help students build confidence in their own opinions.
- Related artworks, or art which may help to provoke discussion of ideas in the text include:
 - Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*
 - John William Waterhouse, *The Lady of Shalott*
 - Eugène Delacroix, *Liberty Leading the People*
 - Henry Fuseli, *Lady Macbeth Seizing the Daggers*
 - Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*

Supporting Student Progression, Autumn 2021

Art

Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*

- What do you notice in the image?
 - Think about colours and placement; what tone is being portrayed?
 - Where does your focus lie?
- How does the image make you feel?
- Look specifically at the figure, what do you notice?
- Is the art realistic?
 - Do you notice any motifs or symbolism?
 - What ideas do you think are being presented?
- Why do you think things are being depicted in this way?
- How can this be linked to the text we are studying?

Songs

- Build confidence – much ‘safer’ talking about a song than a poem.
- Introduce themes and ideas.
- As an ‘in’.
- Link ideas to something more relatable.
- Helps to clarify ideas being portrayed.

Songs are a great way to build confidence and introduce the main themes and ideas in poetry. I've included a huge list in the accompanying booklet, but some examples are Coldplay's Viva La Vida or Motorhead's King of Kings to introduce Ozymandias, The Cranberries' Zombie to link to Remains, War Photographer or even Poppies, Pink Floyd's Us and Them for CotLB, Dave's Black linked to ComH and even Stick it to the Man from School of Rock when thinking about the Romantics...

Making links

- Between poems.
- Between poems and songs/art.
- Between poems and other texts studied.
- Between poems and current affairs.
- Linked to films/books/past experiences.

As stated previously, it is vital that students can make links between new ideas and learning and past learning or experience. This is what helps to understand and to learn. There are many different ways in which links can be explored in the classroom, a few of which are listed here.

Big questions linked to big ideas

Used in and across lessons:

Power and conflict:

- What impact does conflict have on those involved?
- How do the poets depict different forms of power?
- What are some of the different types of power that we encounter through the poems?

Worlds and lives:

- What 'worlds' are explored in the poems?
- How do the poets depict Man's impact on the world?
- How do the poets portray Man's relationship with the natural world / our planet?

How this might look

Big Question: What is 'paradise'?

Copy of Robinson's *A Portable Paradise* (p.18 in *Worlds and lives*)

- What do you understand 'paradise' to mean?
- Read and discuss poem.
- Read interview with the poet: [The Guardian](#).
- What do you understand Robinson's idea of paradise to be?
- Could paradise be the same as hope?
- Why might we need an idea of paradise?
- What would your idea of paradise be?
- Who introduced this idea or concept to you?
- Is paradise portable?
- Where and when might you find it necessary to call on your 'paradise'?

Playing with structure

- Story boards
- Deconstruction – why this order?
- Pivotal moments/volta
- Sorting activities
- 'what if...?'
- **Why this, now?**

Current affairs

- Links to GCSE Language skills.
- Links to our lives now – connecting past and present.
- Cultural literacy.
- Articles on current affairs and issues.
- Our place in nature.
- Heritage and belonging.

How this might look

Big Question: How relevant are Shelley's ideas of England in 1819 to Britain in 2022?

Playing with structure: Deconstructed copy of Shelley's 'England in 1819'

- How would you piece this poem back together?
 - Use form as a clue to the original structure.
- How does your version compare to Shelley's original?
- Discussion of placement of ideas within the poem.
- Opportunity for vocabulary discussion (leech-like, Liberticide e.g.)
- Where is the volta?
 - What is the idea that Shelley is communicating through this volta?
- Links to current affairs
 - Article from [The Guardian](#) 'Forget trickle down, what the UK needs is middle-out economics'
 - ["How dare you!"](#) Greta Thunberg's address at the 2019 UN Climate Action Summit

Reading aloud

- Model
- Choral/call and response
- Feelings evoked by words - Charge of the Light Brigade
- Different voices – Ozymandias
- Playing with change of tone

It is incredibly important that students have the opportunity to hear poetry being read aloud – and to be taught to read it aloud. This can then lead to a student being able to read a poem *as if* they were reading aloud, which can help with understanding tone, expression and ideas. This will help students in the unseen poetry element of the course.

Resources

[Teaching guide: Unseen poetry](#)

We've collated a list of great sources of poems, inspiration and teaching ideas from third parties - see pages 45-51.

Course materials: Building skills and confidence for unseen poetry, spring 2021 (Download from Centre Services > tick 'Training, guidance and events').

Listen to professional audio recordings of poems from the AQA poetry anthology (for free) produced and read by Anton Jarvis, English Teacher and former BBC Radio Producer/Presenter.

['Power and Conflict'](#)

['Love and Relationships'](#)

('Worlds and Lives' coming soon)

Resources

Take advantage of the extra resource sections on our website.

GCSE English Literature

8702

Find all the information, support and resources you need to deliver our specification.

Teaching from: September 2015

Exams from: June 2017

QAN code: 601/4447/6

[Specification](#)

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<https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/english>

Event materials

The electronic materials from this event will be available to download shortly. If you aren't able to download them at this time, they will be made available to you in the customer portal of our online booking system.

Once we receive notification that you have attended the course, you will be sent a certificate of attendance email. When you receive the email, please log in to your account and the materials will be available on the 'my resources' tab on the welcome screen.

Please explain to the delegates that it may take a few days for the materials to be made available as we need to receive confirmation that they have attended (ie when we receive the attendance list). Once we have this confirmation, we can send a certificate of attendance email and the materials will be available in the portal. It is important that, if a delegate has attended in place of another colleague (ie they are not the named person on the attendance list) then they must let us know their name, school and email address so that we can send them a copy of the certificate email and provide access to the materials. Please send in the attendance list as soon as you can.

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Thank you
