

## **ENGLISH LITERATURE TRANSITION WORK 2026**

This transition booklet is designed to help you to bridge the gap between your GCSE studies and A Level for English Literature before starting the course in September.

As an A Level English Literature student, you will need to demonstrate your ability to be a critical thinker, curious, committed and an independent learner in order to build academic excellence. Although you will have fewer subjects in Year 12, preparation is crucial as the volume of work is much greater due to the increased demand on depth and detail in both the coursework and examinations. By completing the activities and wider reading in this transition booklet, you are equipping yourselves with the important skills and knowledge that are required as part of the Key Stage 5 curriculum over the two year course. The exercises in this booklet will also ensure that you are ready for the exciting challenges of becoming an A level student in September.

In this transition booklet, you will find pre-reading transition tasks that have been designed to ensure that you are ready for the exciting challenges of becoming an A level student in September:

- introduce key concepts
- build foundational knowledge

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### **Produce an Online Reader Profile:**

The English department at Holyport College offers a diverse range of literary works both from within and outside the literary canon across the centuries. You will explore texts ranging from fiction to non-fiction, prose to poetry. Our curriculum is diverse, keeping up with issues of the time, as well as offering a historical, social, theological and political lens into the past. An interest and enthusiasm for reading is integral for any student undertaking the study of English Literature at A Level. Intellectual curiosity and reading beyond our syllabus and curriculum promotes independence, effective communication and well informed critical thinkers.

#### **Task:**

As part of developing an understanding for who each of you are as critical thinkers, writers and readers, read a book for pleasure and create an online reading profile. We will refer to your reading profiles in our first lesson in September. You can use the following questions to support you:

- What are your current interests within the literary world?
- What are you currently reading?
- What did you enjoy and least enjoy about your current book?
- Provide examples of wider reading you have completed for your book that you found particularly interesting
- What other books are there that are similar in genre and style?



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## **Component 01**

### **(Drama and Poetry pre-1900)**

#### **Set Texts:**

Hamlet by William Shakespeare

A Doll's House by Henrik Ibsen

Christina Rossetti's poetry

#### **Subject Terminology - AO2 Methods**

Learn the following literary terms below and then identify their function and effect. One has been done for you. Some of the literary devices and their definitions are taken from York Notes: [Literary terms Hamlet: AS & A2](#)

| Method                         | Definition                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Function and Effect                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Allusion</b>                | An indirect or implied reference to something in the real world or fiction. Allusion is used as a literary device to link texts, yet differs from intertextuality in its brevity and indirectness.                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Anaphora and repetition</b> | Repetition is a rhetorical device where a word, phrase, or sound is used more than once within a short passage or piece of text.<br><br>Anaphora is the repetition of a word or phrase at the start of successive sentences or clauses.                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- To provide a continual reminder</li><li>- To establish something as perpetual, continuous and ongoing</li><li>- To add clarity, strengthen argument or demonstrate a desire for something</li></ul> |
| <b>Antithesis</b>              | Setting one idea in a logical, balanced way against another:                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Aside</b>                   | A common dramatic convention in which a character speaks in such a way that some of the characters on stage do not hear what is said, while others do. It may also be a direct address to the audience, revealing the character's views, thoughts, motives and intentions. |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Blank verse</b>             | Verse written in lines of unrhymed iambic pentameter. An unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable make up one iamb; five iambs in a line make iambic pentameter                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Cadence</b>                 | (adj. cadential) a sense of closure. Often Shakespeare will bring a scene crisply to an end with a rhyming couplet                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Diction</b>                 | The sorts of words a writer uses in particular situations.                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

|                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |  |
|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Double entendre</b> | A word or phrase that is open to two interpretations, one of which is usually risqué or indecent.                                                                                                                                                                                        |  |
| <b>Dumbshow</b>        | A mime prefiguring the action of the play                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |  |
| <b>Epic</b>            | Originally a long poem featuring larger-than-life, godlike characters. Epic imagery suggests things happening on a huge scale.                                                                                                                                                           |  |
| <b>Epitaph</b>         | Verse or prose suitable for inscribing on a person's tomb                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |  |
| <b>Euphemism</b>       | A mild or indirect word or expression substituted for one considered to be too harsh or blunt when referring to something unpleasant or embarrassing.                                                                                                                                    |  |
| <b>Interlude</b>       | An episode which momentarily lowers the dramatic tension, lightens the mood and serves to make the resumption of the tragedy proper feel all the more intense.                                                                                                                           |  |
| <b>Memento Mori</b>    | The phrase means 'remember you are mortal'. In Shakespeare's time, many people hung memento mori in their homes to remind them of the brevity of human life. Paintings of skulls, wasting candles and decaying fruit remind us that human life is a brief moment compared with eternity. |  |
| <b>Monosyllables</b>   | Words consisting of single syllables                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |  |
| <b>Oxymoron</b>        | A phrase that combines two words that seem to be the opposite of each other.                                                                                                                                                                                                             |  |
| <b>Parody</b>          | An imitation, sometimes comic, of a dramatic or poetic style.                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |  |
| <b>Pentameter</b>      | A line with five stressed syllables                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |  |
| <b>Platitude</b>       | A trite, commonplace idea, a cliché                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |  |

|                     |                                                                                                                                     |  |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Prose</b>        | The way we usually write and speak: in language which, unlike verse, is not rhythmically organised                                  |  |
| <b>Pun</b>          | Simple wordplay, exploiting two different meanings of a word.                                                                       |  |
| <b>Satire</b>       | Making fun of moral, social or political abuses by exaggerating or ridiculing them.                                                 |  |
| <b>Staccato</b>     | Usually rapid, crisply enunciated, clipped speech                                                                                   |  |
| <b>Stichomythia</b> | A passage of verse in which two characters speak alternate lines, usually rapidly and generating excitement                         |  |
| <b>Subversion</b>   | Undermining the authority of a character, an idea or a convention, for example, by making it seem inadequate, absurd or meaningless |  |
| <b>Wordplay</b>     | The witty exploitation of the meanings and ambiguities of words, especially in puns.                                                |  |

### **Characteristics of the Tragic Hero:**

**Below are the characteristics of a tragic hero explained by Greek philosopher, Aristotle, including:**

**Hamartia** – It is the tragic flaw that causes the downfall of a hero.

**Hubris** – It is excessive pride and disrespect of the hero for natural order.

**Peripeteia** – The reversal of fate that the hero experiences.

**Anagnorisis** – This moment happens when the hero makes an important discovery in the story.

**Nemesis** – A fortune that the protagonist cannot avoid, usually due to retribution of his hubris.

**Catharsis** – These are the feelings of pity and fear that the audience feels for the protagonist after his downfall.

## How Has the Play Been Interpreted Across Time? AO5

Hamlet is a play, not just a text. Soliloquies for instance can be spoken aloud, whispered, or delivered as voiceovers by actors and therefore it is important to explore the performance of the text. Several stage and film productions of Shakespeare's Hamlet exist, watch and make notes on each different version of the play in the grid below. You may wish to consider the following:

- how do the directors and actors interpret *Hamlet* differently?
- setting
- use of props and costumes
- performance style
- staging and cinematography
- emphasis on theme
- tone and style



It is also helpful to be aware that the play explores the following big ideas before you begin watching:

- madness
- corruption and decay
- revenge and justice
- madness (real or feigned)
- duty and family
- death and the afterlife

**Laurence Olivier (1948)**



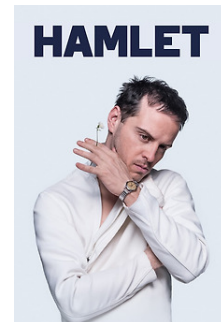
**Kenneth Branagh (1996)**



**Gregory Doran's 2008 RSC production**



**Robert Icke's production (2018)**



## How do Allusions Shape Meaning? (AO2)

In the play, Shakespeare makes allusions to mythology, the bible, literature and historical figures. Allusions are specific references to themes, well-known characters or events and they are often used to:

- add complexity and depth
- enhance the big ideas within the play
- connect a character or plot to something recognisable, concrete and familiar
- enrich meaning
- evoke emotions and tone
- express complex ideas concisely
- foreshadow events and suggest a character's trajectory

Read through the definitions for each allusion from the play. Then research and write down each mythological reference in *Hamlet*.

|                   | Mythological allusion                                                                                                                                      | Biblical allusion                                                                                        | Literary allusion                    | Historical allusion                         |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| <b>Definition</b> | A reference within literature, art, and popular culture to characters, stories, or symbols from ancient mythologies, such as Greek, Roman, or Norse tales. | A reference to the Bible, or more specifically, to a character, event, story, or concept from the Bible. | A reference to a piece of literature | A reference to a historical event or period |

| Mythological Allusions in Hamlet |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |          |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| Example                          | Textual Example                                                                                                                                                                                    | Research |
| <b>Neptune</b>                   | 'Upon whose influence<br>Neptune's empire stands<br>Was sick almost to<br>doomsday with eclipse:<br>And even the like precurse of<br>fierce events,<br>As harbingers preceding still<br>the fates' |          |
| <b>Hercules</b>                  | 'My father's brother, but no<br>more like my father<br>Than I to Hercules: within a<br>month'                                                                                                      |          |
| <b>Hyperion</b>                  | 'So excellent a king, that was<br>to this <i>Hyperion to a satyr</i> '                                                                                                                             |          |
| <b>Satyr</b>                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |          |
| <b>Niobe</b>                     | 'Like Niobe, all tears:--why<br>she, even she--<br>O, God! a beast, that wants<br>discourse of reason,<br>Would have mourn'd<br>longer--married with my<br>uncle'                                  |          |

|                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |  |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Hecuba</b>  | <p>‘For Hecuba!<br/> What's Hecuba to him, or he<br/> to Hecuba,<br/> That he should weep for<br/> her?’</p>                                                                                                                 |  |
| <b>Pyrrhus</b> | <p>‘The rugged Pyrrhus, he<br/> whose sable arms,<br/> Black as his purpose, did the<br/> night resemble<br/> When he lay couched in the<br/> ominous horse,<br/> Hath now this dread and<br/> black complexion smear'd’</p> |  |
| <b>Priam</b>   | <p>‘where he speaks of<br/> Priam's slaughter: if it live in<br/> your memory, begin<br/> at this line: let me see, let me<br/> see--’</p>                                                                                   |  |

## Close Reading

Using your skills and knowledge from studying Shakespeare at GCSE, read and annotate the extract taken from Act 1 Scene 1 by identifying methods and their effects.

### ACT I

#### SCENE I. Elsinore. A platform before the castle.

*FRANCISCO at his post. Enter to him BERNARDO*

**BERNARDO**

Who's there?

**FRANCISCO**

Nay, answer me: stand, and unfold yourself.

**BERNARDO**

Long live the king!

**FRANCISCO**

Bernardo?

**BERNARDO**

He.

**FRANCISCO**

You come most carefully upon your hour.

**BERNARDO**

'Tis now struck twelve; get thee to bed, Francisco.

**FRANCISCO**

For this relief much thanks: 'tis bitter cold,  
And I am sick at heart.

**BERNARDO**

Have you had quiet guard?

**FRANCISCO**

Not a mouse stirring.

**BERNARDO**

Well, good night.

If you do meet Horatio and Marcellus,  
The rivals of my watch, bid them make haste.

**FRANCISCO**

I think I hear them. Stand, ho! Who's there?

*Enter HORATIO and MARCELLUS*

**HORATIO**

Friends to this ground.

**MARCELLUS**

And liegemen to the Dane.

**FRANCISCO**

Give you good night.

**MARCELLUS**

O, farewell, honest soldier:  
Who hath relieved you?

**FRANCISCO**

Bernardo has my place.  
Give you good night.

*Exit*

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**Component 02:**  
**(Comparative and Contextual Study)**



**The Gothic:**

Use this time to research Gothic context. Demonstrating understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received is central to the exam.

Use the links below to support you - I would suggest you make notes as these will come in very useful right from the start of the course.

[Gothic motifs | The British Library](#)

[In Our Time - Gothic - BBC Sounds](#)

**Set texts:**

***The Gothic***

*Dracula* by Bram Stoker (1897)

*The Bloody Chamber* by Angela Carter (1979)

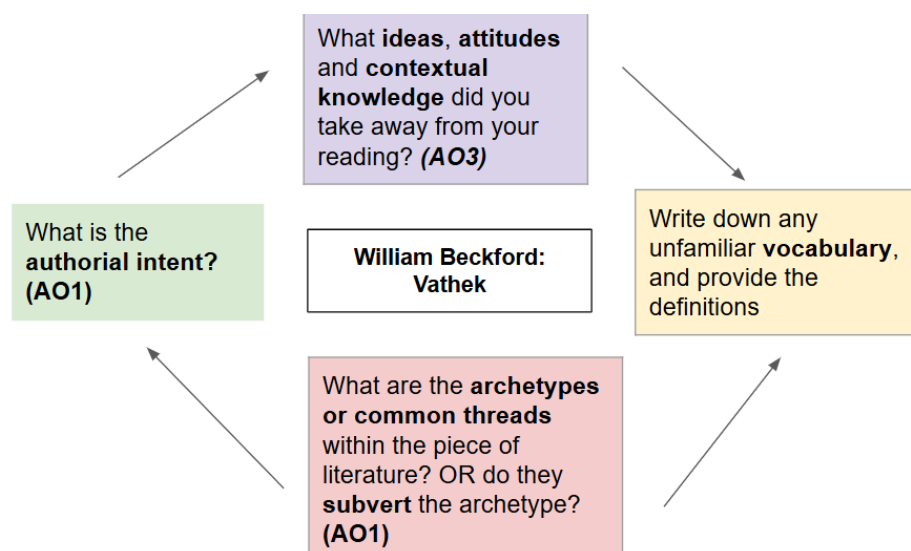
Compulsory reading: Chapters 1-4 *Dracula* [The Project Gutenberg eBook of Dracula, by Bram Stoker](#) and complete the Lit Crit below.

**Lit Crit:**

This list below is not exhaustive and by the same token the expectation is not that you would read every text on this list. However, the more Gothic texts you read the more expert you will be in the genre which is what you need to be for the exam.

- William Beckford: *Vathek*
- Ann Radcliffe: *The Italian*
- Mary Shelley: *Frankenstein*
- Oscar Wilde: *The Picture of Dorian Gray*
- William Faulkner: *Light in August*
- Cormac McCarthy: *Outer Dark*
- Iain Banks: *The Wasp Factory*
- Toni Morrison: *Beloved*

When reading, you should think about the lit crit questions below and write notes for each one.



**Complete this Gothic Vocabulary Chart:**

|                                                                         | <b><u>Note definitions, relevant dates, authors/key texts here</u></b> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b><i>Romanticism</i></b>                                               |                                                                        |
| <b><i>Uncanny/<br/>unheimliche</i></b>                                  |                                                                        |
| <b><i>The Sublime</i></b>                                               |                                                                        |
| <b><i>Terror/ Horror (as<br/>distinguished by<br/>Ann Radcliff)</i></b> |                                                                        |
| <b><i>Doppelganger</i></b>                                              |                                                                        |