

Welcome to A-level English Literature 2026

We follow the OCR specification, and will study:

- Othello
- The Duchess of Malfi
- Chaucer
- Atonement
- A Streetcar Named Desire
- The Dystopian genre, specifically 1984, The Handmaid's Tale, Brave New World, We.
- Critics and context, plays in performance

Your examination will consist of two papers which are each 2.5 hours and worth 40% of the course. You will also complete a Non-Examined Assessment (coursework) worth 20%. Students study a minimum of eight texts across poetry, prose, and drama. You can find the specification [here](#). You will need to buy the texts below to use during the course:

The Drama and Poetry pre-1900 Component 01:

Othello by William Shakespeare

- Publisher/Imprint: Arden Shakespeare (Bloomsbury)
- ISBN: 9781472571762

The Duchess of Malfi by John Webster

- Publisher/Imprint: *Bloomsbury Publishing PLC*
- ISBN: 9781904271512

The Merchant's Prologue and Tale

- Publisher/Imprint: Cambridge School
- ISBN: 9781316615478

The Dystopian Genre, component 02:

1984 by George Orwell

- Publisher/Imprint: Penguin Classics (Penguin Student Readers)
- ISBN: 9780241705407

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood

- Publisher/Imprint: Vintage Classics
- ISBN: 9781784874872

Brave New World by Aldous Huxley

- Publisher/Imprint: Vintage Classics
- ISBN: 9780099518471

We by Yevgeny Zamyatin

- Publisher/Imprint: Modern Library Classics (Random House)
- ISBN: 9780812974621

The NEA texts:

Atonement by Ian McEwan

- Publisher/Imprint: Vintage
- ISBN: 9780099429791

A Streetcar Named Desire by Tennessee Williams

- Publisher/Imprint: Penguin Modern Classics
- ISBN: 9780141190273

The World's Wife by Carol Ann Duffy

- Publisher/Imprint: Picador (Pan Macmillan)
- ISBN: 9781035038541

We will be starting with the dystopian genre, and the bridging work reflects this. You should prioritise purchasing the dystopian texts to ensure you can complete the bridging work and are ready to start the dystopian genre when you return to school.

Bridging Work

Total time: approx. 2-4 hours plus reading time.

TASK 1: Reading.

Read the three texts below. Keep a reading journal tracking how the authors present the relationship between the citizen and the state.

- The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood (Focus: Theocracy and control of the female body).
- Nineteen Eighty-Four by George Orwell (Focus: Surveillance, psychological manipulation, and language control).
- Brave New World by Aldous Huxley (Focus: Technological hedonism and genetic conditioning).

Then listen to the following Massolit course:

<https://massolit.io/courses/dystopian-literature/utopia-dystopia-speculative-fiction-and-extinction>

(the videos total about an hour altogether) and create a timeline of the dystopia genre based on the information from the videos

Jot down anything specifically relevant to the set texts (mentioned in videos 2 and 3 respectively)

TASK 2: Contextual Research

Dystopias are never really about the future; they are reflections of the time they were written.

Instructions: Research the following historical events and how they directly influenced dystopian writing. Focus on how real-world fears translate into fictional nightmares. For each historical event, think about where we see these ideas in dystopian texts you either already know, or have read as part of this bridging work.

- 1) The Rise of Industrialisation , Historical shift from agrarian to mechanised societies, which authors use to critique unchecked technological "progress," the dehumanisation of workers, environmental destruction, and the loss of individual autonomy in favor of mass conformity. Where do we see these ideas in literature?
- 2) The Rise of Totalitarianism, , The rise of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia., How dictatorships crush individuality, enforce propaganda, and use secret police forces. Where do we see these ideas in literature?
- 3) The Cold War & The Nuclear Age, , Post-WWII paranoia, McCarthyism, and the threat of total nuclear annihilation., Fears of sudden state destruction, constant surveillance, and global instability. Where do we see these ideas in literature?
- 4) Second-Wave Feminism (1970s/80s), , The backlash against women's rights and reproductive autonomy. Where do we see these ideas in literature?
- 5) The Digital Panopticon (Late 20th Century), , The birth of mass data collection and algorithms., The evolution of state surveillance. Where do we see these ideas in literature?

Use the following sources for help:

- Britannica Dystopian Novel Hub: britannica.com
- ReadWriteThink Dystopian Characteristics Guide: readwritethink.org
- The British Library Discovering Literature: bl.uk/discovering-literature
- The Orwell Foundation: orwellfoundation.com

- BBC Bitesize Prose Fiction Guide: bbc.co.uk/bitesize

OPTIONAL TASKS

Introduction to Critical Theory

Research one of the following two literary frameworks and write a 250-word reflection explaining how either concept applies to a dystopian book, film, or TV show you already know (e.g., The Hunger Games, Black Mirror):

Feminist Literary Criticism: Looks at how literature reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women.

Or:

Marxist Literary Criticism: Views literature through the lens of class struggle, examining how those in power (the bourgeoisie) exploit the working class (the proletariat) to maintain control.

Listen to:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09k0nzi>

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/utopian-and-dystopian-fictions/id1776596947>

Read:

We by Yevgeny Zamyatin (Focus: state control through Technological and surveillance)

The Children of Men by P.D. James (Focus: Demography, despair, and totalitarian control).

The Memory Police by Yoko Ogawa (Focus: Memory loss, state-enforced forgetting, and loss of identity).

Never Let Me Go by Kazuo Ishiguro (Focus: Cloned bodies, ethics, and passive acceptance).