



English Literature (Edexcel) A Level Bridging Work

This work is designed to prepare you for the start of both sides of the A Level course. Your teachers will check completion of each task by questioning you, or asking to see your notes. Where relevant, please ensure you keep notes, or can produce a copy of the reading which you have highlighted and annotated.

PROSE TASK: Introduction to dystopia and academic writing and talks

1. Read '1984' by George Orwell. This is essential pre-reading for our first Prose text on the course, 'The Handmaid's Tale'. As you read, reflect on the messages Orwell has about society and government control, and the features of the genre of dystopia.
2. Read the article by Margaret Atwood on 'Why I write Dystopias'
<https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2022/10/margaret-atwood-dystopias>
3. Listen to the lecture from Radio 4 'The Reith Lecture' on the meaning of 'Freedom of Speech'. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001fmtz>

POETRY TASK: Immersing yourself in contemporary poetry

1. Read the poem below and complete the initial activities, thinking/talking points.
2. Write an essay response to the question following the above activities. You will do some work in the first few weeks on essay writing; this will be your starting point.

'To the Welsh Critic Who Doesn't Find Me Identifiably Indian',

Arundhati Subramaniam

You believe you know me,
wide-eyed Eng Lit type
from a sun-scalded colony,
reading my Keats – or is it yours –
while my country detonates
on your television screen.

You imagine you've cracked
my deepest fantasy –
oh, to be in an Edwardian vicarage,
living out my dharma
with every sip of dandelion tea
and dreams of the weekend jumble sale...

You may have a point.
I know nothing about silly mid-offs,
I stammer through my Tamil,
and I long for a nirvana
that is hermetic,
odour-free,
bottled in Switzerland,
money-back-guaranteed.

This business about language,
how much of it is mine,
how much yours,
how much from the mind,
how much from the gut,
how much is too little,
how much too much,
how much from the salon,
how much from the slum,
how I say verisimilitude,
how I say Brihadaranyaka¹,
how I say vaazhapazham² –
it's all yours to measure,
the pathology of my breath,
the halitosis of gender,
my homogenised plosives
about as rustic
as a mouth-freshened global village.

Arbiter of identity,
remake me as you will.
Write me a new alphabet of danger,
a new patois to match
the Chola³ bronze of my skin.
Teach me how to come of age
in a literature you've bark-scratched
into scripture.
Smear my consonants
with cow-dung and turmeric and godhuli.
Pity me, sweating,
rancid, on the other side of the counter.
Stamp my papers,
lease me a new anxiety,
grant me a visa
to the country of my birth.
Teach me how to belong,
the way you do,
on every page of world history.

Glossary

¹Brihadaranyaka – a Sanskrit word for great wilderness.

²vaazhapazham – a Tamil word for banana.

³Chola – one of the most important longest-ruling dynasties of South India which conquered many countries outside of India and was a key ancient empire.

Initial activities

1. Read the poem slowly at least twice.

- Read it aloud if you can or hear it in your head (which is what you will need to do in exam conditions).
- One reading might note the line breaks.
- Another might focus on the punctuation and sense of the text without the poetic line breaks. This can help you understand the choices the poet has made.

2. Look at the shape of the poem on the page.

- Notice the space between stanzas.
- Notice any changes in typography or line length.

3. Consider the 'story' of the poem: What is happening? What is the setting?

- It's important to establish this foundation.
- Establish this and consider the focus of the exam question, before you start noticing finer details and writing your analysis.

Thinking/talking points

1. What do you understand by the following terms:

- the literary establishment?
- the academic establishment? How has the established literary canon been developed?
- What kind of people have held the power to define that from medieval times to the present day? Has that change and if so how?
- What has the role of gender and race been in that?

2. Consider the experience of reading words in Indian languages (Tamil and Sanskrit) and English in this poem.

- How does that make you feel as a reader? How might your experience of reading the poem aloud be different from the poet's?
- Is there a difference between reading it on the page and aloud?
- Consider the effect of the poet's combination of these words.

3. Think carefully about the title of the poem in relation to the points above. This is a poem written to address a reviewer or academic critic.

4. Pinpoint the tone of this poem. Which stanza in particular most strongly reflects the tone you have identified?

***TIP*:** when a poem deals with important political topics you must take care not to jump to unsupported conclusions. You cannot assume what the poem conveys or the poet's intention, by relying on societal truisms and assumptions. You must instead look for a pattern of evidence in the poem itself.

ESSAY QUESTION

Read the poem *'To the Welsh Critic Who Doesn't Consider Me Identifiably Indian'* by Arundhati Subramaniam. Examine the methods Subramaniam has used to explore the concept of identity.

Your response should be approximately 1 ½ pages long.