

English Literature

This bridging work **MUST** be completed by the time you start your course and will be assessed during the first weeks of term. The aims are for you to be ready to start learning at post-16 level.

What do you do in your first year?

In the first year, you will begin studying most of your set texts for the following specification: [Pearson Edexcel Level 3 Advanced GCE in English Literature](#).

Up until Christmas you will focus on three different texts: a contemporary poetry anthology, 'Poems of the Decade,' the classic of science fiction 'The Handmaid's Tale' and the first of your drama texts, 'A Streetcar Named Desire'. After Christmas, you will additionally start work on your second drama text, Shakespeare's Othello. The year finishes with study of one specific poet: John Donne, and your coursework home text: 'Translations' by Brian Friel.

Year 12	Teacher 1: Poetry and Prose (50%)	Teacher 2: Drama and NEA (50%)
HT1	Poems of the Decade	A Streetcar Named Desire
HT2	The Handmaid's Tale	A Streetcar Named Desire
HT3	The Handmaid's Tale and POTD	Othello
HT4	Donne	Othello
HT5	Donne	Othello
HT6	Donne	NEA - Translations

Required Resources

You will be required to obtain your own copies of the key texts ('A Streetcar Named Desire', 'The Handmaid's Tale', 'John Donne - Selected Poems' and 'Othello') to annotate and use for extra revision at home. It is your responsibility to bring the required texts to every lesson. We strongly recommend that you buy the following editions:

Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*: Penguin Modern Classics ISBN: 9780141190273

John Donne, *Selected Poems*: Penguin Classics, 2006 ISBN 9780140424409

Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*: Vintage Classics ISBN 9781784873189

William Shakespeare, *Othello*: Heinemann Advanced Shakespeare ISBN 9780435193058

Brian Friel, *Translations*: Faber Paperback ISBN 9780571117420

Bridging Work - Drama

It is recommended that you read 'A Streetcar Named Desire', which is the first drama text on the course, and other plays by Tennessee Williams ('Cat on a Hot Tin Roof' and 'The Glass Menagerie').

Task 1: Contextual Research (A03)

Create a one-page visual or written summary on the social and historical context of the play. Include:

- Post-WWII America and the South
- Gender roles in the 1940s
- Class tensions and the American Dream
- Tennessee Williams' life and themes in his work

Format: Mind map, infographic, or bullet-point summary

Task 2: Read the two short character descriptions below then answer the following question: What do you predict the central conflict between these two characters will be? What themes might emerge from their clash?

Blanche is a woman in her late 30s from a once-wealthy Southern family. She arrives in New Orleans to stay with her sister, Stella, after losing their family estate. Blanche is elegant, sensitive, and deeply attached to the past. She often speaks in poetic language and seems to live in a world of illusion and memory. Beneath her charm lies a fragile and anxious personality, haunted by loss and shame.

Stanley is Stella's husband, a working-class man in his early 30s. He is confident, physical, and proud of his Polish American identity. Stanley is direct, practical, and often aggressive. He values control and dislikes pretension. When Blanche arrives, he quickly becomes suspicious of her and sees her as a threat to his authority and lifestyle.

Format: notes to be written up in class

Task 3: Introduction to Critical Reflection (A05): Read the two short critical viewpoints given below. Which character do you feel more sympathy for based on the extracts and your research? Why?

Blanche as a Tragic Hero

"Blanche DuBois is a modern tragic heroine, undone not only by her own flaws—her dependence on illusion and her fragile mental state—but also by the brutal world around her. Williams crafts her as a figure of sympathy, whose poetic sensibility and yearning for gentility are crushed by the harsh realism of Stanley's world. Her downfall is not merely personal but symbolic of the decline of a more graceful, if flawed, Southern ideal."

— Elaine Showalter, feminist literary critic

Stanley as a Victim of Class Prejudice

"Stanley Kowalski is often vilified as a brute, but he is also a product of his environment—a working-class man defending his space against the intrusion of Blanche's elitism and condescension. Williams presents Stanley not just as violent, but as someone asserting his identity in a society that marginalizes his class. His aggression, while disturbing, is also a response to being treated as inferior by Blanche and the values she represents."

— John S. Bak, American drama scholar

Format: notes to be written up in class

Bridging Work - Poetry

Eat Me - Patience Agbabi

When I hit thirty, he brought me a cake,
three layers of icing, home-made,
a candle for each stone in weight.

The icing was white but the letters were pink,
they said, eat me. And I ate, did
what I was told. Didn't even taste it.

Then he asked me to get up and walk
round the bed so he could watch my broad
belly wobble, hips judder like a juggernaut.

The bigger the better, he'd say, *I like
big girls, soft girls, girls I can burrow inside
with multiple chins, masses of cellulite.*
I was his Jacuzzi. But he was my cook,
my only pleasure the rush of fast food,
his pleasure, to watch me swell like forbidden fruit.

His breadfruit. His desert island after shipwreck.
Or a beached whale on a king-size bed
craving a wave. I was a tidal wave of flesh

too fat to leave, too fat to buy a pint of full-fat milk,
too fat to use fat as an emotional shield,
too fat to be called chubby, cuddly, big-built.

The day I hit thirty-nine, I allowed him to stroke
my globe of a cheek. His flesh, my flesh flowed.
He said, Open wide, poured olive oil down my throat.

Soon you'll be forty... he whispered, and how
could I not roll over on top. I rolled and he drowned
in my flesh. I drowned his dying sentence out.

I left him there for six hours that felt like a week.
His mouth slightly open, his eyes bulging with greed.
There was nothing else left in the house to eat.

'Eat Me' - the first poem we will study on the course - is an audacious dramatic monologue which examines an extreme kind of unhealthy relationship. Agbabi uses the relationship between 'feeder' and 'feedee' to explore issues of gender and power. That the concerns of the poem are not confined solely to sexual politics is hinted at through some of the language used to describe the woman's body: 'forbidden fruit', 'breadfruit', 'desert island', 'globe', 'tidal wave'. These suggest a post-colonial viewpoint in which the colonial authority - identified with the male protagonist - is ultimately overwhelmed by the power of the former colony. However, this dimension is hinted at subtly. The power of the poem lies in the voice of the narrator and the vividness with which her situation is described: patterns of alliteration, assonance and repetition combine to convey a cloying sensuousness which mirrors the excess described. Read aloud, the reader

can't help but be sensitised to the mouth and tongue. The rhyme/half rhyme scheme of aba further increases the sense of claustrophobia in the poem. In these ways the subject's physicality is enacted at the level of language. The ending of the poem is quite shocking and worth thinking about in terms of the poet's attitude towards consumption - and where this eventually might lead.

TASK: Prepare your answers in note form, or annotations on the poem, to the following questions, to be written up in class:

1. Explore how the poem uses two voices - the narrator's and the man's - to chart the shifting dynamics of the relationship between them.
2. How is the woman's body described and how does the description of the woman's body change through the course of the poem? How does this relate to the shift in power within the poem?
3. Following on from this, students might consider whether the poem is solely concerned with gender relationships or if there are other possible themes.
4. Look at the form of the poem, in particular the patterns of sound. What effect do these have? How do they relate to the subject matter?