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Literature in English

for Cambridge International AS & A Level

COURSEBOOK

Elizabeth Whittome



 Cambridge Assessment
International Education

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Cambridge International

AS & A Level Literature in English

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Contents

Introduction	iv		
Assessment overview and key concepts	vi		
How to use this book	viii		
Part 1: AS Level	1	Part 2: A Level	189
Section 1: Poetry 1	2	Section 4: Poetry 2	190
Unit 1: Introduction to poetry	3	Unit 20: Poetry critical essays	191
Unit 2: The language of poetry	9	Unit 21: Poetry passage questions	209
Unit 3: Poetic structures and themes	18	Unit 22: Poetry unseen and comparisons	227
Unit 4: Working with rhythms, sounds and movement	26	Section 5: Prose 2	253
Unit 5: Poetry unseen	44	Unit 23: Prose critical essays	254
Unit 6: Timed poetry essays, critical and passage type	53	Unit 24: Prose passage questions	264
Section 2: Prose 1	65	Unit 25: Prose unseen and comparisons	276
Unit 7: Studying a novel or short story	66	Section 6: Drama 2	299
Unit 8: Prose – opening paragraphs	76	Unit 26: Drama critical essays	300
Unit 9: The novel – structure	83	Unit 27: Drama passage questions	309
Unit 10: Characterisation	90	Unit 28: Drama unseen	326
Unit 11: Prose unseen	98	Part 3: Essay skills, techniques and problem solving	348
Unit 12: Timed prose essays, critical and passage type	106	Introduction	349
Section 3: Drama 1	120	Unit 29: Writing a good critical essay	350
Unit 13: Studying a play	121	Unit 30: Tackling a passage question	354
Unit 14: Studying the themes of a play	127	Unit 31: Unseen	357
Unit 15: Studying play structures	133	Unit 32: Unseen comparisons	359
Unit 16: Characters in drama	145	Unit 33: Writing longer essays/coursework	360
Unit 17: The language of drama	154	Unit 34: Using critics	362
Unit 18: Drama unseen	165	Unit 35: Command words and typical essay terminology	365
Unit 19: Timed drama essays, critical and passage type	177	Unit 36: Troubleshooting	369
		Index	xxx
		Glossary	xxx
		Acknowledgements	xxx

Introduction

This is the second edition of your course book, with new features designed to help you to succeed in your study of English Literature at Advanced Level. Like the first edition it is intended to inspire a love of literature in English and greater confidence in reading, thinking, analysing and writing about it. It envisages a two-year course, with the first year devoted to AS Level, or first-year studies, and the second year to Advanced Level work. However, there may be other learners with different educational experiences who can benefit just as much from the book, and the Pathways grid is helpful in showing you how.

The book contains a great deal of advice on undertaking passage-based questions that combine the skills of close reading with wider reference to the text. Part 1 begins with the basics of the subject and is suitable for revision or for those who have not taken an earlier qualification such as O Level, GCSE or IGCSE in Literature, before moving on to Part 2's more advanced studies later. However, you should look closely at the specific requirements of your own syllabus, because there will be slight differences.

Some of you may have studied Literature already up to GCSE, IGCSE or O Level. For you, the AS Level part of the book will contain some revision elements, although there is plenty of new and challenging material there, too. If you haven't followed one of these courses, then pay particular attention to the early units on Poetry, Prose and Drama and you will soon come up to speed and be ready to tackle the Advanced Level if you want to.

In the Advanced Level part of the book, all the knowledge and skills you've acquired during the first part of your course will be extended and refined. You'll learn different approaches and new technical terms. The activities here are more advanced and more demanding.

Reading is central to this course. It demands concentration and focus. Don't allow yourself to be distracted: switch your devices off and enjoy some quiet mental space to read!

Enjoying literature is also about discussing what you've read and expressing your thoughts; this includes writing essays, either for homework or tests and exams. This book focuses on sharing ideas and discussion, as well as writing particular kinds of essays on Poetry, Prose and Drama (including Shakespeare) with advice on comparisons and on longer essays, such as coursework, too.

You'll find that in every case, advice is given to show that there are many different ways of answering a question and they can all be valid. This is not a subject which has the 'model answer' to every question. The good answer for you is the one that shows off your interest, enthusiasm, knowledge of the text and ability to answer a specific question on it with good supporting evidence, expressing your thoughts as clearly as you can.

Set texts come and go (and come back!), and obviously most of the examples in the book will be from books you are not specifically studying. You will discover that the range of activities can be transferred so that you benefit from all the examples given. There are many new illustrative examples from poetry, prose and drama to develop your knowledge and understanding. Works quoted range across 650 years, and reference is made to authors from 20 different national backgrounds from across the world, all writing in English. These references may inspire you to further reading – I hope so. The activities in this book include

reading, thinking, analysing and wider reading; writing critical essays; tackling passage questions, unseen, comparisons and longer essays; essay plan exercises; incorporating contextual material; and using the critics. These activities also allow you to use 'Key concepts' to understand, appreciate and evaluate different texts. Although specifically designed for the International AS & A Level, the activities in this book are all suitable for other Advanced students.

Sample and student responses to many activities are provided as an example of the kind of answers you might come up with, but these are not definitive or model answers; avoid looking at these until you have tried the activities for yourself. Look at the marker's comments and learn from them, too.

The final section of this book, which has been extended to include more examples, is a reminder to all students at this level of what skills and techniques you need for success, with the final unit on 'Troubleshooting' to help you to improve by being analytical and monitoring your own work.

Key terms are defined throughout the body of the book as they are used. If you need to look up a term, a final index will allow you to pinpoint exactly what you're looking for.

Reading literature is one of life's greatest pleasures. Appreciating it, writing about it and discussing it are all enhanced by sharpening your skills. I hope you enjoy the book and find it useful.

Elizabeth Whittome, 2018

Assessment overview and key concepts

The newly structured exam is very clear and straightforward. You do two papers for the AS Level (Papers 1 and 2) and two more for the A Level (Papers 3 and 4); each paper lasts two hours. All papers are compulsory: there are no optional papers.

AS Level	A Level
Paper 1: Drama and poetry	Paper 3: Shakespeare and drama
Paper 2: Prose and unseen	Paper 4: Pre-/Post-1900 poetry & prose

You have a choice of questions with each set text: either a critical essay or a passage-based question, and you'll need to spend an hour on each one. Altogether, then, you'll be studying three set texts for the AS Level and four for the A Level, so seven set texts in all for the full A Level, as well as preparation for the unseen question in AS Level Paper 2, which is a new element. Each question carries equal marks.

The unseen question will allow you to choose between two passages printed on the exam paper: a poem/piece of prose, or poem/drama or prose/drama. There will be different combinations each time, so you will need to practise unseens in all three forms.

The set and unseen texts will all be written in English originally, but they come from different periods and cultures.

This book gives you practice in all aspects of analysis of poetry, prose and drama, with special chapters on the approach to unseens and examples of assessed student work. The poetry, prose and drama examples given in this book are designed to extend your reading and illustrate the basic principles of study of the subject at this level. They are not guides to your set texts, but a means of exploring the subject in detail and developing your skills of close reading, analysis and communication.

Parts	Units	Relevant for Cambridge exams
Part 1: AS Level or first year	Section 1: Poetry 1 Units 1–6	AS Level Paper 1; A Level Paper 4; Pre-U 1, 3, 4
	Section 2: Prose 1 Units 7–12	AS Level Paper 2; A Level Paper 4; Pre-U 1, 3, 4
	Section 3: Drama 1 Units 13–19	AS Level Paper 1; A Level Paper 3; Pre-U 2, 3, 4
Part 2: A Level or second year	Section 4: Poetry 2 Units 20–22	A Level Paper 4; Pre-U 1, 3, 4
	Section 5: Prose 2 Units 23–25	A Level Paper 4; Pre-U 1, 3, 4
	Section 6: Drama 2 Units 26–28	A Level Paper 3; Pre-U 2, 3, 4

Parts	Units	Relevant for Cambridge exams
Part 3: Essay skills, techniques and problem solving	Units 29–36	All

Assessment Objectives

The Assessment Objectives show clearly the different but interconnected abilities needed for writing a literature essay at this level.

AO1	The ability to respond with understanding to literary texts in a variety of forms, from different cultures; with an appreciation of relevant contexts that illuminate readings of the texts.
AO2	The ability to analyse ways in which writers' choices of form, structure and language shape meanings and effects.
AO3	The ability to produce informed, independent opinions and interpretations of literary texts.
AO4	The ability to communicate a relevant, structured and supported response appropriate to literary study.
AO5	The ability to discuss and evaluate varying opinions and interpretations of literary texts (Cambridge International A Level only).

Key concepts

The key concepts of any subject are the essential underpinning ideas that characterise it. Knowing what they are helps students to appreciate the subject and to work productively within it. Each unit in this book shows which key concepts are incorporated. The key concepts are focused on three areas: the subject of Literature, the craft of the writer and the reading and writing of the student.

First of all, literature is an imaginative art form with written texts in distinctive forms such as poetry, prose and drama, and there are different conventions for these forms which have been established over hundreds of years. There is also a wide variety of genres, such as comedy, tragedy or satire. Students need to know about these forms and how they communicate their interpretations. Specifically, you should remember:

- The context in which literature is written and received is an important part of the background to a text.
- In detail, the language, style and structure of a text do not just inform the meaning – they are intrinsic to it. A writer makes language choices and these have effects on the reader.
- The student reads and reacts, analyses and interprets the language choices made by writers to communicate their concerns.

When an essay is written, it is a response to a particular question which is framed to focus on the skills of the writer. It must be relevant to the question, structured and supported with reference to the text. Appropriate terminology should be used. The student should be aware of the effects of a work on the readers and the audience (in the case of drama).

SAMPLE

Part 1

AS Level

1



Section 1

Poetry 1

2

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Unit 1

Introduction to poetry

Learning objectives

In this unit you will:

- Enjoy reviewing the basics of poetry
- Reflect on poems you already know and what you think about them
- Consider any difficulties you may have experienced in discussing or writing about them
- Remind yourself of the importance of words, their meaning and sound



KEY CONCEPTS

Imaginative literature in the genre and form of poetry, language, style and conventions, as well as readership

Before you start

- Remember that you are the reader and your personal response is vital! Get ready to read, concentrate and enjoy yourself. This is Unit 1 and it's always reassuring to go back to basics.
- Have your pens and notebook (whether paper or electronic) at your side. Some activities demand your undivided attention, but some can be enjoyed with a friend. If you are working alone, best to switch your phone to silent. You can share afterwards!

Responding to poetry and writing about it

This section of the book will help you to express your thoughts and feelings about poetry. The units on this topic are designed to help you to enjoy poetry to the full and to feel more secure about expressing your responses, formulating your own interpretations and supporting your ideas with examples. When you come to a poem you have never seen before (such as an examined unseen exercise), you will feel confident and alert, able to use everything you've learnt. All your reading experience will help you.

Poetry can stretch words to their limit to record unique, direct impressions of experience. A word can achieve its full potential when a skilled poet combines it with other carefully selected words. The elements of a word – its meaning, associations, context, history, sound, even its shape and length – all combine with other words to produce the distinctive qualities of a poem. No wonder that many writers see poetry as the ultimate achievement of any language, the utterance that can never really be translated without losing some of its magic. Read any poem aloud to savour its sounds and rhythms; critical appreciation will follow with practice.

All syllabuses focus on a very important Assessment Objective that reminds us that every writer chooses forms, structures and words to shape meanings. Both the writer selecting the words and the reader absorbing their effects are important in this process. You are the reader, whose close listening and reading, personal experience and enjoyment are most significant for your appreciation. You may find that you observe and give emphasis in a different way from your classmate. Providing that both of you can express your feelings, identify the evidence from the poem you are discussing and argue your case, then neither of you is wrong, necessarily. Both of you are literary critics.

Reflection: Consider why you came to this conclusion.

ACTIVITY 1.1

Discuss with your group, or teacher if possible, what qualities you think a poem should have in order to be defined as a poem and make a list. If you are working on your own, think particularly of short fragments and any texts you've come across before which didn't seem very 'poetic' (perhaps rhymes in birthday cards). Consider whether song lyrics can be called poems, since they need the music to complete their effect.

What makes a poem?

COMMENT

Here's a table for you, which shows where various points are discussed in the following poetry units. You may have come up with some of these points in your discussion about the qualities that define poems.

Possible qualities of a poem	Where these are discussed
A: Reading a poem out loud can be very exciting/thrilling/funny/sad even if you don't understand all of it completely.	
B: It is usually 'about' something – a theme; but it doesn't have to tell a story.	Later in Unit 1
C: The writer is expressing her/his thoughts on a particular subject, so it can be full of humour or emotion such as anger or sadness.	Later in Unit 1
D: The meaning can sometimes be difficult at first reading because: - the words aren't in the usual order - some of them even seem to be missing - they appear to be new words not in the dictionary, or don't have their usual meaning - the language is concentrated or ambiguous.	Unit 2
E: The language can have lots of figures of speech (such as metaphor and personification) and be very descriptive.	Unit 2
F: Sometimes words or phrases or ideas are repeated.	Unit 2
G: It is written in lines and the sentences don't reach the end of the page.	Unit 3
H: There is a pattern to the way it is laid out (e.g. in verses, stanzas or groups of lines).	Unit 3
I: Sometimes it is very rhythmical and there are rhymes or other sound effects such as alliteration.	Unit 4

Of all the points in the list, it's probably D, with its range of challenges for readers, that worries students the most, especially when they have never studied poetry before or are looking at a poem for the first time. Try not to be too worried about what you see as difficulties of interpretation. Some students spend too much time trying to chase the 'meaning' of a poem and forget about the real words that *are* the poem. It's important to remember that the poet has made choices to create particular effects, and considering these in detail – their sounds, their rhythm, their combination together – often clarifies meaning where it has seemed tricky.

Unit 5 gives you hints and tips for tackling an unseen poem, helping you to interpret and to write about a poem you've never seen before. You will have more confidence in your work. There are examples of students' essays on an unseen poem, with the marker's comments showing what is good and what could be improved, which you'll find helpful.

Then, in Unit 6 you focus on writing essays on set texts for an exam, with two different examples of questions. Throughout the units you will have Study and Revision tips. The examples used are from past Literature texts on Cambridge syllabuses, as well as others that are especially memorable or appropriate to illustrate particular points. This book uses texts from writers across the world writing in English.

ACTIVITY 1.2

Look again at the table of qualities that could characterise a poem. How many of them can be seen in the following short poetic text?

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

Ezra Pound *In a Station of the Metro* (1913)

SAMPLE RESPONSE

At first there do not seem to be enough qualities to make this into a poem as such. It has only two lines, which are not of the same length; there is no distinctive rhythm or rhyme and there is not even a verb to give action to the situation and point to a theme. (Some students think this is too fragmentary to be classed as a poem and you may have some sympathy with that view.) But it is a very descriptive fragment and it uses two different images – one in each line – to capture the poet's experience of seeing people in a crowded station. (The Metro is the Paris underground system. If you do not have an underground train system where you live, imagine crowds pouring off a train.) The poem's title is important because it places the poet's observation and allows the reader to conjure up similar experiences.

The first image is that the faces are an *apparition*, a word that means 'appearance', but also 'ghost', suggesting that they do not look like living beings and perhaps are pale and sad. The second image develops the idea by the metaphor of their faces being like petals on a wet black bough: perhaps the poet is suggesting spring when the trees have blooms, but no leaves and the weather is still rainy; the petals are white or pale pink and delicate, easily blown away. Both images suggest helplessness and transience: there is nothing substantial or robust in the description at all. So although the poet has only offered us images, they are suggestive ones, haunting even, and the experience of seeing people as vulnerable in the hurly-burly of modern urban life has been communicated in two lines and two evocative images.

Reflection: Did the poem's images have this effect on you? Look at some crowds emerging from a station or underground train. Do they look cheerful and lively?

KEY TERM

Imagists: a group of early 20th-century poets who believed that experience was most effectively communicated through images of the senses. This approach is an important element in appreciating *what* a poet is expressing by considering *how* it is expressed. Sense images do not have to be metaphors. The senses are sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell; to these we can add the 'sense' of energy or movement, which could be termed the kinetic sense.

Reflection: If possible, with your partner or in a group, discuss in more detail how each theme develops as the poems progress.

The poem is a good example of Imagism. Ezra Pound was one of a group of poets called **Imagists**.

Here is another example of a short poem with vivid images by Singaporean poet Ong Teong Hean. Tai-chi was originally a training for Chinese martial arts but is now considered a very valuable exercise regime. There are some effective rhymes and half-rhymes at the ends of the lines, features that you will discuss in Unit 4.

the man of tai-chi
with such sequestered ease
creates a clean calligraphy
of graceful peace;
a centre of concentration
to pump his heart and arteries
with measured arm-motion
and steps of gnarled artistry.

Ong Teong Hean *The Tai-chi Man* (2010)

What are poems usually about?

Poets can express thoughts and feelings about anything, so poems can have as their subject matter anything in the world you can think of, such as the Underground or exercising in the morning! There are great poems created about apparently trivial objects like a lock of hair, insects such as a flea or mosquito, or growing things such as thistles or mushrooms. Major life dramas such as love, treachery and war do of course also feature. What the poet does with the subject matter, and how these ideas are developed, is the poem's theme, or it can be expressed as 'the poet's concerns'. These ideas are not separate from the words they are expressed in: the words *are* the poem.

Your exam syllabus for AS Level does not set longer narrative poems for study, so all the examples used in this part of the book will be of shorter lyric poems with distinct themes; you will find that length is not necessarily a criterion for excellence. Poems used in an unseen exam question will also be of this kind.

ACTIVITY 1.3

Write down the names of five poems you have studied and, in one or two sentences, say what they are about.

Themes in poetry

It is often easier to summarise the theme of a poem than it is to analyse the poet's methods and the effects of the language used. This poem is about the waste and futility of war, you might say, or the sadness of death, or the passage of time, or how relationships can be difficult, or how some people in power can make others suffer dreadfully.

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Perhaps the poet gives a different example in each **stanza** and then concludes by emphasising his point, or uses a little anecdote that illustrates the issue. Or possibly the poet chooses images which are suggestive of a thought but don't express the thought directly, but we still grasp the gist of the argument. You'll look more closely at this in Unit 3.

**KEY TERM**

Stanza: an Italian word that means 'room', a place to stop. Poetic stanzas can be irregular as well as regular (see Unit 3, Verse and stanza).

ACTIVITY 1.4

Before you read the next poem, *Egrets* (1962) by Australian poet Judith Wright, see if you can find a picture of these graceful white birds, perhaps on the internet. Then, in one sentence, say what you think the poem is about. When you have answered, consider what other elements in the poem could affect the expression of this theme and your appreciation of it.

Once as I travelled through a quiet evening,
I saw a pool, jet-black and mirror-still.
Beyond, the slender paperbarks* stood crowding;
each on its own white image looked its fill,
and nothing moved but thirty egrets wading –
thirty egrets in a quiet evening.

Once in a lifetime, lovely past believing,
your lucky eyes may light on such a pool.
As though for many years I had been waiting,
I watched in silence, till my heart was full
of clear dark water, and white trees unmoving,
and, whiter yet, those thirty egrets wading.

(*A paperbark is an Australian tree with white bark which resembles strips of paper)

Judith Wright, *Egrets* (1962)

**SAMPLE RESPONSE**

The poet speaks of the beauty of some birds she sees at a pool as she is walking one evening and how she is affected by this memorable experience.

What is missing from this response?

This answer interprets the theme of the poem quite successfully, but to focus on theme alone is to neglect other aspects of the poem that influence the theme powerfully. Wright uses images of silence and the stillness of everything except the birds. There is effective colour contrast in the dark pool and the white birds and trees. She uses repetition of words and phrases for emphasis, and the poem's two-stanza structure takes the reader from a single incident (*Once as I travelled through a quiet evening*) to the idea that this is a special *Once in a lifetime* experience which anyone would be lucky to have. When she says *my heart was full / of clear dark water* she is using language metaphorically to express the way that experiences can overwhelm the mind. The rhymes and half-rhymes skilfully enhance the theme. You will revise these in more detail in the next three units.