

## English Literature A Level Transition Tasks

Complete the tasks below in as much detail as you can. They will help you with your understanding of the course from September, meaning you will hit the ground 'running'.

### 1. The Gothic Genre – Contextual Research Task

Conduct a research project into the Gothic genre within Literature. You will want to consider: the origins of the Gothic; Gothic conventions; the evolution of the Gothic genre, especially during the Victorian era; famous Gothic texts and their features; how the Gothic genre continues to be relevant today.

### 2. The Gothic Genre - Wider Reading Task

Read 'Frankenstein' by Mary Shelley

### 3. Poetry Appreciation Task

Find a poem that has been written by a poet who is in the literary canon (you may need to begin with finding out what the literary canon is and who it is.) You should bring this poem to your first A Level lesson and be prepared to share why you chose it.

Here are some authors to get you started:

- Christina Rossetti
- William Wordsworth
- John Keats
- William Blake
- Phillip Larkin
- Sylvia Plath
- Alfred Tennyson

### 4. Poetry - Close Analysis Task

Read the following poem by Phillip Larkin and complete the tasks that follow.

## **An Arundal Tomb by Phillip Larkin**

Side by side, their faces blurred,  
The earl and countess lie in stone,  
Their proper habits vaguely shown  
As jointed armour, stiffened pleat,  
And that faint hint of the absurd—  
The little dogs under their feet.

Such plainness of the pre-baroque  
Hardly involves the eye, until  
It meets his left-hand gauntlet, still  
Clasped empty in the other; and  
One sees, with a sharp tender shock,  
His hand withdrawn, holding her hand.

They would not think to lie so long.  
Such faithfulness in effigy  
Was just a detail friends would see:  
A sculptor's sweet commissioned grace  
Thrown off in helping to prolong  
The Latin names around the base.

They would not guess how early in  
Their supine stationary voyage  
The air would change to soundless damage,  
Turn the old tenantry away;  
How soon succeeding eyes begin  
To look, not read. Rigidly they

Persisted, linked, through lengths and breadths  
Of time. Snow fell, undated. Light  
Each summer thronged the glass. A bright  
Litter of birdcalls strewed the same  
Bone-riddled ground. And up the paths  
The endless altered people came,

Washing at their identity.  
Now, helpless in the hollow of  
An unarmorial age, a trough  
Of smoke in slow suspended skeins  
Above their scrap of history,  
Only an attitude remains:

Time has transfigured them into  
Untruth. The stone fidelity  
They hardly meant has come to be  
Their final blazon, and to prove  
Our almost-instinct almost true:  
What will survive of us is love.

- Research: Why did Phillip Larkin write this poem?
- Annotate the poem for language, structure and ideas. Ensure that you identify how the theme of love is explored and developed in the poem.
- Is the poem just about a tomb? What might the real meanings be?
- 500 words - How does Larkin present love in this poem?

### 5. Close Reading of a Prose Extract Task.

In this extract how does the writer present the significance of individuality? You may wish to consider:

- The tone and register of the narrator's voice
- The response and role of the reader
- Language choices and effects.

Read the extract on the next page carefully. It is taken from *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood which was first published in 1985. This dystopian novel portrays the totalitarian society of Gilead, which has replaced the USA, where women's rights have been eroded. Handmaids exist solely for the purpose of reproduction, bearing children for elite barren couples. They are forbidden to work, vote or read and are given a name which includes that of the man with whom they are reproducing. Handmaids are only allowed to travel outside in pairs and, in this extract, Ofglen and Offred are on a shopping trip.

A group of people is coming towards us. They're tourists, from Japan it looks like, a trade delegation perhaps, on a tour of the historic landmarks or out for local colour. They're diminutive and neatly turned out; each has his or her camera, his or her smile. They look around, bright-eyed, cocking their heads to one side like robins, their very cheerfulness aggressive, and I can't help staring. It's been a long time since I've seen skirts that short on women. The skirts reach just below the knee and the legs come out from beneath them, nearly naked in their thin stockings, blatant, the high-heeled shoes with their straps attached to the feet like delicate instruments of torture. The women teeter on their spiked feet as if on stilts, but off balance; their backs arch at the waist, thrusting the buttocks out. Their heads are uncovered and their hair too is exposed, in all its darkness and sexuality. They wear lipstick, red, outlining the damp cavities of their mouths, like scrawls on a washroom wall, of the time before.

I stop walking. Ofglen stops beside me and I know that she too cannot take her eyes off these women. We are fascinated, but also repelled. They seem undressed. It has taken so little time to change our minds, about things like this.

Then I think: I used to dress like that. That was freedom.

*Westernized*, they used to call it.

The Japanese tourists come towards us, twittering, and we turn our heads away too late: our faces have been seen.

There's an interpreter, in the standard blue suit and red-patterned tie, with the winged-eye tie pin. He's the one who steps forward, out of the group, in front of us, blocking our way. The tourists bunch behind him; one of them raises a camera.

"Excuse me," he says to both of us, politely enough. "They're asking if they can take your picture."

I look down at the sidewalk, shake my head for *No*. What they must see is the white wings only, a scrap of face, my chin and part of my mouth. Not the eyes. I know better than to look the interpreter in the face. Most of the interpreters are Eyes, or so it's said.

I also know better than to say Yes. Modesty is invisibility, said Aunt Lydia. Never forget it. To be seen – to be *seen* – is to be – her voice trembled – penetrated. What you must be, girls, is impenetrable. She called us girls.

Beside me, Ofglen is also silent. She's tucked her red-gloved hands up into her sleeves, to hide them.

The interpreter turns back to the group, chatters at them in staccato. I know what he'll be saying, I know the line. He'll be telling them that women here have different customs, that to stare at them through the lens of a camera is, for them, an experience of violation.