

O Level English Literature 2010

Unit 1: Prose

Learning outcomes	Suggested Teaching activities	Learning resources
(i) to enjoy a detailed knowledge of a narrative	<p>A first reading. Teachers will have to estimate how far their own students will be able to do this for themselves. Many teachers will give them this task to do over a holiday before this unit is studied. Others will feel the need to help students through a first reading, reading sections out aloud, dramatising sections perhaps, arranging activities, such as those suggested in Appendix 1 to accompany a first reading.</p> <p>It might prove useful for students to keep a reading log. This might include brief synopses of chapters, time-lines of events, lists of characters and inter-relationships, personal thoughts about some of the issues they identify.</p> <p>Study after reading the whole novel Study should include close reading of selected passages, which will ensure they keep in touch with the texture of the writing. Students should also be involved in activities which empower them to range widely over the text. They should be encouraged to find and note, for future reference, episodes or quotations to support a point of view. Finally, activities like writing diaries, mock interviews, hot-seating will encourage empathic responses to the text. Examples of such activities are to be found in Appendix 2.</p> <p>Tackling passage-based questions The purpose of such questions is to enable candidates to show the quality of their reading by ensuring they have direct contact with the words of the text within the examination setting. The passages selected will generally be central to the work and the writing memorable. There are plenty of examples from past papers to base work on this part of the unit. In general, in discussion and later in writing, students should be encouraged:</p> <p>a) to be aware of the passage within the context of the work as a whole. They do not necessarily have to state this explicitly (questions will vary in the degree to which they require reference external to the passage), but it should inform all their writing about the subject.</p>	Set text (novel)
(ii) to engage with the twists and turns of a narrative; to enjoy surprise elements; to experience tension; to respond to the build-up to narrative climaxes		Appendix 1
(iii) to respond to the atmosphere in a novel; to be alert to changes of atmosphere; to respond to descriptions of locations		
(iv) to respond to the tone adopted by the narrator and any changes of tone as the narrative proceeds		
(v) if there is a first person narrator, to explore the effect of this device		Set text
(vi) to be alert to the moods of the narrative, including comedy, tragedy, pathos, irony		Appendix 2
(vii) to understand the different personalities in a novel; to relate to them and perhaps identify with them; to see the narrative from their points of view		
(viii) to be able to trace changes and developments in characters as the novel proceeds		Set text
(ix) to explore the interaction between characters		
(x) to explore the roles played by characters in the novel	Past examination papers	
(xi) to respond to the dialogue of the		

Learning outcomes

- novel
- (xii) to understand the thematic content of the novel and to explore how the author is developing her/his ideas
- (xiii) to identify the questions raised by a narrative and to enter intelligently into a consideration of these issues
- (xiv) to be aware of the cultural context of the work and thus to broaden understanding not only of the work, but of humanity as a whole
- (xv) where helpful, to appreciate the relevance of literary antecedents and sub-genres of the novel (e.g. the Gothic novel if studying a set text such as *Northanger Abbey* or *Frankenstein*)
- (xvi) to experience the literary text **as a whole**, with each of the above relating to the other items to be able to communicate this experience in different types of essay
- (xvii) to be aware of the writer at work, how effects are achieved through literary means, including:
- use of words/diction
 - structure
 - recurrent imagery
 - irony
 - foreshadowing and parallelism in the plotting

Suggested Teaching activities

- b) to be alert both to *what* the passage communicates and to *how* it does so.
- c) to show an awareness of nuances in the writing – perhaps a poignant use of imagery, perhaps an irony in the choice of diction. Such devices do not have to be *learned* specifically – there are too many forms of nuance to be listed and they should normally be *explored* rather than merely identified or codified.

Students should, in their first written work, be given a number of prompt questions or headings which will ensure that they are covering important lines of enquiry. Examples of these are contained in Appendix 2. As they proceed through the course, the number of prompts should be reduced until they are able to approach with confidence the single question that is normal in the examination. At this point, students may wish to develop their own sub-headings to replace the prompts that the teacher provided earlier in the course. They will have to consider, with guidance, which parts of the passage are relevant to the task set and which are peripheral; they should also be aware of the effect of the passage as a whole. Passages are selected carefully as complete entities and students should not merely focus on the first few lines.

Students should be encouraged to establish their own effective method of planning such answers, but they should, of course, focus very closely on the terms of the question, perhaps underlining or highlighting key words.

Tackling general questions

By doing some of the activities on the line of those in Appendices 1 and 2, students should build up a sound first-hand knowledge of the text. Any notes that will act as an aide-memoire will be useful and should be kept alongside the notes suggested in section 1 above which accompanied their first reading. The aide-memoire might include key quotations, character sketches accompanied by textual evidence and notes of significant key incidents. The value of these is to help students find their way around the text in later activities, not as an end in itself.

There is no substitute for knowledge of the text itself and students should be encouraged to read and re-read rather than to pick up ideas from secondary sources and use them as their own.

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Most questions will be phrased in such a way as to encourage candidates to express their **individual responses** to an aspect of the text. If one looks at questions on character, therefore, they will often ask candidates to make some sort of judgement about them: perhaps, giving what seem to be opposite verdicts on a character and asking candidates to give their view, or to ask whether it is possible to feel sympathy or admiration for a specified character, or to judge what their role in the novel is. It will not be helpful, therefore, for students to learn by heart a standard character study and feel that that is adequate. More useful would be for them to be constantly encouraged to take part in such debates and have enough knowledge of the text to support their views.

Likewise, there might be questions on key moments in the novel. Again, the question will be trying to elicit a response from the candidate and so will ask, for example, what makes an incident memorable or significant, amusing, tense or particularly powerful (*for them*). Mere narrative of the particular incident will be of very limited usefulness.

As with the passage-based questions, preparation from the activities suggested in Appendix 2, should introduce candidates by a number of prompt questions to the areas of enquiry appropriate to an adequate answer to the question concerned. They should be encouraged to identify relevant areas of the text and to re-read them as a matter of course.

At this stage also, they should learn how to construct answers and to argue a case with clarity. They should see the relevance of their Language training in construction of paragraphs and be shown how to make a point and then develop/qualify it with reference to the text, which might come in the form of a *brief* quotation or in a *brief* paraphrase of an incident/action. They should try to develop a style in which quotation is integrated into the flow of the argument.

They should learn the difference between an essay which just lists unconnected points and that which develops a coherent argument. They should also learn how to plan essays so that each paragraph makes a separate point which is connected to previous ideas through connectives. They might at this stage profitably find their own method for planning essays.

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The class might together learn the value of spider grams, or mind-mapping for instance. Planning is equally as important in the examination as in class or homework. It need not be very detailed, but a brief list of suitable points arranged in a logical order will enhance the answer. As part of this general development also, they should learn how to show evidence of (xv) of the Learning Outcomes.

This will normally come through closer analysis of the language of quotations and, while this is *essential* for an adequate treatment of passage-based questions, it is also entirely appropriate in general answers also. In a closed book examination it is understood by examiners that quotations may not be completely accurate. Provided that the relevant reference is pinpointed precisely in support of an argument it will be credited even if only an echo of the text.

Tackling empathic questions

Many candidates find this type of question a useful vehicle for showing their knowledge and understanding of aspects of the text. Appendices 1 and 2 offer some ideas of how students might be encouraged into “getting into the skin” of a character. Such activities will often be lively and students should find them a refreshing change, but the outcome should be entirely serious. False notes should be identified, again with close reference to the text. Darcy, for example, would not use flippant slang. If a character could not possibly have said something or used a particular word or phrase, the misjudgement should be corrected if possible without affecting adversely the flow of the student’s imaginative thought.

The movement into writing will have to be accompanied by work on trying to adopt the “voice” of the character. It is not expected that candidates should aspire to an accurate pastiche of the style of a Jane Austen heroine, for example, although, if it were offered, it would be happily received, but the language used should reflect the character whose voice is being adopted in register and tone *at the particular moment referred to in the task*. Likewise, the emotions which might be being portrayed should be expressed through the voice as well as the content. It is through this that learning outcome (xiv) might be demonstrated quite sharply in answers to this type of question.

Set text

Grade Descriptors

Learning outcomes

Short Stories

The learning outcomes for the novel apply to this study. However, because of its length (though the lengths can vary hugely) there may generally be expected to be more emphasis on:

- structure
- the economy of the writing in setting scenes, characterisation, narrative
- the significance of the ending and the beginning.

Students should also explore the ways that different stories treat similar themes or use similar/contrasting techniques.

Suggested Teaching activities

Progression to tackling full scale essay questions will generally be through increasing the scale and range of what is required. So early attempts might be very restricted - a brief diary entry for example - and one could work up to more detailed answers with discussions about the sort of areas which might be covered.

Central to these questions is the identification of a precise moment at which a character might be experiencing particular feelings. Though imaginative engagement is required, it must be rooted directly in the text and not merely be general speculation. In the same way, it is not helpful to set empathic tasks on characters who are mentioned but who do are only peripheral to the novel because students will have little evidence on which to construct a 'voice'.

The same processes as outlined above apply to the study of short stories. There may be a little more emphasis on the additional learning outcomes outlined in the adjacent column.

In many ways it is easier teaching short stories than novels as each one can be dealt with in a lesson or two. As with all literature, students should not be encouraged to form too many preconceptions about the genre. There have been collections which select stories which illustrate particular features, like ambivalent endings, which might mislead them into thinking this is an *essential* feature of the genre. Students should be encouraged, as always, to explore each story as a unique creation, rather than codify according to a limited range of evidence.

Appendix 3 uses *Samphire* from Barrie Wade's short story collection *Into the Wind* as exemplar material.

Learning resources

Set Text
Empathic Tasks Booklet
Grade Descriptors for Empathic Tasks

Appendix 3

Set text (short story collectio