



Making the Leap:

moving from GCSE to
A Level Literature study



EMC

Publications

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Contents

What This Pack Is and How to Use It

1. Let a Poem Brew Over Time

Allow a response to develop over time, widen your reading, develop independence

2. Explore *emagazine*

Immerse yourself in a range of articles about literature, reflect on ways of writing about texts

3. Books on TV

Use a literary adaptation to discover new insights into a text, evaluate the adaptation as an interpretation of the text

4. Watch an Online Play

Enjoy watching, thinking and talking about literature

5. emagClips: Experts in the Spotlight

Widen your understanding of literature, discover the different ways experts talk about literary texts and ideas

6. Dip a Toe into Books About Books

Engage with the wider subject, learn to evaluate and develop a personal opinion, learn about the different ways critics respond to literature

7. The World of Literary Podcasts

Discover a literary world beyond the classroom, widen your reading, think about the bigger picture of literature

8. Immerse Yourself in a Virtual Library – The British Library's Discovering Literature Website

Discover the riches offered by the British Library's website

9. Listen to Literature

Enjoy listening to a new novel

10. Experience a University Lecture

Challenge yourself to listen to a university lecture on Shakespeare

What This Pack Is and How to Use It

Are you thinking about studying English Literature at A Level? The activities in this unit will help you start to make the move from being a great GCSE student of Literature to being a great student at A Level – and beyond.

Some of the activities ask you to step back and think about what it means to study literature, while others encourage you to try out some different ways of approaching your learning – whether that's reading, discussing, writing or learning how to reflect on your own work.

Some of the activities are short, others might take a couple of sessions to complete; others are longer projects which you might keep going over several weeks. Between now and the start of your A Level course, try to complete a selection of activities. That way you will be practising and developing a good range of the skills an English Literature student needs.

The activities make use of a wide variety of freely available online resources, either on the EMC website or via sites such as the National Theatre, the *Guardian* and other newspapers, YouTube, university websites, the Poetry Foundation. We've checked the links but if you find one that is not working or which requires you to take out a paid subscription, please email web@englishandmedia.co.uk and we'll find an alternative for you. (If the hyperlinks don't work for you, copy and paste the web address into your browser.)

Many of the activities can be completed on your own, but some will be more fun and more productive if you can join up with others who are also thinking of studying literature.

I. Let a Poem Brew Over Time

- Choose a poem. You could choose one from your exam anthology or (and this would be both more fun and more useful for you as a student of Literature) browse the websites listed below.

Online poetry libraries

[Poetry Foundation](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/)

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/> [The](#)

[Saturday Poem](#)

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/series/saturdaypoem>

[National Poetry Library](#)

<https://www.nationalpoetrylibrary.org.uk/online-poetry/poems> [Poem Hunter](#)

<https://www.poemhunter.com/>

[Poetry by Heart anthology](#)

<https://www.poetrybyheart.org.uk/anthology/>

[Scottish Poetry Library](#)

<https://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/>

[Library of Congress Archive](#)

<https://www.loc.gov/collections/archive-of-recorded-poetry-and-literature/about-thiscollection/> <https://poets.org/>

<https://poets.org/>

- Use the platform recommended and validated by your school to swap poems.

Set a timer for 10 seconds.

- Do a 'snapshot' look at the poem for 10 seconds – don't try to read it – and jot down anything you notice about it.
- Do the same again but this time for 30 seconds.
- Now put the poem to one side.
- On three different days over the next week or so, spend about 10 minutes reading the poem and writing about it in any way you want. You might write about what you like or what you are puzzled by or you might just ask questions. It's up to you whether you read over what you wrote on the previous occasion – there are advantages to both ways. Over the course of the next few weeks you could try the activity both ways.
- On the last day, read the poem again, read over all your writing, then make a few notes or record a voice message exploring how your response to the poem changed and developed.

2. Explore *emagazine*

emagazine is a magazine and website for A Level student with articles written by academics, critics, writers, teachers and students on texts and topics set for A Level – and on literature and language more generally.

We've collected together a small selection of articles for you to browse and choose from. A few are on authors or texts you may have come across at GCSE, a few are more general and a few explore books you may want to read just for pleasure. (See the '*emagazine* Resource Pack' accompanying this download.) The school has bought a membership and the log-in is:

USERNAME: ASARGENT

PASSWORD: Ribston22

- Dip into the openings of several articles and choose the one that most immediately grabs your attention.
 - Read the article and pick out three points to share. These could be ideas you find interesting, that you want to question (perhaps because you disagree, perhaps because you want to find out more), a point you don't understand.
1. Adapting Literature for Film
 2. Crossover Fiction
 3. Openings in Contemporary Fiction – Questions, Challenges and Surprises
 4. Dickens and Realism
 5. Comedy in Shakespeare's Tragedies
 6. William Blake: The Tyger
 7. William Wordsworth: A Poet of the Ordinary
 8. Michael Rosen: Defining Poetry
 9. Bloodlust, Savagery, Obsession and Excess – Gothic *Macbeth*
 10. Navigating Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde's London
 11. Structures of Innocence – Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones*
 12. *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* – A Question of Trust (don't read this article until you have read the novel – it's a quick and enjoyable read, so if you haven't, give it a go).

3. Books on TV

- Watch (or think back to) a film or TV adaptation of a novel you know, for example *Northern Lights*, *Noughts and Crosses*, *Emma*, *David Copperfield*, *Sherlock Holmes*, Agatha Christie.

(See BBC iPlayer for freely available dramas; Netflix and Amazon Prime have a wide selection if you have a subscription. Some complete dramas are also available on YouTube)

- Read Jenny Grahame's article for *MediaMagazine* about the recent adaptation of *David Copperfield* in the 'emagazine Resource Pack'. (Like *emagazine*, *MediaMagazine* is a magazine for A Level student – but for those studying Media or Film.)
- Write your own review of the adaptation you have watched.

Your own adaptation

- Now write a pitch for a different novel you think would make a great film or film adaptation. Explain why and how you would approach it.



4. Watch an Online Play

Why not watch a play online?

Here are some of the places you can watch theatre online.

Students working at home are now able to access the [National Theatre's on-demand site](https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/learning/schools/secondary-and-fe/on-demand-in-schools) for free – please ask your teacher to sign up or send you your school logins. <https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/learning/schools/secondary-and-fe/on-demand-in-schools>

[Digital Theatre](https://www.youtube.com/user/digitaltheatre) also offers a wide range of plays to watch on-demand (including from the Royal Shakespeare Company). Although this is a subscription site, some of their plays are available on their YouTube site. They are also currently offering a 30-day free trial. <https://www.youtube.com/user/digitaltheatre>
<https://www.digitaltheatre.com/consumer/productions>

[Shakespeare's Globe](https://globeplayer.tv/all) also has a wide range of plays which can be rented or bought at <https://globeplayer.tv/all>

A Shakespeare play

- Choose a Shakespeare play you have never studied before.
- Watch the play online. (If you can arrange to watch the same play at the same time as one of your classmates, have an interval break in the middle, so that you can chat about it.)
- Record a 2-minute review of it to send to your teacher. (Watch a second play if you want to!)
- On a different day, watch the Shakespeare play you studied for GCSE. What difference does it make to the experience of watching it to have already studied it? What difference does watching it make to your understanding?

A play not Shakespeare!

- Enjoy watching the play.
- Write the script for a podcast/online discussion between a critic and the director. (If you have been watching the same play as some of your classmates, hold an 'After Show' discussion. One of you could play the director, one a lead actor and one the interviewer/critic. Use the platform recommended and validated by your school to do this.)

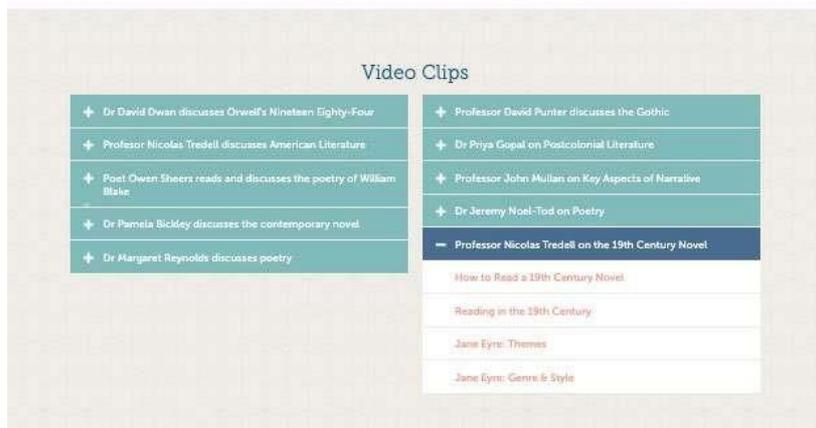
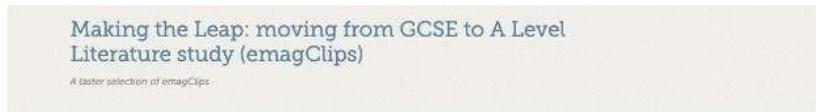
You can see examples of this sort of discussion on the following websites (all are freely accessible):

1. [National Theatre YouTube channel](http://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLJgBmjHpqgs7citDojiasj-nMABL_DXku)
http://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLJgBmjHpqgs7citDojiasj-nMABL_DXku
2. [National Theatre podcasts](https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/nt-talks/id486761654?mt=2) https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/nt-talks/id486761654?mt=2
3. [Young Vic](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLqthOoZOoHJJYftVHd2ZHwaKQ_shhRGhf)
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLqthOoZOoHJJYftVHd2ZHwaKQ_shhRGhf
4. [Shakespeare's Globe](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjz6LNDQOWaCkQegAHxyo2g)
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjz6LNDQOWaCkQegAHxyo2g
5. [RSC](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjz6LNDQOWaCkQegAHxyo2g)
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjz6LNDQOWaCkQegAHxyo2g>

5. emagClips: Experts in the spotlight

The *emagazine* website includes a collection of video interviews with leading writers, academics and critics. A taster selection from emagClips is available without a subscription to accompany this download.

<https://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/video-clips/clip-listing/making-the-leap-moving-from-gcse-to-a-level-literature-study-emagclips>



On this page you will find short discussions on a wide range of literary texts and topics including: how to read 19th-century novels (and how to read poems), *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, why George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* continues to be important, William Blake's poem 'London' (along with a reading of it), the difference between horror and terror, and dialogue in novels.

- Over the next few days or weeks dip into these clips. You could make a note of new ideas you come across or share them with classmates or you could just let them brew in your head. As you complete some of the other activities in this pack, you might want to return to specific clips to help you develop your thinking.
- Once you have done some of the reading, thinking, writing and discussion activities in this pack, why not record your own emagClip? In role as the expert talk for three or four minutes about an aspect of one of the stories, novels, poems or plays you have read, watched or listened to. (You might find it helpful to ask and then answer a specific question.)

6. Dip a Toe into Books about Books

As well as critical books about specific writers, there are also a wide range of books available about literature more generally. Some of these are written for people studying literature at university, others are written for a more general audience.

The opening pages of all the books listed below are available online via Amazon's 'Look Inside' feature.

- Read the opening pages of two or three (or more) of these books. Which would you most like to go on to read? Why?
- Select tiny quotations which interest or please you. Use these to create a poster, an Instagram post, or a Twitter thread.
- If you can, talk to a classmate about your choice, or share your selected quotations via the platform recommended and validated by your school. If you can't do this, explore your ideas in a written or voice message to yourself:

On novels:

John Mullan: *How Novels Work* (<https://tinyurl.com/hownovels>)

David Lodge: *The Art of Fiction* (<https://tinyurl.com/lodgefiction>)

Francine Prose: *Reading Like a Writer* (<https://tinyurl.com/prosereadwrite>)

On poetry

James Fenton: *An Introduction to English Poetry* (<https://tinyurl.com/fentonpoetry>)

Ruth Padel: *The Poem and the Journey* (<https://tinyurl.com/padelpoetry>)

Mark Yakich: *Poetry – A Survivor's Guide* (<https://tinyurl.com/yackichpoetry>)

On Shakespeare

Bill Bryson: *Shakespeare – The World as a Stage* (<https://tinyurl.com/brysonshakes>)

Emma Smith: *This is Shakespeare* (<https://tinyurl.com/smithshakes>)

On Drama

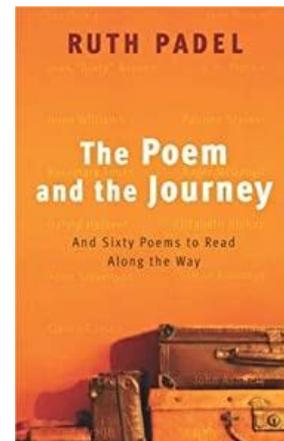
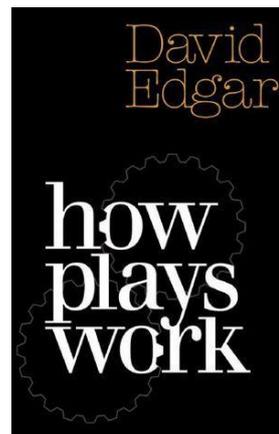
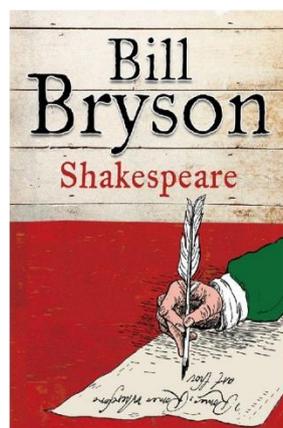
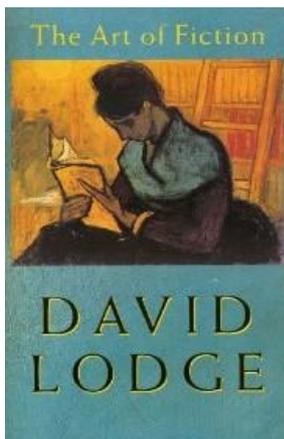
David Edgar: *How Plays Work* (<https://tinyurl.com/playswork>)

Richard Eyre: *Interviews with Theatre People* (<https://tinyurl.com/talktheatre>)

Steve Waters: *The Secret Life of Plays* (<https://tinyurl.com/lifeplays>)

On English in general

Robert Eaglestone: *Doing English* (<https://tinyurl.com/doingenglish>)



7. The World of Literary Podcasts

- Listen to a literature podcast. Any of the following would be good places to start (try two or three – the styles and approaches are very different).
- Use the platform recommended and validated by your school to share what you listened to with friends. Which podcast would you most recommend and why?
- Follow up the suggestions from your classmates.
- Keep listening to any of the podcasts you enjoyed (or try out some others), follow the ones you like on Instagram or Twitter and let the presenters know what you thought.

[The Guardian Books podcast](https://www.theguardian.com/books/series/books)

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/series/books>

[Radio 4 Books and authors](https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/books-and-authors/id331296649?mt=2)

<https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/books-and-authors/id331296649?mt=2>

[Not Another Books podcast](https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/not-another-book-podcast/id1370122551?mt=2)

<https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/not-another-book-podcast/id1370122551?mt=2>

[The Literary Salon](https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/the-literary-salon/id495583876?mt=2)

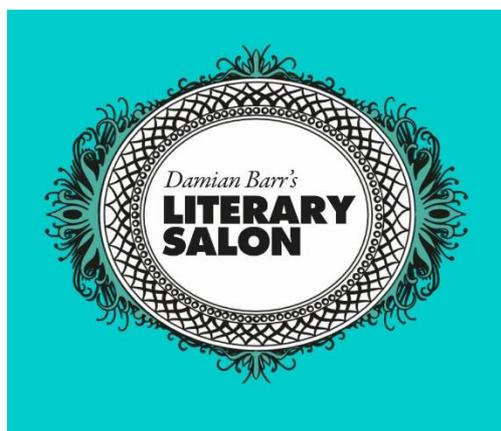
<https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/the-literary-salon/id495583876?mt=2>

[Simon Mayo's Books of the Year](https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/simon-mayos-books-of-the-year/id1402579687?mt=2)

<https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/simon-mayos-books-of-the-year/id1402579687?mt=2>

[Anything But Silent](https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/anything-but-silent/id1464701909) (British Library)

<https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/anything-but-silent/id1464701909>



8. Immerse Yourself in a Virtual Library – The British Library’s Discovering Literature Website

- The British Library’s *Discovering Literature* website is a real treasure trove for anyone interested in Literature.
- It includes hundreds of articles on texts from Chaucer to 21st century novels such as Andrea Levey’s *Small Island*, plus images of many of the fascinating items in the British Library Collection. The Discovering Library website is divided into the following periods:

Medieval

<https://www.bl.uk/medieval-literature>

Shakespeare

<https://www.bl.uk/shakespeare>

[Including: *Macbeth*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Tempest*]

Restoration and 18th Century

<https://www.bl.uk/restoration-18th-century-literature>

Romantics and Victorian

<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians>

[Including: Wordsworth, Blake, Coleridge, *Jane Eyre*, *Frankenstein*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *Oliver Twist*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Hard Times*, Christina Rossetti]

20th Century

<https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature>

[Including: *An Inspector Calls*, *Animal Farm*, the poetry of Wilfred Owen, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*]

The first thing you could do is simply spend an hour or so exploring the different sections of the website, allowing yourself to follow whatever paths interest you. (It might be worth having a Word document open so that you can copy and paste titles and web addresses of anything you might want to return to later. But on this first visit, you could just be an interested browser!) Over the next few weeks, you could complete the British Library Critical Treasure Trail:

- Read an article that’s caught your attention and select one key point – bit of treasure – from it.
- Use the links on the right-hand side of the web page to follow a critical trail through the site.
- Read two more articles, collecting bits of treasure as you go.
- Share your treasure as quotations on the platform recommended and validated by your school.
- You could also record a short audio guide to the trail you followed and the treasure you found.

Going Further: check out the following website for even more information about the literary tradition: <https://crossref-it.info/textguides>

9. Listen to Literature

[The audiobooks listed below are available to listen to online free of charge.](#) They are all ones you might come across in your A Level literature course. Even if you don't go on to study any of these particular texts, each will contribute to your wider understanding of literature.

- If you can, arrange with a few other people to try this activity at the same time – that way you can share your choices and your reviews.
- Listen to the opening few minutes of each and choose the one that most grabs you. Make a brief note of what made you want to keep on listening.
- Listen to your choice of audio book.
- Write a review. Focus on the big picture – what the story is, what it is about (underlying themes and ideas), anything that seems particularly interesting about the way it is written. Read over your review and see if you can reduce it to 150 words – while still getting across your main points.

The audio books:

- o *Jane Eyre*
- o *Frankenstein*
- o *Pride and Prejudice*
- o *Brave New World*
- o *My Antonia*
- o *Ethan Frome*
- o *Picture of Dorian Gray*
- o *The Age of Innocence*
- o *The Metamorphosis*
- o *The Age of Innocence*
- o *Wuthering Heights*
- o *The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Stories*
- o *The Jungle*

https://stories.audible.com/discovery/enterprise-discovery-21122353011?ref=adbl_ent_anon_ds_ds_dml_cntr-4

IO. Experience a University Lecture

In 2015 Professor Emma Smith from Hertford College, Oxford University, recorded her undergraduate lecture series on Shakespeare plays. These are all available via Apple Podcasts.

<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/itunes-u/id399194760> and via Oxford University (<https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/people/emma-smith>)

This is how she describes the approach she takes in the lectures:

Each lecture in this series focuses on a single play by Shakespeare, and employs a range of different approaches to try to understand a central critical question about it. Rather than providing overarching readings or interpretations, the series aims to show the variety of different ways we might understand Shakespeare, the kinds of evidence that might be used to strengthen our critical analysis, and, above all, the enjoyable and unavoidable fact that Shakespeare's plays tend to generate our questions rather than answer them.

Different approaches, a variety of different ways, thinking around a central critical question, enjoyable, more questions than answers – these lectures are the *perfect* way to experience what it means to be a student of literature (as well, of course, as discovering more about some Shakespeare plays).

The lectures were written and delivered for undergraduates at Oxford University, so you should expect to find them a bit of a challenge. But it's the sort of challenge which someone interested in Literature should find very satisfying, even exciting. And Emma Smith explores her ideas with real clarity and delivers the lecture with humour. So, give them a go – don't worry about understanding everything, especially the first time you listen. Use the suggestions below to help you.

- Choose the play you studied for GCSE. Look at the mini-description of the lecture and make a note of your own ideas and questions about this idea.
 - *Macbeth*: This lecture explores ideas of agency – who or what makes happen the things that happen in *Macbeth*?
 - *Twelfth Night*: This lecture takes a minor character in *Twelfth Night* - Antonio - and uses his presence to open up questions of sexuality, desire and the nature of romantic comedy.
 - *Romeo and Juliet*: This lecture tackles the issue of the spoiler-chorus, in an already-too-familiar play.
 - *The Tempest*: This lecture asks if it's useful to think about the character of Prospero as a self-portrait of Shakespeare.
 - *The Merchant of Venice*: This lecture discusses the ways the play's personal relationships are shaped by models of financial transaction, using the casket scenes as a central example.
 - *Henry V*: This this lecture asks whether the presentation of King Henry V in the play is entirely positive
 - *Julius Caesar*: This lecture focuses on the scene with Cinna the Poet to discuss structure, tone, and politics.
 - *Othello*: This lecture looks at the central question of race and its significance in the play.

- *Much Ado About Nothing*: This lecture asks why the characters are so quick to believe the self-proclaimed villain Don John, thinking about male bonding and the genre of comedy
- Listen to the lecture in the background, as you are doing something else, just to get used to the approach and style.
- Listen to the lecture without worrying about taking notes. Afterwards see if you can jot down two or three ideas that interested you. Listen again another day and see if you can add to your notes.
- If you can, arrange with a classmate to listen to the same lecture and swap notes via the platform recommended and validated by your school.
- Listen to a second lecture on a play you haven't studied but are interested in. If you can, listen to an audio dramatization of the play (see activity 30) or watch the play online (see activity xx) before you listen to the lecture.
- Reflect on what it was like to listen to a lecture – what did you enjoy? What did you find challenging?
- Draft an email to Emma Smith in which you explore your response to one of her ideas.
- Draft and record your own short lecture (aim for 10 minutes) on your Shakespeare play. Follow Emma Smith's model and focus your lecture on a specific idea or question.