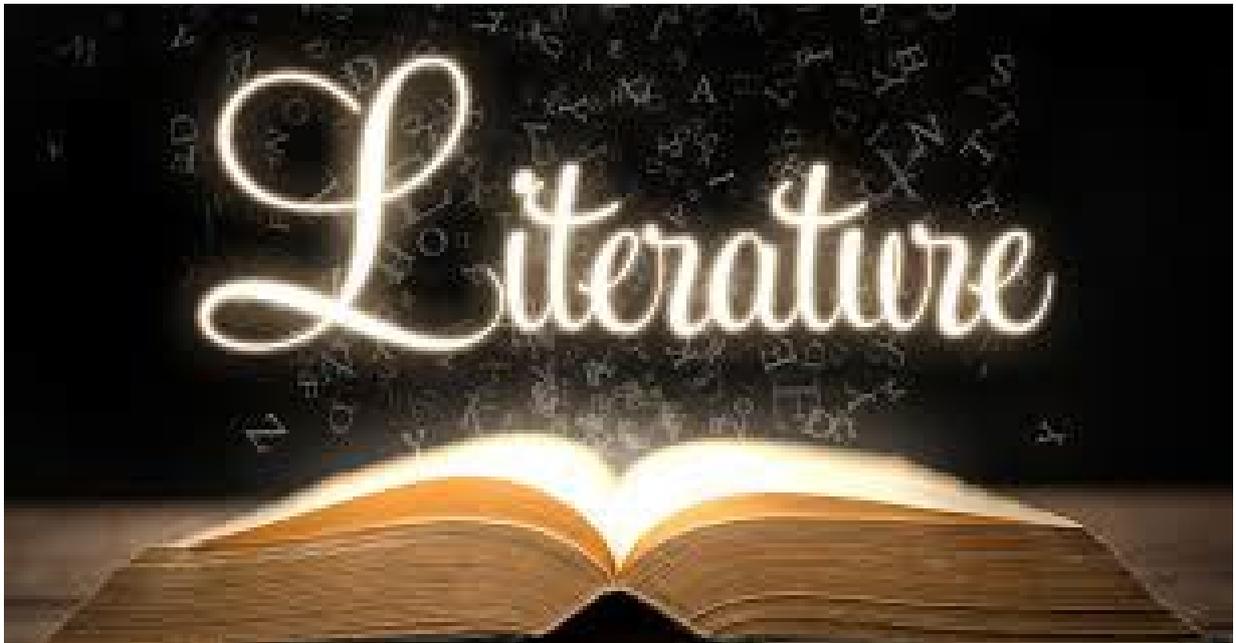


Year 12 Transition

# English Literature

An insight into English Literature A Level



Name	
Teacher	

**BQ: How does literature explore aspects of political and social protest?**

**Engage task:**

1. What is genre?

---

---

---

2. What is the last book you have read and explain whether or not you would recommend it to others?

---

---

---

3. What are some of the reasons people protest?

---

---

---

4. What texts have you studied at school (KS3 or GCSE) that could be an example of political or social protest?

---

---

---

5. What is the definition of oppression?

---

---

---

**Political and Social Protest**

**Political protest** writing in literature is writing that aims to critique or challenge political systems, structures, and ideologies. **Social protest** writing, on the other hand, focuses on social issues, including inequality, discrimination, and other forms of social injustice.

In Year 12, students will focus on Paper 2: Political and Social Protest writing. The texts of study for this unit include:

- Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale
- Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner
- William Blake's Songs of Innocence and Experience
- Unseen Political and Social Protest writing (could be any form: prose, drama, poetry)

### **A Dangerous Book or a Classic Novel of Our Times?**

The Handmaid's Tale is set for AS or A Level on many different specifications in the UK. It has been a popular modern fiction set text for many years. Appearing on an examination syllabus is usually a mark of critical acceptance and value. Yet Atwood's novel has not received such straightforward critical acclaim in every context since its publication.

In the box below are some facts and figures about its reception in the USA and elsewhere over the period since its publication.



Look at the information and discuss what's suggested about:

1. How people have chosen to read the novel and whether any of the criticisms from would-be banners are justified.
2. Whether it is ever legitimate to ban books from school curricula and how that very question of book banning relates to political and social protest.
3. Whether the arguments about 'age-appropriacy' are in any way justified and, if so, what age should be set for this book.

1. The American Library Association (ALA) lists the novel as being 37th in the most frequently challenged books of 1990-1999 (though it's worth noting that *Of Mice and Men*, Roald Dahl's *Witches*, *The Catcher in the Rye* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and books by Alice Walker and Toni Morrison were much higher!)
2. On the equivalent list for 2000-2009, *The Handmaid's Tale* is number 88. (It's worth noting that Harry Potter is number one in this period!)
3. Between 1990 and 2009, there were at least nine or ten challenges to its inclusion in school curricula, or inclusion on reading lists for students, in the USA or Canada on the following grounds:
  - Too explicit for students, with lurid passages about sex
  - Profanity, in other words blasphemous, irreligious ideas
  - Irreverent or obscene language
  - 'poor quality literature' that 'stress[es] suicide, illicit sex, violence, and hopelessness'
  - 'Age-inappropriate subject matter'
  - 'rife with brutality towards and mistreatment of women (and men at times), sexual scenes, and bleak depression.'
4. In 2012, 2,300 people signed a petition in North Carolina to have the novel removed from a reading list at a local school because of its 'negative view on religion and its anti-biblical attitudes towards sex.
5. More recently, as well as the criticisms that it is anti-Christian, it has also been accused of being anti-Islamic.
6. On the 'Goodreads' website, *The Handmaid's Tale* is listed as 70th out of over 40,000 books, in the 'Best Books Ever' category, 28th in the 'Best Books of the 20th Century', 5th in the 'Best Dystopia', 1st in 'Best Feminist Fiction' and 1st in 'Best Feminist Books'. It was voted as 37th in the Readers' Picks of '100 Books to Read in a Lifetime' and 1st in 'Best Books of the Decade: 1980's'.



As protest, by definition, is a rebellion against power, one of the ways into analyse literature is to focus on the depiction of this power. These questions might help to guide you:

- Who holds the power?
- What type of power does this person/group symbolise? (e.g. patriarchy, capitalism, colonial power)
- How does this person/group maintain that power? (e.g. by violence, through control of language and education, denying groups access to resources, maintaining false consciousness...)
- Are there any examples of rebellion against this power, and how successful is this?
- What is the author's attitude to this power? (e.g. are they critiquing or consolidating?)

We are going to read the opening chapter of The Handmaid's Tale and answer the questions above to analyse how Atwood explores political and social protest in the novel. In this novel, Atwood explores how women could be controlled in a not-so-distant dystopian future.

## CHAPTER ONE

"WE SLEPT IN what had once been the gymnasium. The floor was of varnished wood, with stripes and circles painted on it, for the games that were formerly played there; the hoops for the basketball nets were still in place, though the nets were gone. A balcony ran around the room, for the spectators, and I thought I could smell, faintly like an afterimage, the pungent scent of sweat, shot through with the sweet taint of chewing gum and perfume from the watching girls, felt-skirted as I knew from pictures, later in mini-skirts, then pants, then in one earring, spiky green-streaked hair. Dances would have been held there; the music lingered, a palimpsest of unheard sound, style upon style, an undercurrent of drums, a forlorn wail, garlands made of tissue-paper flowers, cardboard devils, a revolving ball of mirrors, powdering the dancers with a snow of light.

There was old sex in the room and loneliness, and expectation, of something without a shape or name. I remember that yearning, for something that was always about to happen and was never the same as the hands that were on us there and then, in the small of the back, or out back, in the parking lot, or in the television room with the sound turned down and only the pictures flickering over lifting flesh.

We yearned for the future. How did we learn it, that talent for insatiability? It was in the air; and it was still in the air, an afterthought, as we tried to sleep, in the army cots that had been set up in rows, with spaces between so we could not talk. We had flannelette sheets, like children's, and army-issue blankets, old ones that still said U.S. We folded our clothes neatly and laid them on the stools at the ends of the beds. The lights were turned down but not out. Aunt Sara and Aunt Elizabeth patrolled; they had electric cattle prods slung on thongs from their leather belts.

No guns though, even they could not be trusted with guns. Guns were for the guards, specially picked from the Angels. The guards weren't allowed inside the building except when called, and we weren't allowed out, except for

our walks, twice daily, two by two around the football field which was enclosed now by a chain-link fence topped with barbed wire. The Angels stood outside it with their backs to us. They were objects of fear to us, but of something else as well. If only they would look. If only we could talk to them. Something could be exchanged, we thought, some deal made, some trade-off, we still had our bodies. That was our fantasy.

We learned to whisper almost without sound. In the semi-darkness we could stretch out our arms, when the Aunts weren't looking, and touch each other's hands across space. We learned to lip-read, our heads flat on the beds, turned sideways, watching each other's mouths. In this way we exchanged names, from bed to bed:

Alma. Janine. Dolores. Moira. June.



### Who holds the power?

*Power is held by the Angels, who choose the guards – who are presumably male. However, “Aunt Sara” and “Aunt Elizabeth” are also armed with “electric cattle-prods” and maintain order amongst the prisoners.*



What type of power does this person/group symbolise?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

How does this person/group maintain that power?

---

---

---



Are there any examples of rebellion against this power, and how successful is this?

What is the author's attitude to this power?

On the following pages are the instructions and tasks for the A Level Literature summer homework. Besides this homework you should also spend time reading for pleasure. The more you read; the more you will achieve in A Level Literature. At the back of this workbook is a suggested reading list, but ultimately you should spend your summer holidays reading literature that you enjoy.

## Year 12 Summer Homework: Who was William Blake?

In year 12, we will study William Blake's poetry collection 'Songs of Innocence and of Experience'. The activities in this summer project will introduce you to Blake and some of the key elements of protest which shaped his world and his writing.

There are seven activities, with a suggested minimum amount of time you should spend on each (in total 1 hours 45 minutes). If you have any questions email me – [Crobinson@thedustonschool.org](mailto:Crobinson@thedustonschool.org)

**Your summer project work will form the basis of the first Paper 2 lesson in the new term.**

### **Task 1: What was Blake's world like? (20 minutes)**

- 1750 Process of industrialisation begins
- 1757 Born in London
- 1767 Apprenticed as an engraver
- 1755-1783 War of American Independence and 1776 Declaration of Independence
- 1780 Gordon riots in London – Blake sees burning of Newgate prison
- 1782 Marries Catherine
- 1784 Sets up print shop; the business fails within a few years
- 1788-9 Becomes involved in the Swedenborgian New Church, setting himself apart from Orthodox religion
- 1789 French Revolution; Songs of Innocence is engraved and privately printed
- 1791-2 Thomas Paine publishes 'The Rights of Man'; it is read/heard by 2 million people – a fifth of the population of Britain
- 1792 The Paris Massacres – the ideals of the Revolution are destroyed by tyranny
- 1793 Execution of Louis XVI; France declares war on England; in England the Aliens' Act restricts the liberty of foreigners; Traitorous Correspondence Bill gives the state the right to open mail.
- 1794 Songs of Innocence and Experience is engraved; Pitt suspends Habeus Corpus (which protects defendants from unjustified detention) and curbs the freedom of the press
- 1795 Pitt introduces Treasonable Practices and Seditious Meetings Bills
- 1799 Combination Laws suppress trade unionism
- 1803 Blake is accused of cursing the King and is charged with 'sedition' (later acquitted)
- 1811-13 Luddite rioters start machine breaking (17 rioters executed)
- 1815-17 Civil unrest sparked by bad harvest
- 1819 Peterloo massacre
- 1824 Repeal of Combinations Act
- 1827 Blake dies

Look at the key dates in Blake's life and answer the questions below

1. What kind of world might Blake have been living in? Find adjectives to describe it e.g. stable/dangerous/ rural
2. What might have changed for Blake between his youth and his adult life?
3. What else can you tell from these dates and facts about the Songs of Innocence and of Experience?

### Task 2: Perspectives on Blake (20 minutes)

Watch and create a mind-map on what you have learned about Blake and the time period he lived in.

Video clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liVQ21KZfOI&t=145s> ( The Romantics- watch until 17:06)

### Task 3: Reading Activity- Infant Joy (15 minutes)

Infant Joy

'I have no name;  
I am but two days old.'  
What shall I call thee?  
'I happy am,  
Joy is my name.'  
Sweet joy befall thee!

Pretty joy!  
Sweet joy, but two days old.  
Sweet Joy I call thee:  
Thou dost smile,  
I sing the while;  
Sweet joy befall thee!

- Summarise the story of this poem in 3 bullet points (think about who is talking, you could also consider the original engraving by Blake).
- Can we link this poem to any of the information about Blake and his times?
- Which collection do you think this poem came from? Why? List reasons.
- Blake wrote a companion poem to go with this one in the other collection. If you were going to write a companion poem to this, what would you write?

### Task 4: Reading Activity- Infant Sorrow (15 minutes)

#### **Infant Sorrow**

BY WILLIAM BLAKE

My mother groand! my father wept.  
Into the dangerous world I leapt:  
Helpless, naked, piping loud;  
Like a fiend hid in a cloud.

Struggling in my fathers hands:  
Striving against my swaddling bands:  
Bound and weary I thought best  
To sulk upon my mothers breast.

- Summarise the story of this poem in 3 bullet points (think about who is talking - you could also consider the original engraving by Blake).
- Can we link this poem to any of the quotations about Blake and his times?
- Which collection do you think this poem came from? Why? List reasons.
- What are the key differences between this poem and the companion piece that you just read?

**Task 5: Reading and Annotating Infant's Joy (5 minutes)**

Blake's poetry is deceptively simplistic.

When we look at them in detail there is a lot to say!

Here is a fully annotated copy of one of the poems – add any new ideas to your notes.

It is in the form of a simple lullaby. Speech marks indicate two different voices (mother? Child? Poet?). Why is a two day old child represented as speaking? Disorientating? Is it to suggest equality?

Very short lines and a simple repetitive structure emphasise the simple, unquestioned idea of innocence.

Each stanza ends with a refrain, emphasising its importance. Saying 'Sweet joy befall thee' suggests that there is a risk of the opposite - sorrow?

'I have no name;  
I am but two days old.'  
What shall I call thee?  
'I happy am,  
Joy is my name.'  
Sweet joy befall thee!

Pretty joy!  
Sweet joy, but two days old.  
Sweet Joy I call thee:  
Thou dost smile,  
I sing the while;  
Sweet joy befall thee!

Is the child a free spirit not yet restricted by parental restraint?

The question is answered immediately, creating a sense of certainty and security.

Semantic field of innocence – 'joy' and 'sweet'

'I sing' Importance of creativity in the development of children and human life.

Ends on 'thee' emphasising the importance of the infant.

**Task 6: How are ideas of innocence and experience presented in Infant Sorrow? (20 minutes)**

Annotate the poem in detail. Consider the following:

- Voice
- Structure
- Imagery
- Tone
- Writer's message

## **Infant Sorrow**

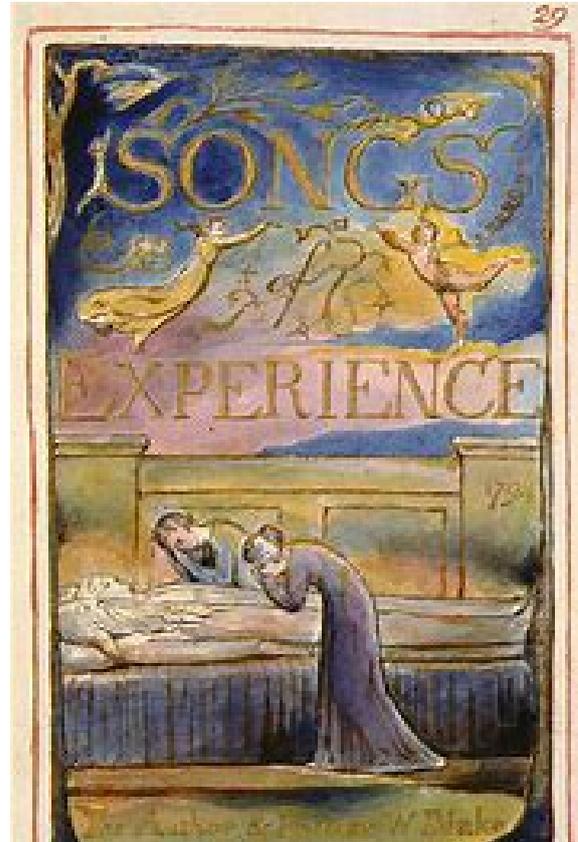
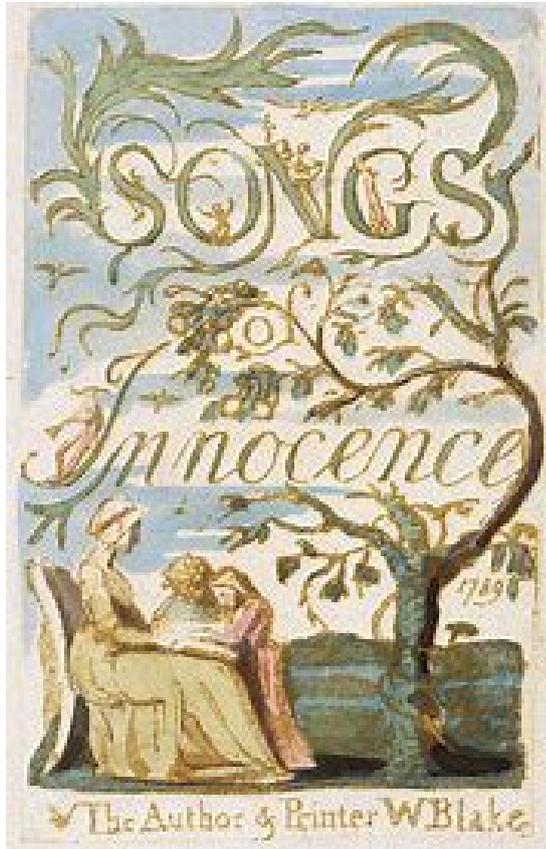
BY WILLIAM BLAKE

My mother groand! my father wept.  
Into the dangerous world I leapt:  
Helpless, naked, piping loud;  
Like a fiend hid in a cloud.

Struggling in my fathers hands:  
Striving against my swaddling bands:  
Bound and weary I thought best  
To sulk upon my mothers breast.

**Task 7: Exploring the title (10 minutes)**

- In the title 'Songs of Innocence and of Experience Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul', the words 'Innocence' and 'Experience' stand out.
- Look at the two title pages and make a list of the similarities and differences.



**Suggested Summer Reading List:**

Morrison- 'Beloved' and 'The Bluest Eye'  
Angelou-'I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings'  
Atwood- 'Oryx and Crake'  
Kingsolver- 'Demon Copperhead' 'The Bean Trees'  
Sepetys- 'Salt to the Sea' and 'I Must Betray You'  
Chbosky- 'The Perks of Being a Wallflower'  
Egan- 'A Visit from the Goon Squad'  
Mottley- 'Nightcrawling'  
Knoll- 'Bright Young Women'  
Hill- 'The Woman in Black'  
Lynch-'Prophet Song'  
Boulley-'Firekeeper's Daughter'  
Shafak- '10 minutes 38 seconds in this Strange World' and 'The Island of Missing Trees'  
Reid- 'The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo' and 'Daisy Jones and the Six'  
Finch- 'The Eternal Return of Clara Hart'  
Ishiguro- 'Never Let Me Go' and 'Klara and the Sun'  
O'Farrell- 'Hamnet' and 'The Marriage Portrait'  
Lee- 'Pachinko'  
Miller- 'Song of Achilles' and 'Circe'  
Stuart- 'Shuggie Bain' and 'Young Mungo'  
Palahniuk- 'Fight Club'  
Orwell- 'Animal Farm' and '1984'  
Huxley- 'Brave New World'  
Hosseini- 'A Thousand Splendid Suns'  
Walker- 'The Color Purple'  
Shamsie- 'Home Fire'  
Achebe- 'Things Fall Apart'  
Eliot- 'Middlemarch'  
Rushdie- 'Midnight's Children'  
Adichie- 'Half of a Yellow Sun'  
Levy- 'Small Island'  
Plath- 'The Bell Jar'  
Roy- 'The God of Small Things'  
Zadie Smith- 'White Teeth'  
Rhys- 'Wide Sargasso Sea'  
Fitzgerald- 'The Great Gatsby'  
Steinbeck- 'Grapes of Wrath'  
Du Maurier- 'Rebecca'  
Austen- 'Pride and Prejudice'  
Bronte- 'Wuthering Heights'  
Hurstun- 'Their Eyes Were Watching God'  
Barker- 'Regeneration'