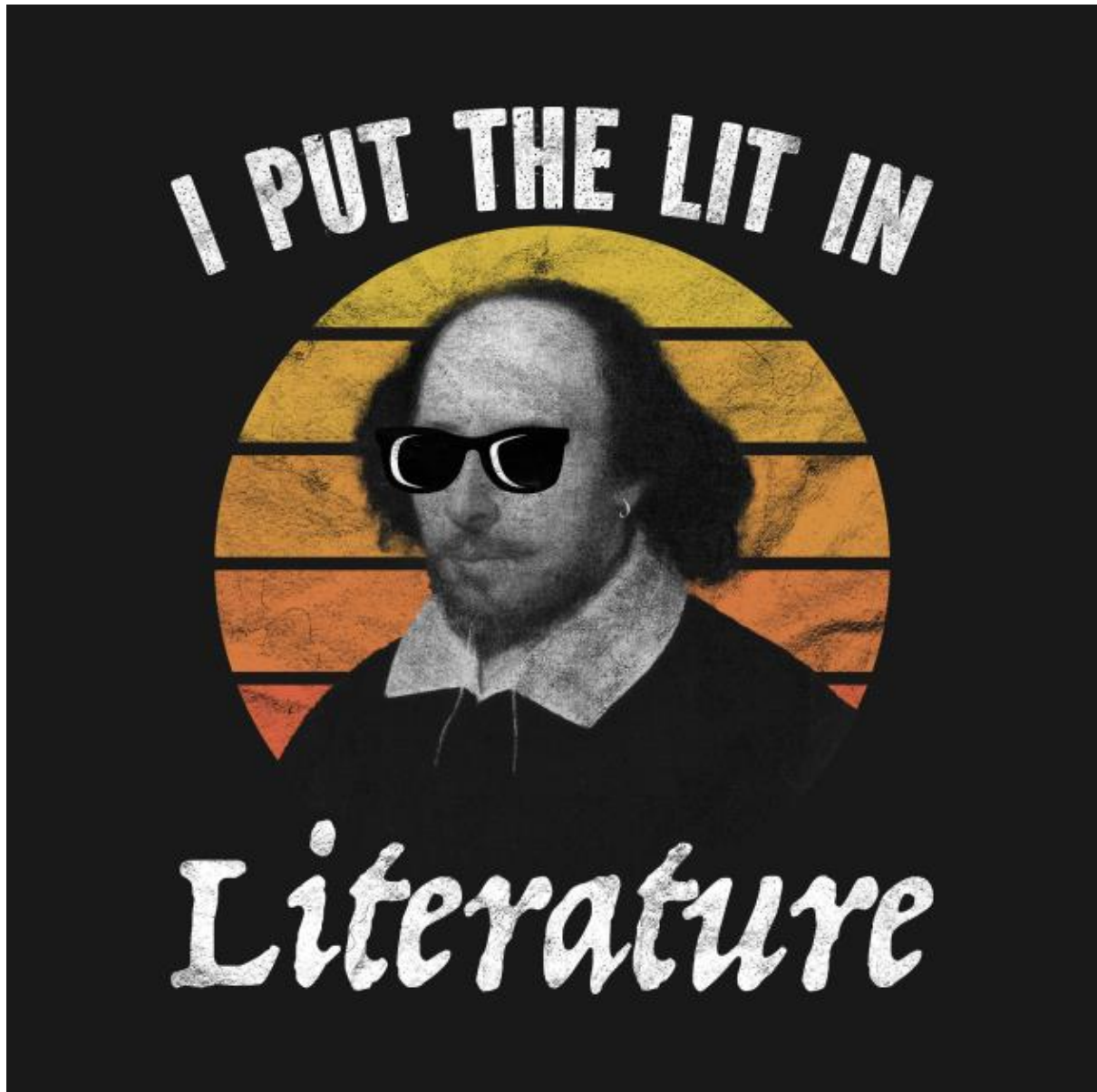


A LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE TRANSITION
BOOKLET



Name:

You will be studying AQA A Level literature B

Over the 2 years, you will cover two genres of writing:

Comedy

Texts studied:

- Taming of the Shrew – William Shakespeare
- The Importance of Being Earnest – Oscar Wilde
- Comedy Poetry Anthology



Political and Social Protest

Texts studied:

- The Handmaid's Tale – Margaret Atwood
- The Kite Runner – Khaled Hosseini
- Songs of Innocence and Experience – William Blake

The tasks in this booklet are related to these genres and will prepare you for studying A level literature.

Task 2

Read the following article from the website 'LiveAboutDotCom' about the origins of comedy and the theatre and answer the comprehension questions that follow:

History of Comedy in Ancient Greece

An Overview of Satire in Greek Theatre

by Wade Bradford

Updated May 02, 2017

Modern movies such as *The Hangover*, *40-Year-Old Virgin*, and *American Pie* owe a great deal to the Greeks. Why? Because playwrights invented the ever-popular but always controversial genre known as "the sex comedy." Of course, that's not what they were called during the days of Ancient Greece. Instead, they were known as satyr plays.

During the Festival of Dionysus, audiences would sit and watch three tragedies in a row. How depressing is that? So, to expunge the seriousness of the viewing experience, the evening would conclude with a satyr play. Thousands of years before there was Saturday Night Live, the playwrights of Ancient Greece were poking fun at the world around them. Very often, these comedies featured half-man / half goat characters known as Satyrs. They were obnoxious, dim-witted, and usually drunk. And let's face it - these goat men were perverts. The Satyr characters lusted after everyone on stage, and they delivered the most humorous lines, often at the expense of others. (Not just the other characters, but sometimes they poked fun at Athenian society.) Hence, the notion of "satire" is derived from the Satyr play.

Although many Satyr plays are mentioned by Greek historians, only one complete script remains *Cyclops* is an adventurous comedy by Euripides. The storyline is borrowed from Homer's *Odyssey*; however, this version has a good deal more vulgar jokes (some of which unfortunately gets lost in translation).

But for the most part, these satyr plays were briefer than a regular drama. And the plot was always a lampoon. It wasn't until later that writers such as Aristophanes began inventing longer and more original comedies, such as the highly provocative *Lysistrata*.

Written during the Peloponnesian War - a conflict Aristophanes felt was a pointless waste of human life, this comedy begins with the heroine, Lysistrata, explaining to her fellow women how to prevent their husbands from going off to battle:

"LYSISTRATA: All we have to do is idly sit indoors With smooth roses powdered on our cheeks, Our bodies burning naked through the folds Of shining Amorgos' silk, and meet the men With our dear Venus-plats plucked trim and neat. Their stirring love will rise up furiously, They'll beg our arms to open. That's our time! We'll disregard their knocking, beat them off -- And they will soon be rabid for a Peace. I'm sure of it."

In short, they withhold sex from their husbands until the men submit to their wives and call off their ongoing battle. The alternative title of the play could be: "Make Love, Not War." Considering the plays political views, powerful female characters, and overt sexuality, it's no wonder the play has been banned, off-and-on, for centuries.

Aristophanes had a knack for controversy. He would populate his comedies with social and political figures of his era. He would poke fun at philosophers, politicians, and playwright, most of whom were probably in the audience at the time. But more than a celebrity roast, Aristophanes criticized the direction of his community. He felt that his society was going backward instead of forwards.

Euripides and Aristophanes and other Greek dramatists pushed the boundaries, and I'm sure they made audiences gasp now and then. The audience probably felt uncomfortable or annoyed at times. But were the plays controversial during their own time?

Historians believe that the front row seats were filled with dignitaries and religious officials. Audience members were also likely to be the judges of the festival productions. And guess which playwrights won the most awards over the years? Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes. All the so-called boundary pushers were also the winners. So, like today's Academy Awards, the shows that generate a lot of "buzz" are often shocking and satirical, as well as wrought with heavy themes.

Questions to answer

1. What were comedy plays called in Ancient Greece?
2. Why did evenings often conclude with a comedy play during the Festival of Dionysus?
3. What were satyrs?
4. What were their characteristics?
5. What did they poke fun at?
6. Which comedy original script still remains in full today?
7. What example of a longer play does the article mention?
8. What do women do to men in this play?
9. Who would Aristophanes often poke fun at in his comedies?
10. How might audiences have felt at times whilst watching Aristophanes' comedies?
11. Who came to watch plays at the Festival of Dionysus?
12. Who often won awards at the Festival of Dionysus?

Task 3:

- A. Below are some common elements of political and social protest texts. Research the definitions of any words that you don't understand and write them down.



- B. Read the following definition explaining what social protest is and answer the questions that follow:

“Social protest is a form of political expression that seeks to bring about social or political change by influencing the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of the public or the policies of an organization or institution. Protests often take the form of overt public displays, demonstrations, and civil disobedience, but may also include covert activities such as petitions, boycotts/buycotts, lobbying, and various online activities. Protesters engage in protest activities motivated by both individual rewards (including a variety of personal benefits and gratifications) and collective incentives (benefits that are realized by a large class of individuals that does not necessarily include the individual protester). Most protests represent the collective interests and issues of activist groups, coalitions, or social movements that challenge mainstream institutions. In the process, they serve a number of important democratic functions, including providing opportunities for participation and expression for individuals, and as a potential engine of social change for communities and nations. Communication, whether mass or interpersonal, is a central element in the success of a protest group by facilitating information exchange, mobilization, coordination, integration, identity formation, and many other essential functions.” (Oxford Bibliographies, 2019)

1. What changes does social protest seek to bring about?

2. What forms can protests take?

3. What rewards and benefits do protesters hope to gain by their actions?

4. Why are protests important?

5. What is a central element for protesters and why?

C. Research one of the protests below (or a protest of your choice) and complete the table:

The Storming of Bastille, The Anti-War Movement 1967-1972, Boston Tea Party, Civil Rights Movement 1954-1968, Stonewall Riots

Where did it take place?	
When did it take place?	
Why did people feel the need to protest?	
What actions did they take?	
Evaluate the success of the protest: (Did they achieve what they wanted? Has it made a lasting difference?)	

Task 4:

One section of your exam asks you to read an unseen extract and identify elements of political and social protest in it. Below is an example question:

1. Read the contextualising paragraph at the start to help you understand what the extract is about, where and when it is set and who the key characters are.
2. Read the extract carefully (several times) and identify who has power and who is powerless. Find examples to support your ideas.
3. Identify any other elements of political and social protest and examples to support your ideas.
4. Write an essay response explaining what elements are present and explore how the writer has done this.

Explore the significance of the elements of social protest in this extract. Remember to include in your answer relevant detailed analysis of the ways Steinbeck has shaped meanings.

[25 marks]

Contextualising passage

Animal Farm is an allegorical novella by George Orwell, first published in England on 17 August 1945. According to Orwell, the book reflects events leading up to the Russian Revolution of 1917 and then on into the Stalinist era of the Soviet Union.[1] Orwell, a democratic socialist,[2] was a critic of Joseph Stalin and hostile to Moscow-directed Stalinism, an attitude that was critically shaped by his experiences during the Spanish Civil War.[3] The Soviet Union, he believed, had become a brutal dictatorship, built upon a cult of personality and enforced by a reign of terror. In a letter to Yvonne Davet, Orwell described Animal Farm as a satirical tale against Stalin (“un conte satirique contre Staline”),[4] and in his essay “Why I Write” (1946), wrote that Animal Farm was the first book in which he tried, with full consciousness of what he was doing, “to fuse political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole”.

Extract

The reading and writing classes, however, were a great success. By the autumn almost every animal on the farm was literate in some degree.

As for the pigs, they could already read and write perfectly. The dogs learned to read fairly well, but were not interested in reading anything except the Seven Commandments. Muriel, the goat, could read somewhat better than the dogs, and sometimes used to read to the others in the evenings from scraps of newspaper which she found on the rubbish heap. Benjamin could read as well as any pig, but never exercised his faculty. So far as he knew, he said, there was nothing worth reading. Clover learnt the whole alphabet, but could not put words together. Boxer could not get beyond the letter D. He would trace out A, B, C, D, in the dust with his great hoof, and then would stand staring at the letters with his ears back, sometimes shaking his forelock, trying with all his might to remember what came next and never succeeding. On several occasions, indeed, he did learn E, F, G, H, but by the time he knew them, it was always discovered that he had forgotten A, B, C, and D. Finally he decided to be content with the first four letters, and used to write them out once or twice every day to refresh his memory. Mollie refused to learn any but the six letters which spelt her own name. She would form these very neatly out of pieces of twig, and would then decorate them with a flower or two and walk round them admiring them.

None of the other animals on the farm could get further than the letter A. It was also found that the stupider animals, such as the sheep, hens, and ducks, were unable to learn the Seven Commandments by heart. After much thought Snowball declared that the Seven Commandments could in effect be reduced to a single maxim, namely: “Four legs good, two legs bad.” This, he said, contained the essential principle of Animalism. Whoever had thoroughly grasped it would be safe from human influences. The birds at first objected, since it seemed to them that they also had two legs, but Snowball proved to them that this was not so.

“A bird’s wing, comrades,” he said, “is an organ of propulsion and not of manipulation. It should therefore be regarded as a leg. The distinguishing mark of man is the HAND, the instrument with which he does all his mischief.”

The birds did not understand Snowball’s long words, but they accepted his explanation, and all the humbler animals set to work to learn the new maxim by heart. FOUR LEGS GOOD, TWO LEGS BAD, was inscribed on the end wall of the barn, above the Seven Commandments and in bigger letters. When they had once got it by heart, the sheep developed a great liking for this maxim, and often as they lay in the field they would all start bleating “Four legs good, two legs bad! Four legs good, two legs bad!” and keep it up for hours on end, never growing tired of it.

Napoleon took no interest in Snowball’s committees. He said that the education of the young was more important than anything that could be done for those who were already grown up. It happened that Jessie and Bluebell had both whelped soon after the hay harvest, giving birth between them to nine sturdy puppies. As soon as they were weaned, Napoleon took them away from their mothers, saying that he would make himself responsible for their education. He took them up into a loft which could only be reached by a ladder from the harness-room, and there kept them in such seclusion that the rest of the farm soon forgot their existence.

The mystery of where the milk went to was soon cleared up. It was mixed every day into the pigs’ mash.

Task 5:

At GCSE, you studied the poem 'London' by William Blake. For your A Level course, you will study the collection that this poem came from: 'Songs of Innocence and of Experience'. In this collection, Blake has sometimes written two poems of the same name, but one features in the 'Innocence' section and the other in the 'Experience' section. Below are the two poems called 'The Chimney Sweeper'. Read and annotate both poems looking for elements of political and social protest and methods used by Blake before answering the questions that follow.



"The Chimney Sweeper" (from *Songs of Experience*)

A little black thing among the snow:
Crying weep, weep, in notes of woe!
Where are thy father & mother? say?
They are both gone up to the church to pray.

Because I was happy upon the heath,
And smil'd among the winters snow:
They clothed me in the clothes of death,
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.

And because I am happy, & dance and sing,
They think they have done me no injury:
And are gone to praise God & his Priest & King
Who make up a heaven of our misery

