Clitheroe Royal Grammar Sixth Form: Transition Pack

Welcome to English Language & Literature Combined

We look forward to meeting you and welcoming you to the Sixth Form.

This Transition Pack contains information to support your transition from GCSE to A Level study.

Please read all the documents ready to begin Year 12:

- Independent Learning in English Language & Literature Combined
- English Language & Literature Combined Introductory Tasks

✓ **Read the Subject Information Sheet** which is available here: CRGS Sixth Form Subject Sheet - English Combined

✓ **Download the exam board specification** which is available here: AQA A Level English Language and Literature

✓ **Read the section called 'Specification at a Glance'**, focusing on the A Level content.

✓ Some of these resources will become more useful when you have moved further through the course, such as the A Level specification, so store them where you can revisit them over the next 2 years.

✓ Don't worry if some of the work sounds challenging. A Level work is more difficult than GCSE work after all. Your teachers will be supporting you through this transition. Please talk to us if you are unsure about any aspect of the course.

We look forward to seeing you soon.

English Department

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A Level – English Language & Literature Combined

Tips and suggestions for the first few weeks of the course

Grammar practice	• Brush up on your grammar if you find this area to be weaker. • There are many different websites you can look at for tutorials but start with: http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/english ○ Work your way through the different 'word grammar' and 'sentence grammar' sections, reading the fact sheets, completing the work sheets and taking the quizzes. • Listen to TED talks on grammar to widen your understanding of the subject. This enables you to see what other people's perspectives are. You can listen to them online or download the app. Follow these links to get you started: https://www.ted.com/topics/literature http://blog.ed.ted.com/2014/05/29/be-a-better-writer-in-15-minutes-4-ted-ed-lessons-on-grammar-and-word-choice/
Suggested reading	• 'The Handmaid's Tale', Margaret Atwood • 'A Streetcar Named Desire', Williams • 'The Great Gatsby', Scott Fitzgerald • 'Words, Words, Words', David Crystal • The poetry of Robert Browning
Useful websites	• http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/launch_tl_ages_english.shtml • Back issues of: http://www.worldwidewords.org/ • https://www.sporcle.com/games/spooodrunbkbk/english-language-a-level-terminology • Newspaper websites to stay abreast of topics • https://www.poetry.com/ - good for Browning's poems • https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZbXA4lyCtqoaeZJCIdboGekWdqUHy9RT • https://www.lonelyplanet.com/ - you will be studying non fiction travel journalism amongst other things.

Unless you specifically want to, we do not suggest buying the books listed above. They can be expensive. Many can be borrowed from CRGS Sixth Form Library. Books can also be reserved and borrowed free of charge from most local libraries.

Clitheroe Royal Grammar Sixth Form: Transition Pack

A Level – English Language & Literature Combined Introductory Tasks

Welcome to the English Department!

Core Tasks	During the A-Level course, you will study poetry, novels, drama texts, pre-1900 and post-2000 texts. **In order to prepare for the first few weeks of the course, we would like you to:** ○ **Read as much of 'The Handmaid'sTale' as possible** – The more you read, the easier you will find the transition. ○ **Familiarise yourself with the works of Robert Browning** ○ **Listen to some TED Talks on linguistic analysis of literature.** You can listen to them online or download the app: https://www.ted.com/topics/literature ○ **Take notice of the world of words and the language you use every day –** you will need to learn a range of terminology to analyse texts so the sooner you are thinking about it, the better! ○ **There's a copy of Robert Browning's "The Laboratory" with some explanatory notes and an extract from "The Handmaid's Tale" –** have a read of these and annotate what you can – they will give you a flavour of Browning and Atwood's writing techniques, themes and structures.
Possible additional tasks:	○ Read some Robert Browning poetry. We suggest: *My Last Duchess, The Laboratory, Cristina, Porphyria's Lover*. ○ Read widely – a range of non-fiction and fiction texts will broaden your horizons and allow you to develop your understanding of a wide range of genres. ○ We suggest buying copies of the core texts so that you can annotate them whilst reading. These are: ○ 'The Handmaids Tale' by Margaret Atwood. ○ 'A Streetcar Named Desire' by Tennessee Williams ○ 'The Great Gatsby', Scott Fitzgerald *You don't need brand new copies – second hand are absolutely fine.*
Useful websites if you want to do some further research:	www.britishlibrary.com www.bibliomania.com www.litcharts.com www.literaryhistory.com https://www.lonelyplanet.com/

The Laboratory

By Robert Browning

Now that I, tying thy glass mask tightly,
May gaze thro' these faint smokes curling whitely,
As thou pliest thy trade in this devil's-smithy—
Which is the poison to poison her, prithee?

He is with her, and they know that I know
Where they are, what they do: they believe my tears flow
While they laugh, laugh at me, at me fled to the drear
Empty church, to pray God in, for them!—I am here.

Grind away, moisten and mash up thy paste,
Pound at thy powder,—I am not in haste!
Better sit thus and observe thy strange things,
Than go where men wait me and dance at the King's.

That in the mortar—you call it a gum?
Ah, the brave tree whence such gold oozings come!
And yonder soft phial, the exquisite blue,
Sure to taste sweetly,—is that poison too?

Had I but all of them, thee and thy treasures,
What a wild crowd of invisible pleasures!
To carry pure death in an earring, a casket,
A signet, a fan-mount, a filigree basket!

Soon, at the King's, a mere lozenge to give
And Pauline should have just thirty minutes to live!
But to light a pastile, and Elise, with her head
And her breast and her arms and her hands, should drop dead!

Quick—is it finished? The colour's too grim!
Why not soft like the phial's, enticing and dim?
Let it brighten her drink, let her turn it and stir,
And try it and taste, ere she fix and prefer!

What a drop! She's not little, no minion like me—
That's why she ensnared him: this never will free
The soul from those masculine eyes,—say, "no!"
To that pulse's magnificent come-and-go.

For only last night, as they whispered, I brought
My own eyes to bear on her so, that I thought
Could I keep them one half minute fixed, she would fall,
Shrivelled; she fell not; yet this does it all!

Not that I bid you spare her the pain!
Let death be felt and the proof remain;
Brand, burn up, bite into its grace—
He is sure to remember her dying face!

Is it done? Take my mask off! Nay, be not morose;
It kills her, and this prevents seeing it close:
The delicate droplet, my whole fortune's fee—

If it hurts her, beside, can it ever hurt me?

Now, take all my jewels, gorge gold to your fill,

You may kiss me, old man, on my mouth if you will!

But brush this dust off me, lest horror it brings

Ere I know it—next moment I dance at the King's!

The Laboratory

Glossary

3 *devil's-smithy*: i.e. a workshop fit for the devil: the laboratory with all its poisonous chemicals.

12 *the King's*: i.e. at the court, presumably the court of King Louis XVI of France.

13 *mortar*: a bowl for grinding chemicals into powder.

14 *brave*: splendid.

15 *phial*: small glass container, test-tube.

20 *signet:* a kind of ring.

***fan-mount*: the small metal centre of a fan.**

***filigree basket*: a little ornamental basket.**

23 *pastile*: a stick of aromatic paste. The speaker is imagining one made of poison which, when lit, will give off poisonous vapours.

29 *minion*: little thing (from French *mignonne*).

31 *masculine eyes*: it's Pauline's eyes, in fact, that are so vibrant.

39 *its grace*: i.e. her face's beauty.

Commentary

This is in many ways a really sinister poem: Browning is creating for us the voice of a woman poisoner in eighteenth-century France.

As with "My Last Duchess", this is a dramatic monologue, i.e. it is not the poet speaking to us, but the voice of a character that he has created. The setting here is the Ancien Régime, i.e. France before the Revolution. We are in French high society, the society around the King's court. A woman (we don't know her name) has been betrayed by her husband or lover with another woman, Pauline. Now, she is determined to get her revenge. And she has secretly gone off to an alchemist or chemist, who (for a large fee) has agreed to make her a deadly poison, with which she will be able to kill her rival. It sounds as though her husband or lover is a serial philanderer. This isn't, in other words, the first time he has betrayed the speaker. Not only is the speaker jealous of Pauline, but she is jealous of a woman called Elise as well.

In a mere forty-eight lines the poem gives us this story in incredible and vivid detail. We enter into the mind of the speaker, seeing her raging jealousy, her raging sense of betrayal, and now her fascination with the work of the chemist in his laboratory as he creates the poison that she thinks will end her troubles. Clearly she has become sociopathic or psychopathic as a result of being betrayed: she really wants her revenge. She wears a mask to protect her from the fumes that may be poisonous. She

looks round eagerly at all the different chemicals and glass containers in the laboratory (13–15). She is delighted at the idea that the poison could be hidden away in a ring, or in a secret little hole in a fan-mount (20). She wants actually to witness the moment of her rival's death, the moment when she drinks the poisoned drink (28) and the moment when her face contorts in agony as she is dying (39). This dramatic monologue is very erotic and sexual. The speaker is clearly small – she describes herself as a "minion", a little thing – while her rivals sound taller more full-figured women (23–24, 32). At the end of the poem, even though she is paying the chemist handsomely for his illegal work, she offers to let the old man kiss her on the mouth, since she seems sexually excited by the prospect of murder and winning back her husband or lover.

In one sense, we judge this woman: she sounds deranged, so excited by the prospect of revenge that she has quite forgotten any moral norms. But then again, we think of the era: the corrupt world of the aristocracy in eighteenth-century France. In such a world this woman has little power. Her husband has simply gone off with someone else, leaving her, as he thinks, only able to go to church and pray for his soul (8). What can she do? She cannot challenge him in public. This is the kind of world in which women are supposed to accept that their husbands may have a mistress, or to accept that a lover may be promiscuous and unfaithful. It may remind us slightly of that rather horrible film *Les Liaisons Dangereuses.* In this corrupt atmosphere this woman is determined not to be done down, and she has decided on extreme action.

Browning's poem anticipates the aesthetic sense of the Pre-Raphaelite painters later in the century, and indeed Rossetti and others loved these early Browning poems because of their fine visual sense. We can really imagine the scene: the young, small, beautiful woman, wearing the glass mask, while the old man works with his phials and mortars creating the deadly poison.

The rhythm of the poem is interesting. There is a strong dactylic beat, i.e. a strong stress followed by two weak stresses. This gives an energetic and intense movement to the verse, that creates the woman's highly excited state of mind. Take the rhythm in stanza 4 for example:

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/ ˘˘ / ˘˘ / ˘˘ /

˘ / ˘˘ / ˘˘ / ˘˘ /
/ ˘˘ / ˘˘ / ˘˘ /

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Excerpt from Chapter 1 of "The Handmaid's Tale"

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 miniskirts, 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 tradeoff, we still had our bodies. That was our fantasy.

We learned to whisper almost without sound. In the semidarkness 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.