

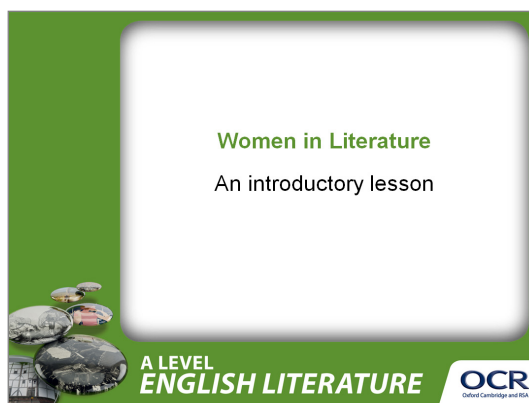
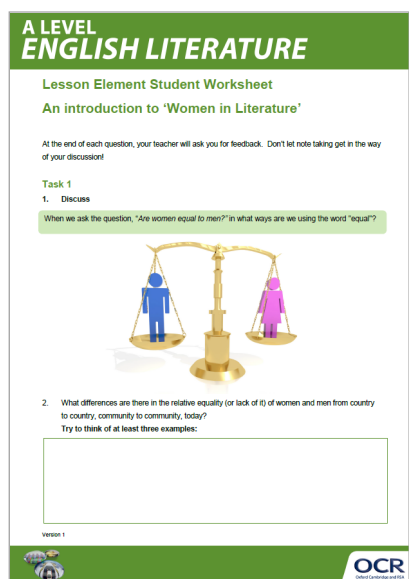
A LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE

Lesson Element

An introduction to 'Women in Literature'

Instructions and answers for teachers

These instructions should accompany the OCR resource 'An introduction to Women in Literature' activity which supports OCR A Level English Literature



The Activity:

An introductory lesson for OCR A level teachers: 1-1 ½ hours



This activity offers an opportunity for English skills development.



This activity offers an opportunity for maths skills development.

Associated materials:

'An introduction to Women in Literature' Lesson Element learner activity sheet.

'Women in Literature' PowerPoint presentation and/or script

Suggested timings:

Task 1: 1-1 ½ hours



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Student preparation

Students should be asked to read the first two chapters of “Sense and Sensibility” before the lesson, as preparation for Part 4. Alternatively, this reading and task could be set for homework.

Aims and overview:

This lesson is intended to introduce the topic of Women in Literature to students taking this option for A level paper 2: Comparative and Contextual Study. This lesson has been designed to get students thinking and talking to one another –debate should be encouraged.

The lesson introduces the topic area by asking students to consider the place of women in society: starting from today and working backwards to the past and the portrayal of women in literature across time. We have included a student worksheet. Students should refer to this at various points in the lesson, rather than attempting to complete it all at once at the start of the lesson. Again, the worksheet can be adapted to suit your needs.

Women in Literature: lesson script

(To be used alongside PowerPoint and student worksheet)

Introduction to the task

This lesson is intended to introduce the topic of Women in Literature to students taking this option for A Level Component 02: Comparative and Contextual Study. It is intended to be a one hour or ninety minute lesson, but teachers can skip, omit and introduce extra material whenever they wish.

The lesson introduces the topic by asking students to consider the place of women in society: starting from today, and working backwards to the past and the portrayal of women in literature.

Students should refer to the worksheet at various points in the lesson, rather than attempting to complete it all at once at the start of the lesson. Again, the worksheet can be adapted to suit the teacher’s needs.

Instructions

The lesson plan is written in the form of a script. This should make it immediately clear which parts are for the student and which parts are for the teacher.

Students might find it helpful to have read the first two chapters of “Sense and Sensibility” before the lesson, as preparation for Part Five: an example from literature: “Sense and Sensibility” chapters one and two.



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The Lesson

Task 1

Equality

1. Ask the students to refer to their worksheet and consider:

When we ask the question,

Are women equal to men?

in what ways are we using the word "equal" ?

(five minutes discussion in pairs and groups, feed back to the whole class)

2. (Ask students to refer to their worksheets again) What differences are there from country to country, community to community, today?

(five to ten minutes discussion in pairs or groups, feed back to the whole class)

Suggestions for directing the discussion:

- a) "Equal" might mean

Of equal worth as human beings – (mainstream) Christian teaching has it that all human beings, of whatever gender, class, colour or creed, are equal before God.

- b) Equal in the economic sense:

- i. Do women earn the same as men and have the same opportunities of promotion as men? (no...but why not? This is, in the UK, in spite of the Equal Pay Acts. Students could be referred to the excellent film "Made in Dagenham", in which a female workers' strike at Ford leads the 1969 Labour Government to introduce the Equal Pay Act. Sadly, it is not always enacted.
- ii. As a ratio of the number of women to the number of men (women: men)... Are there more women than men employed in some of the supposedly less prestigious jobs in the economy? (Such as: cleaners, shop assistants behind the till.) Why might this be? (Possibility of flexible working hours when bringing up a family; need for two earners in a family with two partners looking after children e.g. because of high housing costs; but these jobs tend to be low paid, low security, non-unionised. They are sometimes called McJobs by economists, referring to the condition of burger flippers in McDonald's).



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c) Equal in the sense of holding power:

In a marriage - as husband and wife...in today's marriages, do both partners make the decisions or are the decisions mainly made by the husband? What about in your parents' marriages? In your grandparents' marriages?

In the workplace – how many women bosses are there in prestigious companies and banks?

In positions of political power – how many MPs are women, perhaps as a proportion of men: women? How many women are there in the Cabinet and Shadow Cabinet? How many women Prime Ministers have we had?

Does equality between men and women matter?

Teacher: Clearly, when we consider these questions, there are many ways in which women are not equal to men.

What factors have limited equality between men and women?

Teacher: Students: what factors have limited women's equality? Let's stick to Western societies like Britain and the United States for ease of argument and time...and because these societies have produced the texts on the syllabus.

Students should refer to their **worksheets** and discuss the question above, in pairs or small groups, for 5-10 minutes: then feed back to the whole class.

Suggestions for directing the discussion:

Possible answers might include:

Men's unwillingness to share power and wealth: in spite of the Equal Pay Acts, women are often paid less than men; and the judiciary, which is overwhelmed by other cases (and dominated by men!) might not be very interested.

A prevalent attitude in society that it is important to get the best candidate for the job, irrespective of whether this is a man or woman. This answer is given every time the question of positive discrimination for women is raised, eg: in the selection of parliamentary candidates for political parties; in the appointment of bosses such as the Director General of the BBC and even in the appointment of the



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editor of that most feminist paper, “The Guardian”. Interesting that people who think it important to appoint the best candidate often select a man...

Ideology: some traditional Christian teaching, in some denominations, emphasise the place of women as homemakers, mothers; St Paul writes that the woman should be subservient to the man.

Differences in historical period: changes in ideology and in the perception of the place of women in society, especially since the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Teacher: As a cause and effect of these historical and ideological changes, more and more women’s writing began to be published. In the early nineteenth century, it wasn’t considered entirely proper for women to write: Jane Austen was credited originally not under her own name but as “A Lady”; the Bronte sisters and Mary Ann Evans (George Eliot) used pseudonyms; Elizabeth Gaskell, however, published under her own name.

Task 2

What factors have improved women's position in Western society?

Teacher: Again, in small groups or pairs, consider the **worksheet** question: what factors have improved the position of women in society?

(Students to refer to their **worksheets** and discuss, in pairs or small groups, for 5-10 minutes: then feed back to the whole class.)

Suggestions for directing the discussion:

Economic empowerment of women through, e.g.: changes in the law (e.g. the Equal Pay Act, the Sexual Discrimination Act); women filled the place of men in the factories and on the land in both world wars.

Decline of traditional Christian teaching about the place of woman as homemaker and mother; emphasis on equality of men and women instead.

Crucially, the rise of feminism.

Teacher: in your pairs or groups, come up with a definition of feminism. See the question on your **worksheet**. Remember that feminism (like socialism) can have several definitions.



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Suggestions for directing the discussion:

Worksheet: What is meant by feminism?

In 1980s, feminism could mean that women were superior to men. This might be explained as a reaction to years and years of inequality, in the same way that negritude (black people are superior to white people) reacted against years of oppression in the 1960s. This version of feminism, at its extreme, could be manifested in what was called political lesbianism: as men were so awful, some feminists considered that women should not sleep with them but sleep with their own sex instead. In Andrew Davies's novel "Getting Hurt" (1989), a character considers political lesbianism because she is a feminist: she is frustrated in this aim because, although she ideologically objects to men, she is physically attracted to them.

Teacher: In the present day, feminism is often defined as meaning that men and women are morally equal: of equal worth and value. Ed Miliband and Nick Clegg sported t-shirts in 2014, declaring "This Is What A Feminist Looks Like".

Some have argued that, as the 1980s definition of feminism has declined to be replaced in mainstream opinion by the definition that women and men are equal, we now live in a post-feminist, rather than a feminist, age.

Now, feminism often accepted as meaning that men and women are of equal worth and value.

Women in Literature

Teacher: This A level topic area examines the position of women in literature. We might consider literature, like other art forms, as a way of understanding and interpreting the world. As women outnumber men and are essential to any society, any literature must, at the very least, *glance* at the place of women in different historical periods and societies. (Unless the characters are all male, as in "Lord of the Flies": but even here, Golding's choice of male rather than female characters indicated assumptions about human nature. A favourite question asked by teachers of this novel is, What would happen if all the boy characters were replaced by girl equivalents? If Piggy became Peggy?)

Teacher: When we consider women in literature, we should consider:

- a) Women as writers
- b) Female characters in texts written by women
- c) Female characters in texts written by men



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Is it true that ii above will be truer to the female experience than iii? And is it possible for one gender to put themselves in the place of another, e.g. a male writer writing a female character as a first person narrative? (We might argue Esther Summerson in “Bleak House” is an attempt by Dickens to inhabit the persona of his idealised, sentimental virtuous women; since such two dimensional people don’t exist, Esther is not believable. Nick Hornby uses a female first person narrator in “How to Be Good” (2001) and the journalist and writer Libby Purves commented that he wrote the female voice “astonishingly well” (blurb on “How to Be Good”, Penguin, 2001.)

The texts we are going to study in this option – Women in Literature – unsurprisingly focus on the theme of the place and experience of women in the world.

Task 3

An example from literature: “Sense and Sensibility” chapters one and two

Students and teacher: read the first two chapters of “Sense and Sensibility”.

Teacher: Then, in small groups or pairs, discuss the questions on your worksheet:

- What are the legal arrangements for inheritance for Mrs Dashwood and her three daughters?
- How do these arrangements limit their freedom of choice and action? What do you think Austen’s attitude is to these arrangements?
- At the end of chapter one, Austen introduces the three daughters: Elinor, Marianne and Margaret. What are the differences in personality between them and how do they relate to the themes of sense, and sensibility (sensibility means, the capacity for deep and profound emotional response)?
- In chapter two, how does Mrs John Dashwood get the better of her husband? What techniques does she employ? How does Austen indicate her attitude to these characters?



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