

A Level English Literature

King's Ely

Case Study – A Level English Literature

King's Ely has been using OCR as its A level board for many years. Head of English Frank Danes comments that he is always impressed by the range of texts available and the level of informed support that OCR offers:

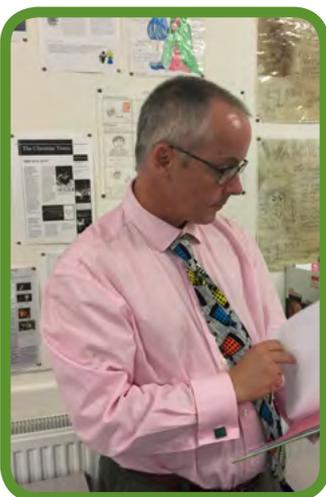
"There is always a friendly person on the end of the phone or available to answer an email."

A word with the students

Why did you choose to study English Literature at A Level, what excited you about the course?

- The freedom and flexibility of the course 'I liked the books on the book list' - 'I'd read lots of them already and liked the look of some of the others'
- The appeal of the subject content 'I like being able to study a variety of different genres: plays, novels and poetry'
- Opportunity to study a range of literature from across time – 'I like studying modern texts as well as Shakespeare'

Of the new syllabus Mr Danes comments:



"We looked at some of the other boards for A Level but our teachers were particularly attracted by the wide range of literature on offer from OCR: from Chaucer to something published yesterday. We were particularly excited by the genre study and our students are getting their teeth into the Dystopia option, relishing The Children of Men, The Time Machine and 1984. Dystopia is great fun and plugs into our students' enthusiasm for fantasy and science fiction like The Hunger Games."



How do you prepare students for this course?

It's a good idea for students to do some reading over the summer. We ask them to read some of their set books and to read around the subject: so our students read *1984* and *The Children of Men* in preparation for the new course in September, plus another classic: some chose Jane Austen, some Charlotte Bronte, some Dickens.

At the moment you use another board for GCSE English. Do you find the transition between boards at KS5 difficult?

We've had no problems with changing board between GCSE and A level: OCR is incredibly supportive and their support materials are second to none - and I speak as someone who's taught all three boards for A level.

What have the students enjoyed most about the course so far?

Students are very open minded and like everything or, at least, are prepared to give everything a try. They are particularly enjoying getting straight on with some of the challenging plays like "Hamlet" and "Richard III" and the new Dystopia option is going down very well. They love the adult approach of A level and the fact they can discard the safe texts of GCSE. Darkness, sex, violence, black humour ... all good stuff!



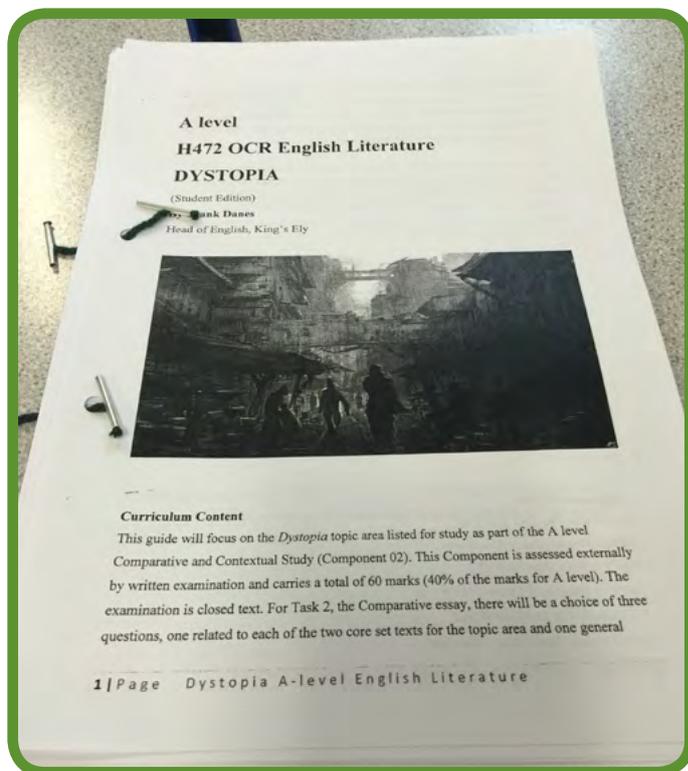
How have you structured the course?

We have opted to teach a linear A level course (no AS) and we start with a weighty text in September, to give students an idea of what A level is all about. Also, we start with set texts straight away rather than giving time to any sort of preliminary course. Students like to get on with it and feel they are plunged straight into A level proper.

I love teaching Shakespeare and am enjoying the new Dystopian option. I love P.D. James and it's good to have a chance to teach her at last. Shakespeare is a delight: his plays are like multiple chocolate layer cakes in texture, meaning, language and theme, and there's always another layer to discover.

What do students find difficult?

Students can find the language of Shakespeare challenging. You have to do your homework. Our students prepare an act or scene ahead: they read the text carefully, using the notes to help them understand it, then underline all the bits they don't get. I start the lesson by saying, ok, lines 1-10, any problems? Line 11-20? And so on. When students get stuck, I explain the text. You can't study Shakespeare if you don't know what he's saying.



"I'm learning a lot about the writing of a novel through studying the Dystopia texts. It's interesting to see how writers have to get a huge amount of information across quickly and without the sense of it being an 'info-dump': P.D. James manages this through Theo's diary but John Wyndham just takes chapter two to fill in the background, which is really clumsy."

