

A LEVEL

Delivery Guide

H472

Accredited

ENGLISH LITERATURE

Theme:
Women in Literature

August 2015



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Introduction

Delivery guides are designed to represent a body of knowledge about teaching a particular topic and contain:

- Content: a clear outline of the content covered by the delivery guide;
- Thinking Conceptually: expert guidance on the key concepts involved, common difficulties students may have, approaches to teaching that can help students understand these concepts and how this topic links conceptually to other areas of the subject;
- Thinking Contextually: a range of suggested teaching activities using a variety of themes so that different activities can be selected that best suit particular classes, learning styles or teaching approaches.

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KEY



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Curriculum Content

This guide will focus upon the 'Women in Literature' topic area listed for study as part of the A Level Comparative and Contextual study (Component 02). This Component is assessed externally by written examination and carries a total of 60 marks (40% of the marks for A level). The examination is closed text.

For Task 2, the Comparative essay, there will be a choice of three questions, one related to each of the two core set texts for the topic area and one general question which will not name a particular set text. Students choose **one** question worth 30 marks and write an essay comparing at least two whole texts, at least one of which must come from the core set text list for the topic of choice. The other text may come from the list of eight further suggested set texts. Students will be expected to range across the texts in their responses, demonstrating their knowledge of the whole text.

Task 2 requires students to establish connections between their chosen texts (AO4); demonstrate their appreciation of the significance of cultural and contextual influences on writers and readers (AO3); and read texts in a variety of ways, responding critically and creatively (AO5), in addition to AO1. AO2 is not assessed in Task 2. Setting aside AO2 gives students greater opportunity to build and sustain a comparative discussion focusing on the contexts, connections and interpretations of their chosen set texts, without having to interrupt the continuity of their comparison in order to 'step aside' and demonstrate AO2 in a single text. However, where students discuss, for example, the use of symbolism or the presentation of persona or character in their chosen texts, such discussion can be rewarded under AO1 ('informed' responses to literary texts), AO4 ('connections' across literary texts) or AO5 ('different interpretations'). Opportunity to satisfy AO2 is afforded by Task 1 of the component where students undertake a 'Close Reading' of one unseen prose extract. In this way Task 1 ensures students have an opportunity to address AO2 more directly than the weighting of the Task 2 response requires.

The core and suggested set texts for the 'Women in Literature' topic area are as follows:

Core set texts

Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*

Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*

Suggested set texts

Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*

George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*

Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

DH. Lawrence, *Women in Love*

Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*

Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

Jeanette Winterson, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*



Curriculum Content

Introduction to activities

The activities outlined below present students with a range of extracts chosen to provoke questions about the representation of women in literary texts published prior to those set for this topic. The background reading these extracts provide, though necessarily limited in scope, should help students realise that, in spite of the fact that no concept of 'Feminism' (as we understand it today) existed when Aristophanes, Chaucer, Christine de Pizan, Milton and Maria Edgeworth were writing, texts produced by these and other

pre-19th century male and female authors nonetheless raise complex questions about the representation and status of women that can usefully inform students' reading of the set texts. Considering how the extracts challenge conventional gender assumptions (whether contemporary or historical) should help establish a more informed basis from which to analyse the set texts. The extracts have been chosen to present writing by men and women from drama, poetry and prose, ranging from Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (411 BC) to Maria Edgeworth's *Letters For Literary Ladies* (1795).



Curriculum Content

Activity 1: Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* (411 BC)

Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* was conceived in 411 BC during a period when Athens was engaged in a war to which there seemed no conceivable end. In the play, the failure of military action to achieve peace leaves Athenian women with no option but to take the initiative in an effort to resolve a conflict that is leaving many of them widows and their children fatherless. Lysistrata decides upon a strategy she is confident will end the war: the women will go on strike. In analysing this extract students should keep in mind the fact that the women's voices are created by a male dramatist and consider the extent to which the gender of the author may or may not have shaped his representation of the women portrayed. The context of the play's conception should also be kept in mind.

LYSISTRATA: Then I will tell you my plan: there is no need to keep it back. Ladies, if we want to force our husbands to make peace, we must give up – *[She hesitates]*

CALONICE: What must we give up? Go on.

LYSISTRATA: Then you'll do it?

CALONICE: If need be, we'll lay down our lives for it.

LYSISTRATA: Very well then. We must give up – sex.

[Strong murmurs of disapproval, shaking of heads, etc. Several of the company begin to walk off.]

LYSISTRATA: Why are you turning away from me? Where are you going? What's all this pursing of lips and shaking of heads mean? You're all going pale – I can see tears! Will you do it or won't you? Answer!

MYRRHINE: I won't do it. Better to let the war go on.

CALONICE: I won't do it either. Let the war go on.

LYSISTRATA: Weren't you the flatfish who was ready to cut herself in half a moment ago?

CALONICE: I still am! I'll do that, or walk through fire, or anything – but give up sex, never! Lysistrata, darling, there's nothing like it.

LYSISTRATA *[to MYRRHINE]*: How about you?

MYRRHINE: I'd rather walk through fire too!

LYSISTRATA: I didn't know we women were so beyond redemption. The tragic poets are right about us after all: all we're interested in is having our fun and then getting rid of the baby. My Spartan friend, will you join me? Even if it's just the two of us, we might yet succeed.

LAMPITO: Well – it's a sair thing, the dear knows, for a woman to sleep aloon wi'oot a prick – but we maun do it, for the sake of peace.

LYSISTRATA: *[enthusiastically embracing her]*: Lampito, darling, you're the only real woman among the lot of them.

CALONICE: But look, suppose we did give up – what you said – which may heaven forbid – but if we did, how would that help to win the war?

LYSISTRATA: How? Well, just imagine: we're at home, beautifully made up, wearing our sheerest lawn negligees and nothing underneath, and with our – our triangles carefully plucked; and the men all like ramrods and can't wait to leap into bed, and then we absolutely refuse – that'll make them make peace soon enough, you'll see.



Curriculum Content

Activity 1: Questions

Students work in pairs/groups. They will **read, annotate and discuss** the extract and consider the questions provided. After pair/group discussion their responses can be shared in whole class discussion.

In responding to the following questions students should refer closely to the extract in providing evidence for their responses.

- 1) *Lysistrata* is the creation of a male dramatist writing at a time of war when all efforts of the men of Athens had failed to achieve peace. Aristophanes' drama is rooted in a real event, one initiated by men but for which men can find no solution.

What does Aristophanes' presentation of the Athenian women suggest about the relative moral and strategic strengths and weaknesses of the genders?

- How would you describe the Athenian women's attitude to sex?
 - Is their attitude similar to that stereotypically attributed to men?
 - In representing women's attitudes to sex in this way, does Aristophanes merely reinforce stereotypes about female sexuality and/or modesty or does he present women as complex characters?
- 2) What does Calonice's and Myrrhine's initial rejection of the idea of a 'strike' suggest about their attitude to the men (their husbands) who are dying in the war?
 - 3) Given that Lysistrata insists that no other end to the war seems possible, what does Calonice and Myrrhine's refusal to take part in the strike suggest about their priorities?
 - 4) In representing their opposition to Lysistrata, does Aristophanes present Calonice and Myrrhine as displaying conventional female attributes such as self-sacrifice, submission and sexual modesty?
 - 5) Given that he presents female characters who openly admit their enjoyment of sex, how does Aristophanes distinguish the character of Lampito from those of Calonice and Myrrhine?
 - 6) When Lysistrata calls Lampito 'the only real woman', what do you think is meant by this?
 - 7) Look at Lysistrata's closing speech:
 - Which gender does she suggest holds most power when it comes to sex?
 - Does she present women as sexually manipulative?
 - Does this reinforce any stereotypes?



Curriculum Content

- 8) To what extent would you agree that, in matters of sex at least, Aristophanes' drama:
- a) reveals a clear gender divide?
 - b) suggests that the genders are similar in sharing the same sexual appetites?
 - c) suggests that women are far more practical when it comes to sexual matters than are men?
- How do your responses fit with conventional gender stereotypes?
- Explain your responses by referring to the text.



Curriculum Content

Activity 2: Geoffrey Chaucer, *The General Prologue to The Canterbury Tales* (1386)

Chaucer's *General Prologue* introduces the pilgrims who are to tell the stories that make up *The Canterbury Tales*. The pilgrims tell each other tales as a means of passing the time whilst they journey from their meeting place at The Tabard Inn in London to the shrine of St Thomas à Becket at Canterbury. Chaucer's depiction of the Wife of Bath reveals a woman who has gained her wealth by marrying rich and aged husbands but who has also shown considerable skill in her trade (as a weaver of fine cloth to rival that produced at Ypres and Ghent). Chaucer wrote in Middle English but the version below is rendered in modern English by Nevill Coghill.

A worthy woman from beside Bath city Was with us, somewhat deaf, which was a pity. In making cloth she showed so much a bent She bettered those of Ypres and Ghent. In all the parish not a dame dared stir Towards the altar steps in front of her, And if indeed they did, so wrath was she As to be quite put out of charity. Her kerchiefs were of finely woven ground; I dared have sworn they weighed a good ten pound,	1 10
The ones she wore on Sunday on her head. Her hose were of the finest scarlet red And gartered tight; her shoes were soft and red. Bold was her face, handsome and red in hue A wealthy woman all her life what's more She'd had five husbands, all at church door, Apart from other company in youth; No need just now to speak of that, forsooth. And she had thrice been to Jerusalem Seen many strange rivers and passed over them;	 20
She's been to Rome and also to Boulogne, St James of Compostella and Cologne, And she was skilled in wandering by the way. She had gap-teeth set widely, truth to say. Easily on an ambling horse she sat Well wimpled up, and on her head a hat As broad as is a buckler or a shield; She had a flowing mantle that concealed Large hips, her heels spurred sharply under that. In company she liked to laugh and chat And knew the remedies for love's mischances An art in which she knew the oldest dances.	 30



Curriculum Content

Activity 2: Questions

Students work in pairs/groups. They will **read, annotate and discuss** the extract and consider the questions provided. After pair/group discussion their thoughts can be shared in whole class discussion. In responding to the following questions students should refer closely to the extract in providing evidence for their responses.

- 1) The extract opens by presenting the Wife as suffering from a physical disability (she is deaf).
 - What effect might this deafness have had upon the Wife's voice?
 - Might her deafness have made the Wife seem to be less conventionally modest?
 - To what extent would you agree that, in making her deaf, Chaucer makes the Wife a comical figure?
 - What would be the consequences of making the Wife a comical figure?
- 2) Look at Chaucer's description of the Wife of Bath's physical appearance (for instance her 'gap-teeth', 'large hips', 'red' face) and consider whether these attributes would have conformed to, or challenged, contemporaneous ideals of femininity and female beauty.

Consider whether ideals of female beauty have altered since Chaucer wrote.
- 3) What does the Wife's clothing suggest about her personality and financial situation?
- 4) How does Chaucer suggest she spends her money and displays her wealth?
- 5) To what extent would the Wife's clothing have made her a conspicuous figure? Might her conspicuous display have exposed her to the censure of society?
- 6) The Wife is represented as possessing great skill in cloth-making; indeed Chaucer asserts that she excels beyond the producers of fine cloth in Ypres and Ghent.
 - How does Chaucer's presentation of the Wife's trade conform to your views about the work available to women in the 14th century?
 - Do you think that the Wife's trade and skill would have made her an exceptional woman of her time?
- 7) What does the Wife's marital history and her experience of 'other company in youth' suggest about her character?
- 8) The Wife's fondness for pilgrimage has taken her as far as Jerusalem and to Rome, Spain and Cologne. Would this degree of travel, undertaken unaccompanied by a male escort, have been usual for the time?



Curriculum Content

- 9) What does her wide-ranging pilgrimage suggest about the Wife's character?
- 10) Though her devotion to pilgrimage might suggest that the Wife is a devout woman, what does the 'wrath' she displays when other women attempt to overtake her when she approaches the altar steps imply about her attitude to religion and the opportunities that attending religious services afford her?
- 11) Though she has been married five times, the Wife has no children. What do you think is implied by the statement that she 'knew the remedies for love's mischances'?



Curriculum Content

Activity 3: Christine de Pizan (b.1365), *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405)

Between 1390 and 1429 Christine de Pizan produced a substantial body of work in verse and prose. Her *Book of the City of Ladies* was finished in 1405 and was first translated from French into English by Brian Anslay in 1521; the version below was translated by Earl Jeffrey Richards in 1982. This extract explains how, in response to the prejudice of male authors in scholarly texts, 'Lady Reason' prompts Pizan to construct an allegorical fortress (her *Book of the City of Ladies*) within which the stories of women of courage, virtue and intellect can be collected, protected and defended.

One day as I was sitting alone in my study surrounded by books on all kinds of subjects, devoting myself to literary studies, my usual habit, my mind dwelt at length on the weighty opinions of various authors whom I had studied for a long time.

By chance a strange volume came into my hands, not one of my own, but one which had been given to me along with some others. When I held it open and saw from its title page that it was by Mathéolus, I smiled, for though I had never seen it before, I had often heard that like other books it discussed respect for women ... I started to read it and went on for a little while. Because the subject seemed to me not very pleasant for people who do not enjoy lies and of no use in developing virtue and manners, given its lack of integrity in diction and theme, and after browsing here and there and reading the end, I put it down in order to turn my attention to more elevated and useful study. But just the sight of this book, even though it was of no authority, made me wonder how it happened that so many men – and learned men among them – have been and

are so inclined to express both in speaking and in their treatises and writings so many wicked insults about women and their behaviour. Not only one or two and not even just Mathéolus (for his book had a bad name anyway and was intended as a satire) but, more generally, judging from all the treatises of all philosophers and poets and from all the orators – it seems that they all speak from one and the same mouth. They all concur in one conclusion: that the behaviour of women is inclined to and full of every vice. Thinking deeply about these matters, I began to examine my character and conduct as a natural woman and, similarly, I considered other women whose company I frequently kept ... hoping that I could judge impartially and in good conscience whether the testimony of so many notable men could be true. ... it would be impossible that so many famous men – such solemn scholars, possessed of such deep and great understanding, so clear-sighted in all things, as it seemed – could have spoken falsely on so many occasions that I could hardly find a book on morals where, even before I had read it in its entirety, I did not find several chapters or certain sections attacking women, no matter who the author was ...

Then Lady Reason responded and said, 'Get up, daughter! Without waiting any longer, let us go to the Field of Letters. There the City of Ladies will be founded.

'The causes which have moved and still move men to attack women, even those authors in those books, are diverse and varied, just as you have discovered. For some have attacked women with good intentions, that is, in order to draw men who have gone astray away from the company of vicious and dissolute women, with whom they might be infatuated, or in order to keep these men from going mad on account of such women, and also so that that every man might avoid an obscene and lustful life.'



Curriculum Content

Activity 3: Questions

Students work in pairs/groups. They will **read, annotate and discuss** the extract and consider the questions provided. After pair/group discussion their thoughts can be shared in whole class discussion. In responding to the following questions students should refer closely to the extract in providing evidence for their responses.

- 1) What impression of Christine de Pizan's intellectual life and her access to literary texts does this passage give (think particularly about the following comments: *'my study'; 'devoting myself to literary studies, my usual habit';* authors whom *I had studied for a long time*)?
- 2) Does anything surprise you about Pizan's access to and familiarity with scholarly texts, given her gender and the period in which she lived?
- 3) Do you think that Pizan would have been a typical representative of her gender? **Explain your response.**
- 4) Does the fact that, in spite of her gender and the age in which she lived, Pizan was nonetheless able to produce texts that, in spite of their criticism of male attitudes, were deemed worthy of publication, challenge any of your ideas about women of her time and/or the power of men to silence women? **Explain your response.**
- 5) What qualities does Pizan suggest make writing, regardless of the gender of the author, worthy of being read?
Does she consider that the work of male writers such as Mathéolus and others embodies such qualities?
- 6) What roles do you think would have been available to most women in Pizan's period?
Does this passage: a) reinforce or b) challenge stereotypical ideas held today about women in the 15th century? **Explain your responses by quoting from the extract.**
- 7) Do you recognise in the comments Christine de Pizan attributes to male authors any stereotypical views still voiced today? What does this suggest about relations between the genders today and the degree of 'progress' made since this text was written?
- 8) Can you make any connections between ideas raised by the Pizan extract and those by the Aristophanes extract?



Curriculum Content

Activity 4: John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1667)

The principal source for John Milton's *Paradise Lost* is the Bible. At the opening of Milton's epic, he asserts that his poem will 'justify the ways of God to men.' *Paradise Lost* is therefore a text that presents itself as founded upon the authority of God. The depiction of Eve, as the 'mother of humankind' in both the Bible and *Paradise Lost*, has substantially influenced the shaping of literary and social ideas about women's roles and their characteristic strengths and weaknesses. The extract below, from Book 4 of *Paradise Lost*, echoes *Genesis* in establishing Eve's origins and her status in relation to Adam. In the extract Milton 'speaks' in Eve's voice as she addresses Adam.

Oh thou for whom	440
And from whom I was formed flesh of thy flesh,	
And without whom am to no end, my guide	
And head, what thou hast said is just and right.	
For we to Him all praises owe,	
And daily thanks, I chiefly who enjoy	
So far a happier lot, enjoying thee	
Pre-eminent by so much odds, whilst thou	
Like consort to thyself canst nowhere find.	
That day I oft remember, when from sleep	
I first awaked, and found myself reposed	450
Under a shade of flowers, much wondering where	
And what I was, whence thither brought and how.	
Not distant far from thence a murmuring sound	
Of waters issued from a cave and spread	
Into a liquid plain, then stood unmoved	
Pure as the expanse of heaven; I thither went	
With unexpected thought, and laid me down	
On the green bank, to look into the clear	
Smooth lake, that to me seemed another sky.	

As I bent down to look, just opposite,	460
A shape within the watery gleam appeared	
Bending to look on me, I started back,	
It started back, but pleased I soon returned,	
Pleased it returned as soon with answering looks	
Of sympathy and love; there I had fixed	
Mine eyes til now, and pined with vain desire,	
Had not a voice thus warned me, What thou seest,	
What there thou seest fair creature is thyself,	
With thee it comes and goes: but follow me,	
And I will bring thee where no shadow stays	470
Thy coming, and thy soft embraces, he	
Whose image thou art, him thou shall enjoy	
Inseparably thine, to him shalt bear	
Multitudes like thyself, and hence be called	
Mother of human race: what could I do,	
But follow straight, invisibly thus led?	
Till I espied thee, fair indeed and tall	
Under a platan, yet methought less fair,	
Less winningly soft, less amiably mild,	
Than that watery image; back I turned,	480
Thou following criedst aloud, Return fair Eve,	
Whom fly'st thou? Whom thou fly'st, of him thou art,	
His flesh, his bone; to give thee being I lent	
Out of my side to thee, nearest to my heart	
Substantial life, to have thee by my side	
Henceforth an individual solace dear;	
Part of my soul I seek thee, and thee claim	
My other half: with that thy gentle hand	
Seized mine, I yielded, and from that time see	
How beauty is excelled by manly grace	
And wisdom, which alone is truly fair.	490



Curriculum Content

Activity 4: Questions

Students work in pairs/groups. They will **read, annotate and discuss** the extract and consider the questions provided. After pair/group discussion their thoughts can be shared in whole class discussion. In responding to the following questions students should refer closely to the extract in providing evidence for their responses.

In analysing this passage students should bear in mind that Eve as a character and the attitudes she expresses are the product of a male imagination. *Does this fact alter the way we read Eve?*

- 1) Lines 440–448 recount Eve's conversation with Adam. She acknowledges, without dispute, that she was 'formed flesh of [Adam's] flesh,' speaks of Adam as her 'guide and head,' admits that she is 'happier' than Adam because she has in him a superior 'husband,' whilst in her Adam lacks a 'consort' equal to him.

If we take Eve to be a kind of literary archetype: a) what model of womanhood do these lines convey; b) what does Eve's acceptance of her inferiority to Adam suggest about the gender assumptions that underpin Milton's text?

- 2) Lines 460–466 describe Eve's response to an image reflected in water. She is captivated and lingers with eyes 'fixed' upon the sight, unaware that what she regards is a reflection of her own face. Here Milton draws upon the myth of Narcissus who fell in love with his own reflection and pined to death.

What does Milton imply about the 'mother of the human race' in invoking this connection between Eve and Narcissus? What is suggested by these lines about Eve's:

- a) perception of beauty;
- b) her 'vanity'?

- 3) What is suggested about Eve when she shows pleasure at the 'answering looks//Of sympathy and love' (ll. 464–465) which emanate from a reflection she assumes is another being?

- Milton uses the word 'desire' to characterise the emotion the 'looks of sympathy and love' awake in Eve. What kind of 'desire' do you think Milton implies here?
- Does 'desire' carry any negative connotations in this context?
- Why do you think Milton described the 'desire' the reflection awakes in Eve as 'vain' (be aware that this word has different meanings)?



Curriculum Content

- 4) The voice that 'warns' (l. 467) Eve and calls her away from the reflection is the voice of God. God leads Eve to Adam, showing her that it is towards Adam that her desire must be directed. Eve responds 'what could I do, // But follow straight, invisibly thus led?' In leaving the reflection behind to accept Adam and her future role in bearing 'multitudes' as 'mother of human race,' are Eve's actions presented as the result of her exercise of free will?
- 5) What does Eve's description of Adam as '*less winningly soft*,' '*less amiably mild*' (ll. 478–479) suggest about:
 - a) the text's gender assumptions?
 - b) the qualities Eve most values?What is suggested about Eve when she turns away from Adam and back to the 'watery image'?
- 6) God first directs Eve away from the reflection towards Adam as the proper focus of her admiration. This 'guidance' is repeated at the close of the extract when Adam has again to bid Eve 'return' from the reflection (ll. 481–490).
 - What arguments does Adam use to persuade Eve that it is upon him her attention should rest?
 - Does God's direction, reinforced as it is by Adam, suggest that Eve is a self-determining individual?
 - Who, in the end, determines Eve's conduct?



Curriculum Content

Activity 5: Maria Edgeworth, 'Letter From A Gentleman To His Friend, Upon The Birth Of A Daughter' from *Letters For Literary Ladies* (1795)

Maria Edgeworth's *Letters For Literary Ladies* is a satire upon male opposition to female education as characterised by late 18th century debates. In her 'Letter From A Gentleman To His Friend Upon The Birth Of A Daughter,' Edgeworth adopts a male persona to voice contemporaneous fears about the possible dangers and consequences of female equality. The Gentleman here warns his friend (whom Edgeworth presents as an advocate in favour of female emancipation) of the threat to the social order that will ensue if fathers of females assume their daughters capable of benefitting from the social and educational privileges that sons can take for granted.

I congratulate you, my dear sir, upon the birth of your daughter; and I wish that some of the fairies of ancient times were at hand to endow the damsel with health, wealth, wit and beauty. Wit? – I should make a long pause before I accepted this gift for a daughter – you would make none.

As I know it to be your opinion that it is in the power of education, more certainly than it was ever believed to be in the power of fairies, to bestow all mental gifts; and as I have heard you say that education should begin as early as possible, I am in haste to offer you my sentiments, lest my advice should come too late ...

You are a champion for the rights of woman, and insist upon the equality of the sexes. ... I may confess to you that I see neither from experience nor analogy much reason to believe that, in the human species alone, there are no marks of inferiority in the female ... I have always observed in the understandings of women who have been too much cultivated, some disproportion between the different faculties of their minds. One power of the mind undoubtedly may be cultivated at the expense of the health of the whole body. I cannot think this desirable, either for the individual or society. ... Much attention has lately been paid to the education of the female sex; and you will say that we have been amply repaid for our care, – that ladies have lately exhibited such brilliant proofs of genius, as must dazzle and confound their critics. I do not ask for proofs of genius, I ask for proofs of utility. In which of the useful arts, in which of the exact sciences, have we been assisted by female sagacity or penetration? I should be glad to see a list of discoveries, inventions, of observations, evincing patient research, of truths established by just reasoning from previous principles:– if these or any of these, can be presented by a female champion for her sex, I shall be the first to clear the way for her to the temple of Fame ... there are some few instances of great talents applied to useful purposes:– but, except these, what have been the literary productions of women! In poetry, plays, and romances, in the art of imposing upon the understanding by means of imagination, they have excelled; – but to useful literature they have scarcely turned their thoughts.



Curriculum Content

Activity 5: Questions

- 1) The Gentleman opens by referring to the fairy tale convention that female babies are endowed by fairies with the necessary 'gifts' (health, wealth and beauty) to ensure they prosper in society (which, in fairy tale terms, means to find a 'handsome prince' and 'live happily ever after'). Assuming the Gentleman (whom Edgeworth presents as believing himself a rational being) cannot really believe in fairies, what does the Gentleman imply should actually determine female 'success' in society (magic? chance? beauty? paternity?)? **Explain your response.**
- 2) What do you think the Gentleman understands by the term 'Wit'?
 - Does this word have a specific definition as applied at the time Edgeworth was writing?
 - Why does the Gentleman imply criticism of his Friend's lack of 'pause' in desiring the gift of 'Wit' for his baby daughter?
- 3) What do the Gentleman's fears lest his 'advice should come too late' suggest about the extent to which ideas about female education and intellectual equality might *already* have progressed at the time that Edgeworth's text was written?
- 4) What advantages in argument does Edgeworth gain by presenting the male Friend as 'a champion for the rights of woman'?
- 5) Would a dialogue between a man and a woman or between two women have been as convincing or carried the same authority as that implied by this conversation between two 'rational' and 'educated' males?
- 6) What do you think the Gentleman means when he speaks of 'women who have been too much cultivated'?
 - What kinds of 'cultivation' was it appropriate for women to gain?
 - What does the Gentleman believe will happen to women's bodies as a whole if the 'power of their mind' is unleashed?
- 7) The Gentleman concedes that there *are* 'proofs of [female] genius.' But to him this does not justify female education without 'solid proofs of utility' such as 'a list of discoveries, of inventions, or observations...' Given the restrictions upon women's education at the time Edgeworth wrote, is the lack of 'proofs' due to women's inability to excel in discovering, inventing or observing, or because women have been excluded from the knowledge that would produce such proofs?
- 8) The Gentleman has finally to admit that amongst women there are 'great talents applied to useful purposes.' How does he attempt to undermine and dismiss such talents?



Thinking Conceptually

Approaches to teaching the content

The extracts and activities outlined in the Content section of this guide for 'Women in Literature' should serve to demonstrate how, in spite of the fact that the date of the extracts' authorship places them before the advent of any formalised concept of 'Feminism' (either as ideology or literary methodology), they nonetheless generate similar questions to those that will be asked by readers in the 21st century and beyond. In approaching this topic, teachers should ensure that students understand that for as long as men and women have been writing, their texts have rendered problematic the relative status of the genders and the relation between them. Students should be aware that 'feminism' (whether with a lower or upper case 'f') is not a modern invention. As readers from an era that some critics designate 'post-feminist', students' analysis of the extracts provided in the Content section should help to show them that the concept of a unified or static 'Feminism' is ideologically and intellectually unsustainable. Students' understanding of the set texts and the historical and contextual factors that shape them will be enhanced if they are encouraged to think in terms of *feminisms* (each being the product of unique historical, cultural and literary imperatives) rather than any singular, monolithic concept of 'Feminism'.

Common misconceptions or difficulties students may have

Many students will choose 'Women in Literature' because this topic provides opportunities to read from a feminist perspective. Amongst the terms they will inevitably employ in analysing the texts they encounter will be 'Feminism' and 'Patriarchy'. In approaching this topic teachers need to be aware that some students' understanding of these terms

may be derived primarily from their usage by sociologists in describing social and historical factors. This sociological language has been adapted by literary critics but it has also migrated into popular discourse. It may well be that familiarity with such terms, divorced from a literary context, might lead some students to make assumptions, before beginning to read, that a text written by a woman must be unequivocally 'Feminist' and that by a male author must necessarily replicate 'Patriarchal' assumptions. Teachers should remind students that their primary engagement with the texts must be *literary*. That is to say, any judgements they might eventually reach about texts' ideological positions, must derive from evidence adduced from close analysis of the authors' language. Such evidence will, of course, need to be informed by an awareness of the significance and influence of contexts, literary traditions, movements and genres.

Students often assume that texts whose publication dates are similar (as are the set texts for this Component which fall within the 19th and 20th centuries) will share the same social and literary influences and be similar in narrative method. Students should be alerted to the social and literary movements and narrative innovations that occur *within* historical periods. They should be able to make distinctions between, for instance, novels such as *Sense and Sensibility* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*; both of which, though they were published in the 19th century, result from distinct literary traditions. Students' analysis should show an awareness of the novelistic 'movements' which underpin the texts they study.

Students who choose this topic area might assume that their study of this Component can or should be restricted merely



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to an analysis of the representation of women or of the place of women writers in the literary canon. Such assumptions may lead to polarised arguments that treat women as universally oppressed and posit men as inevitable oppressors. Students should be warned against making generalisations about men and women, their place and roles in society and the nature and content of their literary output. If teachers sustain an emphasis upon close reading and careful analysis, the texts themselves will reveal complexities that preclude such limited interpretations.





Conceptual links to other areas of the specification

The kind of close reading skills fostered by the activities in the Content section of this guide will not only assist students

in reading and analysing the set texts they choose to study for this Component, but will contribute to the development of reading strategies that will enable them to formulate, test and articulate informed and personal responses to any and all texts they encounter as part of A Level English Literature and beyond. It is important that students are made aware that, even though the focus of this topic area is Women in Literature, the fundamental questions they will ask when they read the texts set for this Component (who is writing, who narrates, what are the contexts, who is reading, how can this be interpreted) apply universally, regardless of period or genre.


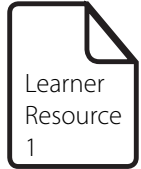


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Activities	Resources
<p>This activity will introduce students to a range of literary terms relevant to the novels they will be studying. Establishing a critical vocabulary focused on the techniques relevant to analysis of novels will help students gain confidence in close reading and analysis. It is important to avoid 'swamping' students with indiscriminate lists of terms they might struggle to understand. A focused critical vocabulary will avoid the kind of writing in which the use of 'sophisticated' terminology is made to stand in for relevant, focused, text-based analysis. Activities that require students (for example) to match cards printed with selected 'terms' to others which contain 'definitions' and then match the 'definitions' to examples from the novels, will foster an informed understanding of the novelists' narrative practice. Teachers might also utilise online resources in compiling tailor-made worksheets/card packs covering 'terms,' 'definitions,' and 'examples.'</p> <p>http://kristisiegel.com/basic.htm</p>	<p></p>
<p>The set texts include novels from the 19th and 20th centuries. In considering the literary factors that determine the types of texts authors produce, students should be aware of the social and literary movements that occur <i>within</i> centuries and that generate texts which, in spite of chronological proximity, differ markedly in their influences and perspectives. Although <i>Sense and Sensibility</i> and <i>Tess of the D'Urbervilles</i> were both published in the 19th century, each is a product of a distinct social and literary milieu.</p> <p>Students should be directed (individually or as a group research activity) to sites such as those listed below which provide scholarly discussions and links to other useful resources. Teachers should ensure that students' research is sharply focused and has a tangible outcome; it might lead, for instance, to a group presentation or contribute to a 'Literary Movements' booklet to be shared with the class.</p> <p>http://crossref-it.info</p> <p>http://www.theliteraryindex.com</p>	<p></p> <p></p>
<p>Students should familiarise themselves with a range of critical approaches to the novels as a means of developing informed critical perspectives of their own. Close reading and discussion of the texts in class will introduce students to the different interpretations that their peers generate. They should also be directed (either individually or as a group research activity) to sites such as those listed below which summarise various interpretive approaches adopted by literary critics. Teachers should ensure that students' research in this area is sharply focused and has a tangible outcome; it might lead, for instance, to class discussion that focuses upon a particular passage/s and adopts a particular critical perspective.</p> <p>http://home.olemiss.edu/~egjbp/spring97/litcrit.html</p>	<p></p>



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Activities	Resources
<p>The basis of study in preparation for written examination must be the kind of teacher-guided close reading that will allow students to test ideas and develop confidence in their ability to generate and articulate informed, personal and creative readings. Students should be aware of their responsibility to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prepare by reading carefully as directed by their teacher 2. Speak to share their ideas and comment on those of others 3. Respond by asking questions and suggesting alternative views 4. Write brief notes to be reviewed and extended after class. <p>The exercises appended to the extracts in the Contents section should suggest the kinds of questions students and teachers might apply to the set texts. Writing might focus, at first, on short passages but should be extended to allow connections to be made and interpretations tested. Lesson plans designed to support students' reading skills can be accessed using the link below.</p> <p>http://crossref-it.info</p>	
<p>Students should be encouraged to record their developing ideas and analysis as their reading progresses. Marginal comments they make in texts and notes from class discussion will be most useful if organised in a form that draws disparate pieces of paper and/or information together so that a clear overview is possible. Students can organise and update the ideas they develop in 'Thinking Conceptually' on the grid provided (please see Learner Resource 1) which can be used as a focus for collaborative or individual activity. The grid can be copied onto A3 paper to allow ample space for students' comments. The grid's categories can be adapted by teachers to focus on areas other than those provided here. Students themselves can be encouraged to design their own grids to capture and collect their individual ideas and research.</p>	

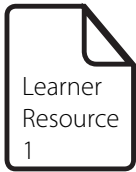


Thinking Contextually

Texts for this topic span nearly two hundred years, during which time the novel as a literary form underwent a process of innovation. Students should be aware of the literary context and sub-generic designation of the novels they study. This period also saw unprecedented changes in the social, political and legal position of women. When Austen, Brontë and Hardy wrote, women were subject to rigid social conventions and legal constraints that pre-determined their existence. By 1922 women were able to vote and some, if they had money, could be financially independent of a man. The First World War allowed women access, if briefly, to occupations hitherto restricted to men. Feminist movements in the mid to late 20th century and legislation such as the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) accelerated progress towards 'equality' in Britain. The development of reliable contraception in the 20th century allowed women to delay or escape the role that had historically defined them. Students should be aware of the literary and historical contexts that generate texts and be able to comment upon how those contexts shape narratives and determine the representation of female characters. Attention should not be limited to the contexts of production; students should be aware of the contexts in which texts are read and how these might affect interpretation.

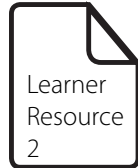



Thinking Contextually

Activities	Resources
<p>Given that representations of women in literature over time will undoubtedly depend upon the roles available and the status accorded to real women in society, students' reading of the novels they choose should be informed by an awareness of women's history: their exclusion from rights that most men could take for granted; their struggles to achieve social and legal equality. Students should be encouraged to construct for themselves a timeline of women's history relevant to the periods and texts they have chosen to study and to which they can refer in analysing texts. The links below will support their research. The third link will take students to an interactive quiz that will test their knowledge of the position of women in Victorian society.</p> <p>http://historyofwomen.org/timeline.html</p> <p>http://mmu.ac.uk/equality-and-diversity/doc/gender-equality-timeline.pdf</p>	<div data-bbox="1720 555 1877 651">▶ Click here</div> <div data-bbox="1720 678 1877 774">▶ Click here</div>
<p>Students should be able to relate the novels upon which they will focus to the development of the genre as a whole. To do this they will need an 'overview' that will allow them to place their chosen texts within a generic continuum. In understanding the evolution of the genre from its inception to the present day, students will be able to establish connections between, and identify developments across, the genre. General introductions to the novel can be found at:</p> <p>http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/cs6/novel.html</p> <p>http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/421071/novel</p>	<div data-bbox="1720 805 1877 901">▶ Click here</div> <div data-bbox="1720 928 1877 1024">▶ Click here</div>
<p>In addition to the generic 'overview' outlined above, students should be aware of the specific literary contexts and sub-generic designations of the two novels they have chosen to study, in order to make specific connections and identify specific continuities and/or developments between them. One way of organising such research (whether conducted individually or as a group endeavour) and presenting it in a clear and accessible form, is to use the kind of grid format presented in Learner Resource 1. The grid can be copied onto A3 paper.</p>	<div data-bbox="1727 1059 1861 1230">  <p>Learner Resource 1</p> </div>



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Activities	Resources
<p>Students should be encouraged to consider and evaluate a range of critical responses to the texts they choose for examination. Their research should aim to gather views that are chronologically diverse and include, where possible, comment from readers of both genders. The grid provided will allow students to organise and present their research in a clear and accessible form (please see Learner Resource 2).</p> <p>http://theliteraryindex.com</p>	 <p>Learner Resource 2</p> <p> Click here</p>
<p>Students should be encouraged to familiarise themselves with other literary works produced around the same period as their set texts. They should also be aware of their authors' literary output as a whole. This knowledge will aid them in making literary and contextual connections.</p>	



Learner Resource 1 Literary contexts



In completing this grid, include chapter/page references where appropriate.

	Text A	Text B	Connections
Date of publication. Sub-genre (e.g. realist, modernist)			
Prominent novels published during the same period			
Prominent texts/genres popular during the same period			
Readership (levels of literacy, access to texts)			
Format (e.g. serialisation, triple decker)			
Author: literary tradition; gender and/or gender restrictions			
Social class/marital status/ race of protagonist/ characters			
Representation of women			
Power relations between genders			



Learner Resource 2 Contextualising the critics



A chronological survey of critical responses.

Critic: date	Text A: date of publication	Text B: date of publication	Notes





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