



Course Start

Course Start is an independent learning task that you need to complete as a fundamental part of your introduction to the course. It should take you approximately five hours in all.

Course Name	English Literature A level
How does Course Start fit into the first term of the course?	This work is the 21st Century novel reading for the Non Exam Assessment (NEA) coursework.
How will my Course Start learning be used in lessons?	The analytical writing helps us to evaluate your skills and enables you to critically engage with the ways ideas are conveyed in the texts. You will receive feedback on this work that helps you to develop your critical and analytical writing.
Course Start : Learning Objectives	• Independent reading • Close textual analysis & writing You will have a significant amount of independent reading in the first year of your course (6+ texts). This work enables you to get some of this done over the summer holiday. You will have further opportunity to read a second 21st Century novel in the second half of the autumn term. This prepares you for coursework in the summer term and gives you choice over your coursework texts.
Study Skills	• Independent reading • Close textual analysis & writing • Critical thinking

Expectations: A Level English Literature

Our specification is [Eduqas A Level English Literature](#)

What does the course involve?

You'll read a minimum of eight set texts (poetry, prose and drama) ranging from the 17th century (Shakespeare/ John Donne / John Webster) to the 21st century. There is also the study of unseen prose and poetry.

80% exam

- **Paper 1: Poetry** (John Donne / T S Eliot & Thomas Hardy),
- **Paper 2: Drama** (Shakespeare *King Lear*, Webster: *The Duchess of Malfi*, Tennessee Williams *A Streetcar Named Desire*)
- **Paper 3: Unseen prose** 1918-39 & unseen poetry

20% NEA coursework (a 3000 word essay that compares an older text (Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, 1899) with one contemporary novel chosen from a given list.

Independent learning (4-5 hours a week) will include:

- Reading and preparing texts in advance so that the classroom is a place of discussion; and practising planning and writing exam responses. We have a range of resources to support this, but you must be prepared to read on your own too.
- Reading and researching contexts and critical interpretations, and watching texts in performance/ documentaries.
- Consolidating learning.
- Creative and extension work.

There is a lot of **classroom discussion** in pairs, small groups and with the whole class.

Analytical writing: you will have 2 pieces of analytical writing each half term of about 800-1200 words. This is normally done in class under timed conditions, so that you get used to the kinds of writing you need for success in the exams.

The **NEA coursework** is done in summer term and is an **essay of 3500 words** (you will have done the reading prior to this)

Studying English Literature at Advanced Level is an invitation to explore, through the written word, the world in all its complexity. Through literature, we explore difficult topics, learning to approach social issues with sensitivity and with intellectual and emotional curiosity. We hope that you will find the programme of study to be a stimulating and inspiring journey.

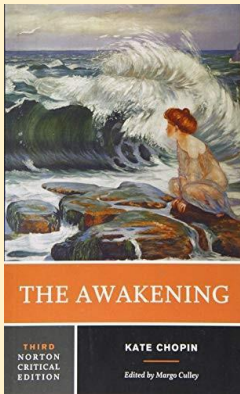
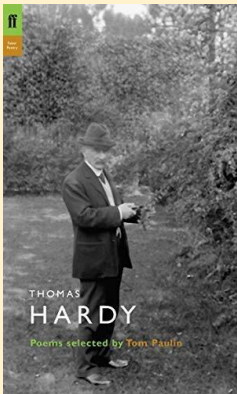
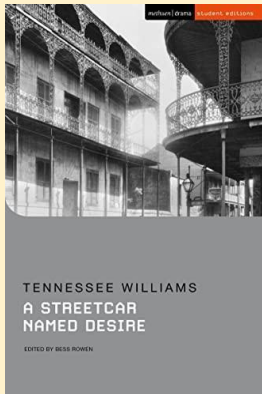
English Literature Course Start



Welcome to English Literature at Varndean College. We are so very happy you will be joining us in September. We hope you will find the journey through A level English Literature a deeply stimulating and enjoyable one. The summer is a wonderful opportunity to get started on the reading for the course so here goes:

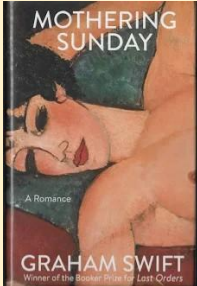
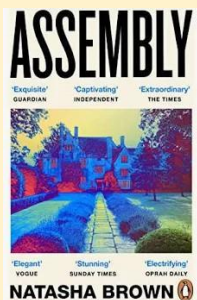
What you **MUST** do over summer:

1. Read one of the 21st century novels before you start in September. Choose one from ***Assembly***, ***Mothering Sunday*** and ***Small Things Like These*** - see below for details (3-4 hours)
2. Complete the two writing tasks (see below) (2-3 hours)
3. Purchase your first term texts. **It is important that you buy the correct edition**, as we will use page numbers in class to discuss specific extracts from the texts.

		
The Awakening, Kate Chopin 3rd Norton Critical Edition ISBN: 9780393617313	Thomas Hardy: Poems Selected by Tom Paulin Faber & Faber ISBN: 9780571226733	A Streetcar Named Desire, Tennessee Williams Methuen Drama, ed. ISBN: 9781350108516

Additionally, you need to buy at least ONE of the following texts, and read the entire (short) text over this summer.

21st Century Prose Fiction choices for coursework:

Graham Swift <i>Mothering Sunday</i>		Twenty-two-year-old Jane Fairchild has worked as a maid at an English country house since she was sixteen. For almost all of those years she has been the clandestine lover to Paul Sheringham, young heir of a neighboring house. The two now meet on an unseasonably warm March day—Mothering Sunday—a day that will change Jane's life forever. The narrative is one of profound self-discovery moving back and forth from 1924 to the end of the century. More than just a story about crossing "impossible barriers" like class and education, it is a love song to books, and to finding words, language, and a voice.
Claire Keegan <i>Small Things Like These</i>		It is 1985 in a small Irish town. During the weeks leading up to Christmas, Bill Furlong, a coal merchant and family man faces into his busiest season. Early one morning, while delivering an order to the local convent, Bill makes a discovery which forces him to confront both his past and the complicit silences of a town controlled by the church. <i>Small Things Like These</i> is a deeply affecting story of hope, quiet heroism, and empathy from one of our most critically lauded and iconic writers.
Natasha Brown <i>Assembly</i>		Come of age in the credit crunch. Be civil in a hostile environment. Step out into a world of <i>Go Home</i> vans. Go to Oxbridge, get an education, start a career. <i>Do all the right things</i>. Buy a flat. Buy art. Buy a sort of happiness. But above all, keep your head down. Keep quiet. And keep going. The narrator of <i>Assembly</i> is a Black British woman. She is preparing to attend a lavish garden party at her boyfriend's family estate, set deep in the English countryside. At the same time, she is considering the carefully assembled pieces of herself. As the minutes tick down and the future beckons, she can't escape the question: is it time to take it all apart? <i>Assembly</i> is a story about the stories we live within - those of race and class, safety and freedom, winners and losers. And it is about one woman daring to take control of her own story, even at the cost of her life.

Task One

Write a 700-1000 word close textual analysis that answers the following question (this is about 1½ to 2 sides of writing):

How does the opening of your chosen 21st Century novel establish the world of that novel?

USE THE SHORT EXTRACT PRINTED BELOW, please do not write on more than this. Please see the advice at the bottom of this document on what this analysis should involve.

Task Two

Write a brief summary of what you think the whole novel is about and how it achieves that. Write no more than 200 words.

You will be using one of these novels as part of your comparative coursework, so we offer you a choice. Over the first year you will have the opportunity to read a second or even a third one. As you will have a lot of reading in this first year, we ask that you do some of the reading this summer to put yourself in a strong place for the course - and because it is enjoyable.

You will be comparing one of these novels with the pre-2000 one for our course, which is ***The Awakening*, by Kate Chopin (1899)**, which you could also read over the summer if you like.

EXTRACTS FOR TASK ONE:

Extract from the opening of *Assembly* by Natasha Brown (2021)

Alright

You have to stop this, she said.

Stop what, he said, we're not doing anything . She wanted to correct him. There was no we. there he the subject and her the object, but he just told her look, there's no point getting worked up over nothing.

She often sat in the end cubicle of the ladies' room and stared at the door. She'd sit for an entire lunch break, sometimes, waiting either to shit or cry or to muster enough resolve to go back to her desk.

He could see her at her desk from his office and regularly dialled her extension to comment on what he saw (and what he made of it): her hair (wild), her skin (exotic), her blouse (barely containing those breasts).

Over the phone, he instructed her to do little things. This humiliated her more than the bigger things that eventually followed. Still, she held her stapler up high as directed. Drank her entire glass of water in one go. Spat out her chewing gum into her hand.

*

She had gone to lunch with her colleagues. They were six men of varying ages. Sizes and temperaments. They ordered four plates of the beef nigiri and, during the meal, occasionally referenced her situation via vague innuendo and accusatory observations.

One of the older ones, fat with a thick greying beard around his thin pink lips, put down his fork to talk straight. He began slowly: He knows she's not the one to take advantage of it. He knows that, he knows. There he paused for effect and to savour the thrill of telling the girl how things were. BUT - but now, she must admit, she had an advantage over him and the others at the table. She could admit that, couldn't she.

He smiled wide, opened his arms wide and leaned back. The other five looked at her, some nodding. He picked up his fork again and shoved more raw meat into his mouth.

His office was glass on three sides. Rows of desks stretched out to the right and left, a spectator's gallery. She had centre stage. He sat talking to her, quite animated.

He hoped she would show some maturity, he said, some appreciation. He was getting up from his chair, walking towards her, brushing against her though the office was large and he had plenty of space. She should think of the big picture and her future and what his word means around here. He said this as he opened the office door.

*

It was nothing. She thought this now, as she thought it each morning. She buttoned up her shirt and thought it, then pushed small studs into her ears. She thought it as she pulled her hair back into a neat bun, left her face bare, smoothed down her stiff, grey pencil skirt.

She thought it as she ate, even as she forgot how to taste or swallow. She tried to chew. It was nothing. She barked that she was fine, then softened, looked around the living room. Asked her mother how her day had been.

*

Dinner after work, she'd agreed to it. Outside the restaurant, before they went in, he grabbed her shoulders and pressed his open mouth on to her face.

She watched his eyelids quiver shut as his slow tongue pushed and poked at hers. She pictured her body, limbs folded, packed away in a box. He stepped back, smiled, laughed a bit, looked down at her. He touched her arm, then her fingers, and then her face. It's alright, he told her. It's alright, it's alright.

[Assembly by Natasha Brown review – the grind of everyday prejudice | Fiction | The Guardian](#)

Extract from the opening of *Mothering Sunday* by Graham Swift (2016)

Once upon a time, before the boys were killed and when there were more horses than cars, before the male servants disappeared and they made do, at Upleigh and at Beechwood, with just a cook and a maid, the Sheringhams has owned not just four horses in their own stable, but what might be called a 'real horse', a racehorse, a thoroughbred. Its name was Fandango. It was stabled near Newbury. It had never won a damn thing. But it was the family's indulgence, their hope for fame and glory on the racecourses of southern England.

The deal was that Ma and Pa - otherwise known in his strange language as 'the

shower'-owned the head and body and he and Dick and Freddy had a leg each.

'What about the fourth leg?'

'Oh the fourth leg. That was always the question.'

For most of the time it was just a name, never seen, though an expensively quartered and trained name. It had been sold in 1915 - when he'd been fifteen too. 'Before you showed up, Jay.' But once, long ago, early one June morning, they'd all gone, for the strange, mad expedition of it, just to watch it, just to watch Fandango, their horse, being galloped over the downs. Just to stand at the rail and watch it, with other horses, thundering towards them, then flashing past. He and Ma and Pa and Dick and Freddy. And - who knows? - some other ghostly interested party who really owned the fourth leg.

He had a hand on her leg.

It was the only time she'd known his eyes go anything close to misty. And she'd had the clear sharp vision (she would still have it when she was ninety) that she might have gone with him - might still somehow miraculously go with him, just him - to stand at the rail and watch Fandango hurtle past, kicking up the mud and dew. She had never seen such a thing but she could imagine it, imagine it clearly. The sun still coming up, a red disc, over the grey downs, the air still crisp and cold, while he shared with her, perhaps, a silver-capped hip flask and, not especially stealthily, clawed her arse.

*

But she watched him now move, naked but for a silver signet ring, across the sunlit room. She would not later in life use with any readiness, if at all, the word 'stallion' for a man. But such he was. He was twenty-three and she was twenty-two. And he was even what you might call a thoroughbred, though she did not have that word then, any more than she had the word stallion. She did not yet have a million words. Thoroughbred: since it was 'breeding' and 'birth' that counted with his kind. Never mind to what actual purpose.

It was March 1924. It wasn't June, but it was a day like June. and it must have been a little after noon. A window was flung open, and he walked, unclad, across the sun-filled room as carelessly as any unclad animal. It was his room, wasn't it? He could do what he liked in it. He clearly could. And she had never been in it before, and never would again.

And she was naked too.

March 30th 1924. Once upon a time. The shadows from the latticework in the window slipped over him like foliage. Having gathered up the cigarette case and lighter and a little silver ashtray from the dressing table, he turned, and there, beneath a nest of dark hair and fully bathed by sunshine, were his cock and balls, mere floppy and still sticky appendages. She could look at them if she liked, he didn't mind.

But then he could look at her. She was stretched out naked, except for a pair - her only pair - of very cheap earrings. She hadn't pulled up the sheet. She had even clasped her hands behind her head the better to look at him. But he could look at her. Feast your eyes. It was an expression that came to her. Expressions had started to come to her. Feast your eyes. Outside, all Berkshire stretched out too, girded with bright greenery, loud with birdsong, blessed in March with a day in June.

He was still a follower of horses. That is, he still threw money away on them. It was his version of economising, to throw money away. For nearly eight years he'd had money for three, in theory. He called it 'loot'. But he would show he could do without it. And what the two of them had been doing for almost seven years cost, as he would sometimes remind her, absolutely nothing. Except secrecy and risk and cunning and a mutual aptitude for being good at it.

But they had never done anything like this. She had never been in this bed before - it was a single bed, but roomy. Or in this room, or in this house. If it cost nothing, then this was the

greatest of gifts.

Though if it cost nothing, she might always remind him, then what about the times when he'd given her sixpences? Or was it even threepences? When it was only just beginning, before it got - was it the right word? - serious.

He sat on the bed beside her. He ran a hand across her belly as if brushing away invisible dust. Then he arranged on it the lighter and ashtray, retaining the cigarette case. He took two cigarettes from the case, putting one in her own proffered, pouting lips. She had not taken her hands from the back of her head. He lit hers, then his. Then, gathering up the case and lighter to put on the bedside table, he stretched out beside her, the ashtray still positioned halfway between her navel and what these days he would happily, making no bones about it, call her cunt.

Cock, balls, cunt. There were some simple, basic expressions.

It was March 30th. It was a Sunday. It was what used to be known as Mothering Sunday.

[Mothering Sunday: A Romance by Graham Swift review – a perfect small tragedy | Fiction | The Guardian](#)

Extract from the opening of Small Things Like These by Claire Keegan (2021)

In October there were yellow trees. Then the clocks went back the hour and the long November winds came in and blew, and stripped the trees bare. In the town of New Ross, chimneys threw out smoke which fell away and drifted off in hairy, drawn-out strings before dispersing along the quays, and soon the River Barrow, dark as stout, swelled up with rain.

The people, for the most part, unhappily endured the weather: shop-keepers and tradesmen, men and women in the post office and the dole queue, the mart, the coffee shop and supermarket, the bingo hall, the pubs and the chipper all commented, in their own ways, on the cold and what rain had fallen, asking what was in it - and could there be something in it - for who could believe that there, again, was another raw-cold day? Children pulled their hoods up before facing out to school, while their others, so used now to ducking their heads and running to the clothesline, or hardly daring to hang anything out at all, had little faith in getting so much as a shirt dry before evening. And then the nights came on and the frosts took hold again, and blades of cold slid under doors and cut the knees off those who still knelt to say the rosary.

Down in the yard, Bill Furlong, the coal and timber merchant, rubbed his hands, saying if things carried on as they were, they would soon need a new set of tyres for the lorry. 'She's on the road every hour of the day,' he told his men. 'We could soon be on the rims.' And it was true: hardly had one customer left the yard before another arrived in, fresh on their heels, or the phone rang - with almost everyone saying they wanted delivery now or soon, that next week wouldn't do.

Furlong sold coal, turf, anthracite, slack and logs. These were ordered by the hundredweight, the half hundredweight or the full tonne or lorry load. He also sold bales of briquettes, kindling and bottled gas. The coal was the dirtiest work and had, in winter, to be collected monthly, off the quays. Two full days it took for the men to collect, carry, sort and weigh it all out, back at the yard. Meanwhile, the Polish and Russian boatmen were a novelty going about town in their fur caps and long, buttoned coats, with hardly a word of English.

During busy times like these, Furlong made most of the deliveries himself, leaving the yardmen to bag up the next orders and cut and split the loads of felled trees the farmers brought in. through the mornings, the saws and shovels could be heard going hard at it, but when the Angelus bell rang, at noon, the men laid down their tools, washed the black off their hands, and went round to Kehoe's, where they were fed hot dinners with soup, and fish & chips on Fridays.

‘The empty sack cannot stand,’ Mrs Kehoe liked to say, standing behind her new buffet counter, slicing up the meat and dishing out the veg and mash with her long, metal spoons. Gladly, the men sat down to thaw out and eat their fill before having a smoke and facing back out into the cold again.

[Small Things Like These by Claire Keegan – between happiness and ruin | Fiction | The Guardian](#)

Task One: Advice for Writing

How does the opening of your chosen 21st Century novel establish the world of that novel?

In your answer you should make detailed reference to the ways in which the author creates the setting, the character and the atmosphere .

You need to include, where relevant, points about:

- The setting - Where is it set? What impression of this do you get? How is this created?
- The character(s) - Who are they? What impression of them do you get? How is this created through the voice, imagery, dialogue, etc.
- The atmosphere - How would you describe the feeling you get from the opening passage? What is it about the way it is written that created that?

You will also need to give supporting evidence and explanations and analysis of how meaning is created. (point - evidence/technique - analysis). Your analysis should link back to the question.

Some possible sentence starters:

It is set in...

The opening establishes a world of ...

There is a feeling of ...

The opening creates a (...) world in which...

The beginning of the novel seems to suggest that ..

It seems the character inhabits a world in which...

The narrator seems to be...

You could comment on how voice is created/ which words or phrases carry the most significance and power and why / the structure of the opening and what it reveals / suggests / creates / gives the impression of