Big Question: Why is understanding critical theory crucial in studying A Level Literature?
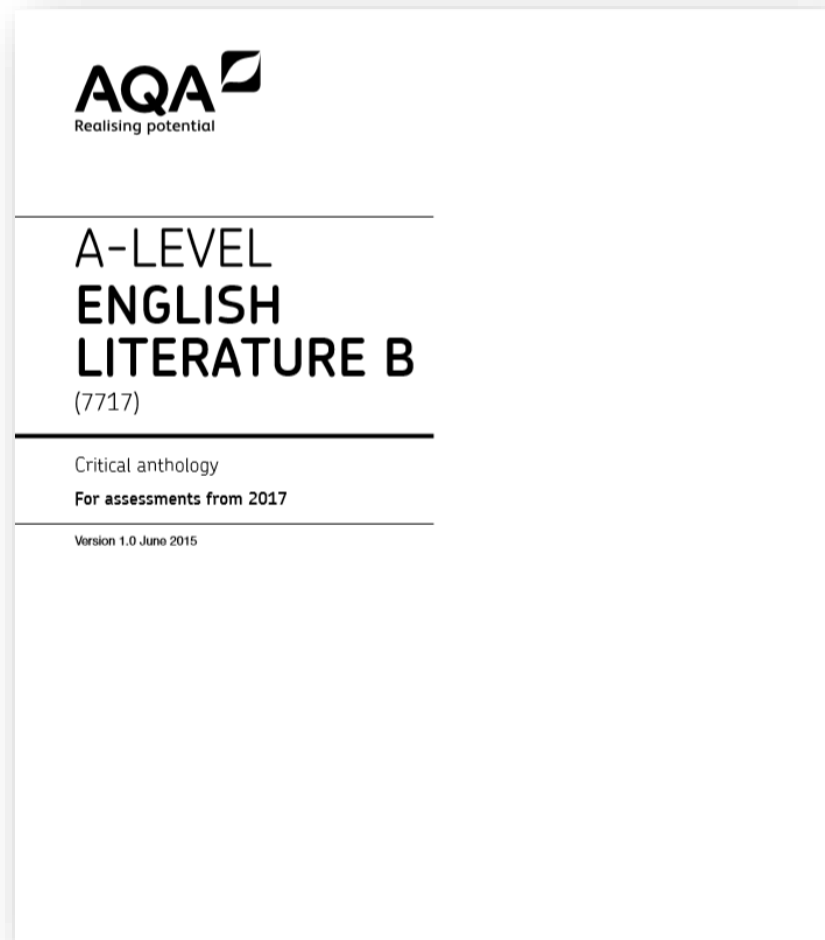
- ✓ <u>To secure understanding</u> of the A Level Literature course
- ✓ <u>To further develop</u> skills understanding critical theory and its importance in studying Literature
- ✓ <u>To achieve excellence</u> through consolidating understanding of the Critical Anthology

AQA
Realising potential

A-LEVEL
**ENGLISH
LITERATURE B**
(7717)

Critical anthology
For assessments from 2017

Version 1.0 June 2015

A Level English Literature Course Overview

Paper 1: Literary Genres
- Written exam (2 hours 30 minutes)
- Closed book
- 75 marks
- 40% of A-level

What are you assessed on?
Aspects of tragedy
- 'Othello' by William Shakespeare
- 'Death of a Salesman' by Arthur Miller
- John Keats Poetry ('Lamia', 'Isabella or The Pot of Basil', 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', 'The Eve of St. Agnes')

Exam Questions
Section A
- One passage-based question on 'Othello' (25 marks)
Section B
- One essay question on 'Othello' (25 marks)
Section C
- One essay question connecting two texts 'Death of a Salesman and Keats Poetry' (25 marks)

Paper 2: Texts and Genres
- Written exam (3 hours)
- Open book
- 75 marks
- 40% of A-level

What are you assessed on?
Elements of political and social protest writing
- *William Blake 'Songs of Innocence and of Experience' (pre-1900)*
- *The Kite Runner (post-2000 prose)*
- *The Handmaid's Tale.*

Exam Questions
Section A
- One compulsory question on an unseen passage (25 marks)
Section B
- One essay question on one of the set texts (25 marks)
Section C
- One essay question which connects two of the set texts (25 marks)

NEA- Theory and Independence
- Coursework element
- 50 marks
- 20% of A-level

What are you assessed on?
Study of two texts: one poetry and one prose text, informed by study of the Critical anthology

Two essays of 1,250 – 1,500 words, each responding to a different text and linking to a different aspect of the Critical anthology

Top tip!
Get ahead and read the texts; order the study guides and watch the adaptations

✓ To secure understanding of the A Level Literature course

Why study critical theory?

- Literature is representational. Literature gives us versions of the world.   These versions are ideological in that they encode various attitudes, values and assumptions.

- Literary criticism is also ideological, giving versions of texts; criticism also contains/promotes attitudes, values and assumptions.   The versions of texts arise out of the approaches that critics use to analyse texts.

Understanding critical methods gives you some frameworks to apply to literary texts.

Depending on the ideology of the critic, and the critical methods used, different readings of a text emerge.

Why study critical theory?

Theory highlights a dilemma we face when analysing a text:

- Should we, as critics, give a single reading of a text based on one method we happen to favour?
- Or should we weigh up various possible readings and understand the central ambiguity of texts and criticism?

✓ <u>To further develop</u> skills understanding critical theory and its importance in studying Literature

Theory and Independence

This process is supported by the **AQA Critical Anthology**, which has accessible extracts on the following critical methods and ideas:

- Narrative theory

- Feminist theory

- Marxist theory

- Eco-critical theory

- Post-colonial theory

- Literary value and the canon.

The Critical Anthology does not say everything there is to say about its chosen areas. It is best seen as a resource to work with and expand upon.

✓ To further develop skills understanding critical theory and its importance in studying Literature

Theory and Independence

Broadly speaking, the material is concerned with the following four types of critical approach:

- <u>Structural criticism</u> – Studying how stories are told can help you reach critical views about what the stories mean. The study of how stories work, and how they are structured, comes under the category *Narrative*.

- <u>Political criticism</u> – *Marxist* criticism investigates the ways in which texts portray economic and other inequalities, and the extent to which the text challenges these and indicates a need for change. *Feminist* criticism looks at representation of gender, and also urges us to consider the implications of inequality.

- <u>Post-colonial</u> criticism concentrates on the social and political relationships between coloniser and colonised. *Ecocriticism* is an area of criticism which analyses and promotes texts that raise political and moral questions about human interactions with nature.

- <u>Moral and aesthetic criticism</u> – Here, three inter-related topics are considered. In 'Value, Aesthetics and the Canon' you are asked to consider whether it is possible to say that reading literature has any real purpose beyond the recreational, whether in some sense it can be said to be 'good' for you and so have 'value'. The second topic considers whether it is possible to say that literary texts are beautiful, that is that they have aesthetic value, and if so whether it is possible to analyse such beauty. The third part of these connected topics involves the idea of a literary canon, a selection of texts deemed to be superior to others which become 'required' reading.

✓ <u>To further develop</u> skills understanding critical theory and its importance in studying Literature

To consolidate your understanding, you can do the following:

1. Read the Critical Anthology

2. Highlight key points and make extra notes in the margin.

3. Produce a mind map for each of the different areas (ideas about narrators, Marxist, feminist, post-colonial, eco-critical and literary canon) and send evidence of this back to me for feedback.

4. Choose one of your GCSE texts (Macbeth, A Christmas Carol, An Inspector Calls or 2-3 conflict and power poems) **OR** choose a novel/poem of your own and apply any of the above critical readings to the text you choose. This can be done as a mind map, table, essay or whatever format you choose. **For example, you might want to explore how a feminist would respond to An Inspector Calls? How would a Marxist interpret the presentation of Scrooge?**

✓ To achieve excellence through consoldidating understanding of the Critical Anthology