



Intro to British Literature – Syllabus

Course Description: British literature holds the history of the English language, traced from the rhythms of Anglo-Saxon storytelling to the vivid poets of World War I. In this course, we'll see language and history unfold as we delve into one era of British literature per week. While the majority of literature assigned will be English, introducing students to the largely-English touchstone literature for this grade level, we'll also explore Scottish, Welsh, and Irish texts. Students will be encouraged to read thoughtfully, respond critically—interacting with the texts through analysis, close-readings, and creative responses—and, of course, have fun!

Course Outline:

Week One: Anglo-Saxon & Medieval – Excerpts from *Beowulf*, “*The Ruin*,” & *The Canterbury Tales*’ “General Prologue”

Week Two: Renaissance – Shakespeare play of choice

Week Three: Regency – Jane Austen novel of choice

Week Four: Regency – Austen, *continued*

Week Five: Romantic – Selected poems from Robert Burns, John Keats, & William Wordsworth

Week Six: Victorian – Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*

Week Seven: Victorian – Short excerpt from Browning’s “Cry of the Children” & Doyle, “The Red-Headed League”

Week Eight: Modernist – Siegfried Sassoon, “Repression of War Experience”; Dylan Thomas, “Out of a War of Wits”; AND James Joyce, “Araby”

Grading Information: All assignments will be graded using *The Advanced Writer Rubric* and averaged to receive a final course grade.

Required Texts:

Please note that, on heavier reading weeks, we will have shorter or lighter written assignments. Our goal is that students are understanding and enjoying the texts!

The student should have access to the following works. Selections cover as wide a geographical and cultural background as possible, while still including the essential works of the British literary canon.

Note on content: *While we always strive to pick clean and uplifting works, some highly valuable texts result from cultural backgrounds that involve some negative or challenging content. Therefore, we recommend that a parent or trusted adult at least briefly review works and reach out if they would like to substitute a work that matches student and/or family values.*

Note: If you have any trouble finding a work, please let me know promptly so that I can help!

Week One: Anglo-Saxon & Medieval

Reading: Excerpts from *Beowulf*, “*The Ruin*,” & *The Canterbury Tales*’ “General Prologue”
(PDF provided)

Value: *Beowulf*, “*The Ruin*,” and *The Canterbury Tales* provide an excellent overview of early British literature and offer an opportunity for reflection on the student’s experience with British literature and history.

Week Two: Renaissance

Reading: Select one Shakespeare play from the following list that the student hasn’t previously read: *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Tempest*, *Twelfth Night* (*Selected for value and brevity*)

Value: William Shakespeare is one of the most well-known British playwrights of the Renaissance. Shakespeare is quintessentially British, and no overview of British literature class would be complete without covering at least one of Shakespeare’s world-renowned plays.

Week Three: Regency

Reading: Select a Jane Austen novel that the student hasn’t previously read: *Emma*, *Persuasion*, *Pride & Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Sanditon* (delightful but unfinished & unedited draft), *Sense & Sensibility*

Value: As one of the leading female authors of the early 1800s, Jane Austen is known for her

insightful novels discussing everything from socioeconomics to marriage, social standing to reputation.

Week Four: Regency

Reading: Finish the selected Jane Austen novel

Week Five: Romantic

Reading: Selected poems from Robert Burns, John Keats, & William Wordsworth (PDF provided)

Value: As iconic Romantic era poets, Burns, Keats, and Wordsworth highlight throughout their work the shift in style and worldview occurring in Britain after the Renaissance, Enlightenment, and Regency periods.

Week Six: Victorian

Reading: Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*

Value: Charles Dickens was an excellent speaker, wildly talented at anything he picked up, and an adorer of his adoring public. *A Christmas Carol* was written over the course of several weeks in 1843, and cemented Dickens—and his love for Christmas—in the public consciousness.

Week Seven: Victorian

Reading: Short excerpt from Browning’s “Cry of the Children” (PDF provided) & Doyle, “The Red-Headed League” (available online or as part of a collection)

Value: Part of Barrett Browning’s popularity derives from her courageous stands against social injustices, such as child labor and slavery in America. “The Cry of the Children,” which we will read this week, is one of her best-known poems due to its empathetic passion.

Value: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was a brilliant Victorian writer, known for his infamous Sherlock Holmes. “The Red-Headed League” is one of the fifty-six Sherlock short stories Doyle wrote.

Week Eight: Modernist

Reading: Siegfried Sassoon, “Repression of War Experience” (poem – PDF provided); Dylan Thomas, “Out of a War of Wits” (poem – PDF provided); & James Joyce, “Araby” (short story from *Dubliners* – available online or as part of a collection)

Value: The work of Sassoon, Thomas, and Joyce help us understand the British Modernist movement, capping off our overview of British history from early centuries to current times.

There is no required edition; the student must simply cite the edition used. **Please make sure that your copy of the text is not abridged.** Other works will be provided in PDF format to the students, although they are more than welcome to find their own print copies!

We recommend that students interact with the text (highlighting and marginal notes), but students are *not* required to own copies of the works—texts from the library are perfectly all right! If you would like to own, inexpensive copies can be found online and at used bookstores.

As students tend to experience stronger reading comprehension when not reading on a screen, we would highly recommend that students have access to a hard copy of the works (a printed out PDF works well, too!).