



British Literature II – Syllabus

Course Description: Though great works of art, especially paintings in large cathedrals, are often the primary icons of the Renaissance, this movement also renewed many other aspects of European culture, including reading and literature. As the Renaissance Age began to fade, a thirst for knowledge and a search for new ideas was only just beginning. In this course, we will explore some of what came about during and in subsequent eras as we read works by several great British poets, essayists, and short story writers between the 1500s-1900s.

Prerequisites: *Intro to British Literature* or equivalent experience. This course will dwell less on British history than *Intro to British Literature*, instead focusing more on individual texts and literary elements, but will provide contextual reminders of important facts.

Course Outline:

Week One: British Foundations – Jonathan Swift, excerpts from *Gulliver's Travels* & *A Modest Proposal*

Week Two: British Poetry, 1500s-1800s – Sonnets by William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser, John Milton, & Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Week Three: British Poetry & Essays, 1800s – Lord Byron, Percy B. Shelley

Week Four: British Essays, *continued* – John Stuart Mill, excerpts from *On Liberty*

Week Five: British Short Fiction – H.G. Wells, “The Man Who could Work Miracles”

Week Six: British Short Fiction, *continued* – Joseph Conrad, “The Secret Sharer” & G.K. Chesterton, “The Blue Cross”

Week Seven: A British Novella – George Orwell, *Animal Farm*

Week Eight: A British Novella – Orwell, *continued*

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, via internet links provided in each lesson, attached PDF documents provided with some lessons, or hard copies borrowed or purchased. Selections cover as wide a geographical and cultural background as possible, while still including 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.*

If you have any trouble finding a particular text, please let us know promptly so that we can help!

Week One: British Foundations

Reading: Excerpts from *Gulliver's Travels* (PDF provided) & *A Modest Proposal* (available online)

Value: Jonathan Swift's work highlights a significant time period in British history, using satire to expose political unrest, division, and hypocrisy. In addition, Swift's work provides a glimpse into the ideologies of the Enlightenment, and how those ideologies have impacted shifts in government and society as a whole.

Week Two: British Sonnets, 1500s-1800s

Reading: Sonnets by William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser, John Milton, & Elizabeth Barrett Browning (PDF provided)

Value: The sonnet is a unique but popular type of British poetry with variations in form across eras and writers. A study of sonnets across centuries shows many similarities in style while also highlighting shifts in writing structures and even in societal ideals.

Week Three: British Poetry & Essays, 1800s

Reading: Lord Byron, "When We Two Parted" **AND** "She Walks in Beauty" **AND** "So We'll Go No More a Roving" **AND** "Stanzas for Beauty" (Available online)

Value: Lord Byron is considered a leading figure of the Romantic movement and one of the

greatest English poets of all time. In the hundreds of poems that he wrote, Byron experimented with everything from satire to drama, narrative to tragedy, Spenserian stanzas to blank verse. Although not Byron's most well-known poems, the four poems covered in this lesson demonstrate the wide array of emotions expressed in Romantic-era poetry.

Reading: Percy B. Shelley, “Ozymandias” AND “Music when Soft Voices Die” AND “Stanzas Written in Dejection, near Naples” AND “Mutability [‘The flower that smiles to-day’]” (Available online)

Value: These four poems are some of Shelley's most-known and widely quoted pieces, all highlighting the grandeur, romance, beauty, and heartache of the Romantic movement.

Reading: Percy B. Shelley, excerpted portions from “In Defence of Poetry” (PDF provided)

Value: Shelly wrote both poems and essays. His well-known “In Defence of Poetry,” published posthumously in 1840, provides an excellent exploration into the controversial nature of Shelly's style while simultaneously giving readers the chance to consider the value of poetry in the literary world.

Week Four: British Essays, continued

Reading: John Stuart Mill, excerpted portions from *On Liberty* (PDF provided)

Value: Considered the “most influential English language philosopher of the nineteenth century,” John Stuart Mill published *On Liberty*, a 50,000+ word essay in 1858, outlining his opinions regarding individual liberty, government interference, and the relationship between individuals and society.

Week Five: British Short Fiction

Reading: H.G. Wells, “The Man Who Could Work Miracles” (available online or in Wells' short story anthology, *Tales of Space and Time*)

Value: Wells was a boundary-pushing author, ultimately earning the title (along with writer Jules Verne) of “the father of science fiction” through the publication of such novels as *The Time Machine* and *The Invisible Man*. In “The Man Who Could Work Miracles,” *H.G. Wells* pushes another boundary by writing a modern fantasy story in an era when fantasy fiction as a genre did not yet exist.

Week Six: British Short Fiction

Reading: Joseph Conrad, “The Secret Sharer” & G.K. Chesterton, “The Blue Cross” (available online)

Value: Conrad's work holds a unique place in British literature, as Conrad himself was neither a native Englishman nor a native English speaker. “The Secret Sharer” demonstrates Conrad's notable writing style, highly influenced by his life on the sea, in addition to his immense talent in characterization.

Chesterton's “The Blue Cross” was the first in a very successful run of fifty-three Father Brown short stories, published over the span of twenty-six years. Throughout this story, we see how Chesterton combines elegant description and prose with humor, suspense, and a strong sense of detail, revealing why the Father Brown series was so enduring.

Week Seven: British Novella

Reading: George Orwell, *Animal Farm*

Value: As a sharp critic of both capitalism found in Britain and communism found in the Soviet Union, George Orwell highlights the results of government oppression in his 1945 *Animal Farm*, written as an allegorical fable depicting the 1917 Russian Revolution.

Week Eight: British Novella

Reading: George Orwell, *Animal Farm*, continued

For this class, we provide PDF documents for some of the works and internet links for works easily accessible online. However, students are more than welcome to find their own print copies! If purchasing or borrowing hard copies, there is no required edition; the student must simply cite the edition used. Simply, **please make sure that your copy of any given text is not abridged.**

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!).