

## **British and American literature**

### **Brief exam description:**

The exam centres on a selection of issues that are frequently fictionalised in British and American literature, emphasising the variety of writing styles, subject matters, narrative elements, character types, and ideological issues that manifest themselves in the Old English, Middle English, English Renaissance, 18<sup>th</sup>-century, 19<sup>th</sup>-century, 20<sup>th</sup>-century and 21<sup>st</sup>-century fiction, drama, and poetry written in the English language.

### **Areas of competence required:**

- Candidates are required to demonstrate their ability of creative thinking and to analyse, compare and contrast a variety of texts relevant to the chosen topic, using specific examples they consider relevant and avoiding unsupported generalisations.
- Candidates are required to apply various reading strategies (e.g. a feminist reading, a formalist reading, a psychological reading, or other approach to a literary text related to the topic of his/her diploma thesis topic) to reveal subtle text cues and layers of the given narrative and non-narrative texts.
- Candidates are required to provide support for their general claims, i.e. to use specific examples from relevant primary and secondary literature, referring to specific passages, characters, actions, scenes, etc.
- Candidates are required to introduce the chosen topic briefly (including the relevant cultural and historical background, if applicable), then move on to discuss relevant details, and try and respond to any questions raised or comments made by members of the state exam committee.
- Candidates are required to avoid stating the obvious (e.g. irrelevant plot synopses, extended author biographies, or complete lists of works written by an author) and overgeneralised reader response comments.
- Candidates are required to make references to any of the compulsory literature they consider relevant.
- Candidates are required to use established terms/concepts of literary theory rather than non-academic ones.
- Most importantly, candidates are encouraged to use their original ideas and interpretations, however unusual or controversial, as long as they can be supported by evidence from literary works of art relevant to the chosen topic.

### **Exam topics and areas:**

#### **British literature**

##### **1. Old English and Middle English literature**

- The origination and basic features of Old English and Middle English literature - genres, subject-matter, forms.
- Chaucer's "The Canterbury Tales" as the transition between Middle English literature and Renaissance literature.
- The realistic elements in "The Canterbury Tales".

##### **2. The English Renaissance literature**

- The socio-historical background of the English Renaissance.

- Characteristic elements of Renaissance poetry in the work of Edmund Spenser, Phillip Sidney and Thomas Wyatt.
3. The English Renaissance and Elizabethan drama
    - Conventions of Elizabethan drama.
    - Elizabethan drama and "the universality" of Shakespeare's work.
    - Shakespeare's plays as the reflection of the problems of Renaissance society.
  4. Origins and diversity of the English novel of the 18<sup>th</sup> century
    - The socio-historical background of the English novel of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.
    - Diversity and features of the English novel of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (D. Defoe, J. Swift, S. Richardson, H. Fielding, L. Sterne).
  5. Pre-romanticism and Romanticism in English poetry
    - The socio-historical background of the literature of Pre-Romanticism and Romanticism
    - Features of Pre-Romanticism in the works of W. Blake and R. Burns.
    - Features of the two generations of the English Romantic poets – The Lake Poets vs. Byron, Shelley and Keats.
  6. Origins and diversity of the English novel of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century
    - The socio-historical background of the English novel of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
    - Diversity and features of the English novel of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (J. Austen, W. Scott, M. Shelley).
  7. Victorian literature
    - Basic aspects of Victorian literature – realism, social problems, Gothic features
    - Socio-political background of the origination of Victorian literature
    - Comparison of two Victorian novels and the diversity of their styles
  8. Aestheticism and Decadence
    - Aestheticism and Decadence as a transitory period between Victorian and Modernist literature
    - The diversity of the British literature at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century
    - Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Decadence
  9. Early 20<sup>th</sup> century British poetry
    - The development of British poetry of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century
    - T. S. Eliot and modernist poetry
    - Symbolism and intertextuality
  10. Anti-War poetry of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century
    - W. Owen, S. Sassoon, R. Brook and others
    - war imagery and symbolism in W. Owen's and S. Sassoon's poetry
  11. Edwardian realists and the Bloomsbury Group
    - The nature of the conflict between the Edwardian realists and the so-called Bloomsbury Group
    - Stream of consciousness and interior monologue in British Modernist fiction
  12. British fiction after the World War II
    - The diversity of British fiction after the World War II
    - Analysis of two novels or short stories from the given period
    - Campus novel, Angry Young Men and G. Orwell

13. British fiction after the World War II

- The diversity of British fiction after the World War II
- Analysis of two novels or short stories from the given period
- Postmodern and postcolonial fiction

14. W.B. Yeats and Celtic literary revival

- The role of myth in W. B. Yeats' poetry
- Drama and Celtic literary revival

## American literature

1. Describe the diversity and characteristic features of early American Colonial Literature (Puritan and other Forms, Genres, Authors)
2. American Romanticism. Boston Transcendentalism and the Romance. Explain Transcendentalism, the idea of the Over-Soul, philosophical and aesthetic influences on the formation of the Transcendentalists' ideas. Romance, its basic features and its manifestation in the works of W. Irving, J.F. Cooper, E. A. Poe. H. Melville and N. Hawthorne.
3. On selected examples discuss the diversity of American realism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (documentary, psychological, regional realism/s – E. Wharton, W. Cather, S.O Jewett, M. Twain, W. D. Howells, H. James and others).
4. Explain Naturalism and its Basic Principles. Naturalistic Elements in the Work of S. Crane and Jack London.
5. Literature Before 1945 – Modernism and “The Lost Generation” – G. Stein, E. Hemingway, F.S. Fitzgerald, Southern Fiction (W. Faulkner, C. McCullers, F. O’ Connor, E. Welty), Social Realism/Literature of the Depression Period (J. Steinbeck, U. Sinclair, S. Lewis and others).
6. American Literature after 1945 – “The Beat Generation”, Postmodern Literature (John Barth, Thomas Pynchon, K. Vonnegut, and others), and Feminism (Maya Angelou, Kathy Acker, Nicole Krauss, etc.)
7. Comment on the specificity and innovation in Walt Whitman’s poetry and work, and explain his ideas on literature, art, religion and American culture as expressed in his essays Preface to Leaves of Grass and Democratic Vistas.
8. Discuss Regional and Ethnic Varieties of American Fiction after 1945 – Southern Fiction (W. Styron, T. Capote, C. McCullers), Afro-American Fiction (R. Ellison, R. Wright, J. Baldwin, T.Morrison, A. Walker), Native-American Fiction (S. Momaday, L.M. Silko, G.Vizenor, S. Alexie), Hispanic-American (S. Cisneros, G. Anzaldúa, H.M. Viramontes and others), Asian-American (Amy Tan, J. Lahiri, Bharati Mukherjee, Maxine Hong Kingston), and Jewish-American Fiction (M. Gold, B. Malamud, S. Bellow, P. Roth).
9. American poetry at the beginning of the 20th century – Imagism and Harlem Renaissance (Ezra Pound, Hilda Doolittle, William Carlos Williams, Amy Lowell, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, etc.)

10. Anti-War Novel after 1945. Poetics of most-known writers of this genre (Norman Mailer, James Jones, Joseph Heller, Kurt Vonnegut, Art Spiegelman).

### **Compulsory reading list:**

#### **British literature**

- *Beowulf*
- Geoffrey Chaucer: *The Canterbury Tales*
- Edmund Spenser – Amoretti
- Phillip Sidney – Astrophel and Stella
- Thomas Wyatt – They Flee from Me.
- William Shakespeare – *The Merchant of Venice*. *Hamlet*. *Antoniou and Cleopatra*.
- Daniel Defoe: *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*.
- Henry Fielding: *Tom Jones*.
- Lawrence Sterne: *Tristram Shandy*.
- Samuel Richardson: *Pamela*
- William Blake: London, The Tyger, The Lamb.
- Robert Burns: My Heart Is in the Highlands.
- William Wordsworth: The Prelude. Lyrical Ballads
- Samuel. T. Coleridge: Kubla Khan. The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.
- George. G. Byron: Child Harold's Pilgrimage. P.B. Shelley – Ode to the West Wind. Prometheus Unbound.
- John Keats: Ode to the Nightingale. Ode on a Grecian Urn.
- Jane Austen: *Pride and Prejudice*
- Walter Scott: *Waverley*
- Mary Shelley: *Frankenstein*
- Emily Brontë: *Wuthering Heights*
- Charles Dickens: *Oliver Twist*
- Oscar Wilde: *The Picture of Dorian Gray*
- Thomas Hardy: *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*
- Victorian poetry: Gerard Manley Hopkins: "Pied Beauty", Robert Browning: "Porphyria's Lover", Matthew Arnold: "Dover Beach", L.A.Tennyson: "The Lady of Shalott" (1842 version)
- Joseph Conrad: *Heart of Darkness*
- Virginia Woolf: "Kew Gardens" or *Mrs. Dalloway*
- James Joyce: "Araby" or "The Dead"
- William Butler Yeats: "Sailing to Byzantium"
- T. S. Eliot: "The Lovesong of J.A.Prufrock"
- Wilfred Owen: "Anthem for Doomed Youth"
- John Fowles: *The French Lieutenant's Woman*
- David Lodge: "Hotel des Boobs"
- Angela Carter: "The Company of Wolves"
- G. Orwell: *1984*

#### **American literature**

E. A. Poe: The Fall of the House of Usher (or any other of his short stories)  
N. Hawthorne: Young Goodman Brown (or any other of his short stories or novels)  
Mark Twain: Huckleberry Finn  
S. Crane: The Open Boat

W. Whitman: Song of Myself, Democratic Vistas, and Preface to Leaves of Grass  
E. Hemingway: Snows of Kilimanjaro or any other short story or a novel by the  
Lost Generation author  
Erskine Caldwell: Kneel to the Rising Sun  
Kurt Vonnegut: Slaughterhouse-Five  
T. Morrison: Song of Solomon or any other short story or a novel by post-1960's  
African-American author

**Recommended secondary literature:**

Baštín, Š., Olexa, J., Studená, Z.: Dejiny anglickej a americkej literatúry, Bratislava, 1993.  
Bentley, N. Contemporary British Fiction. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2008.  
Bradbury, Malcolm & Ruland, Richard. 1992. From Puritanism to Postmodernism: A History of American Literature. New York: Penguin Books, 1991.  
Gray, Richard J. 2004. A History of American Literature. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Limited, 2004.  
Head, D. The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction, 1950-2000. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002.  
Hilský, M.: Současný britský román, Praha, 1991.  
Hilský, M.: Modernisté: Eliot, Joyce, Woolfová, Lawrence, Praha, 1995 Javorčíková, J. A Compendium of English Literature – An Annotated Companion to English Literature and Literary Theory. 2nd ed. Bratislava: Z-F Lingua, 2017.  
1995.  
Marek, Grmela, Oliveriusová, Hilský: Dějiny anglické literatury, Praha, 1988  
Sanders, A. The Short Oxford History of English Literature. Oxford: OUP, 1996.  
Sutherland-Smith, J. Both Roads Taken: A Survey of English Language Poetry in Britain from 1896 to 1953. Prešov: FF PU, 2013.  
Wagner, H.P. A History of British, Irish and American Literature. 2nd ed. Trier: WVT Verlag, 2010.

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