

Inštitút anglistiky a amerikanistiky FF PU v Prešove

Program: anglický jazyk a anglofónne kultúry, Bc.
Štátnicové témy

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, 18th-century, 19th-century, 20th-century and 21st-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.

BRITISH LITERATURE

1. Old English Literature

Describe the main features of Old English literature, with emphasis on its oral tradition, formulaic style, use of alliteration, and heroic ethos.

Situate the literature within the cultural and historical context of Anglo-Saxon England. Compare pagan and Christian values within the same text.

Analyse selected works such as *Beowulf* and *Cædmon's Hymn*, focusing on:

- the concept of the hero and fate,
- the role of religion,
- stylistic features (kennings, variation, caesura).

2. Middle English Literature

Discuss the diversity of Middle English literature, including romances, religious writing, and drama. Explain the concepts of the Matter of Britain, Matter of France, and Matter of Troy. Analyse Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* as a transitional work, focusing on narrative structure, characterization, and social satire. Refer also to works such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*.

3. The English Renaissance

Explain the socio-historical background of the English Renaissance, especially humanism, the Reformation, and court culture.

Discuss the development of Renaissance poetry, focusing on:

- sonnet tradition and courtly love conventions,
- classical influences,
- the role of the individual.

Refer to works by Thomas Wyatt, Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, and Christopher Marlowe.

4. Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama

Discuss the development of English drama in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods.

Analyse W. Shakespeare's plays in relation to Renaissance concerns (power, identity, morality). Explain the characteristics of Elizabethan theatre and metaphysical poetry, referring to John Donne (conceits, paradox).

5. The Enlightenment and Neoclassicism

Explain the principles of Neo-classicism and Enlightenment thought (reason, order, decorum, satire).

Discuss these principles in works by:

- Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, John Dryden, Addison and Steele,
- with reference to John Milton as a transitional figure.

6. The Rise of the English Novel (18th Century)

Discuss the emergence of the novel as a literary form. Analyse narrative techniques and themes in works by Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, and Laurence Sterne

7. Age of Sensibility – Pre-Romanticism

Discuss the transition from Neoclassicism to Romanticism, focusing on emotion, subjectivity, nature, and sensibility.

Refer to Robert Burns, William Blake and Graveyard poets

8. Early Romantic poetry – the Lake Poets

Explain the key features of Romanticism and its contrast with Neoclassicism. Discuss imagination, nature, and individualism. Refer to works of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, especially Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* and their poetry.

9. Romanticism – second generation

Discuss the poetry of Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and John Keats, focusing on their themes, stylistic innovations, and their differing responses to Romantic ideals.

10. Gothic Fiction

Discuss the development of Gothic fiction in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Analyse Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in terms of:

- the sublime and the grotesque,
- science vs. nature,
- the "outsider" figure,
- ethical implications of scientific progress.

11. Regency literature – the novel of manners and the historical fiction

Explain the novel of manners in the novels of Jane Austen, focusing on social structure, gender roles.

Discuss the historical fiction in the novels of Walter Scott.

12. Early Victorian Literature

Discuss the main features of early Victorian literature, including realism, social criticism, and moral concerns. Analyse works by Charles Dickens and Emily Brontë, focusing on:

- representation of society,
- class issues,

- psychological depth.

13. Late Victorian Literature

Explain the socio-historical context of Late Victorian Literature (industrialization, crisis of faith) Define and discuss aestheticism, Decadence, and positivism. Analyse works by Thomas Hardy and Oscar Wilde, focusing on themes of morality and art.

14. Victorian poetry

Discuss the variety of genres and themes in Victorian poetry (Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Matthew Arnold). Explain the role of Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and its influence on poetry and aesthetics.

15. Early 20th-Century British Literature

Explain the transition to Modernism, focusing on:

- fragmentation, subjectivity, stream of consciousness,
- crisis of representation.

Analyse selected works by Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and D. H. Lawrence.

16. War Poetry and Modernist Poetry

Discuss the themes and stylistic features of early 20th-century poetry.

Analyse:

- anti-war poetry by Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon
- modernist poetry by T. S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats.

17. British Fiction after World War II

Discuss the diversity of post-war British literature, including:

- social realism,
- The Angry Young Men,
- The Theatre of the Absurd,
- campus novel.

Analyse George Orwell in relation to political allegory and dystopia.

18. Contemporary British Literature

Describe the diversity of genres in contemporary British literature (e.g. dystopia, ecofiction, Anthropocene, historical metafiction). Explain the concept of postmodernism and its features (intertextuality, metafiction, fragmentation). Explain the difference between modernism and postmodernism.

Analyse works by John Fowles, Angela Carter, Ian McEwan, and Hari Kunzru.

Discuss multicultural writing and refer to Salman Rushdie.

AMERICAN LITERATURE

1. Early American Literature

Describe the main features of **early American colonial literature**. Discuss the diversity of its forms, especially **Puritan writing**, sermons, religious narratives, jeremiads, travel accounts, captivity narratives and poetry. Explain some basic principles of Puritanism and their manifestation in early writing of Bradford, Winthrop or other authors. Refer to selected authors and explain the relationship between literature, religion, and the socio-historical context of colonial America.

2. American Romanticism and Transcendentalism

Explain the main features of **American Romanticism** and **Boston Transcendentalism**. Define the concept of the **Over-Soul** and discuss the philosophical, religious, and aesthetic influences on Transcendentalist thought. Show how Romantic and Transcendentalist ideas are reflected in selected works by **Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, Washington Irving** or others.

3. The American Romance

Define the genre of the **American Romance** and distinguish it from Realism. Discuss its characteristic features, such as symbolism, ambiguity, the extraordinary, and psychological or moral conflict. Analyse these features in selected prose works by **Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, or Herman Melville**.

4. American Realism

Discuss the diversity of **American Realism** in the second half of the nineteenth century. Explain the characteristic features of **psychological realism, regional realism, and documentary realism**. Refer to selected authors such as **William Dean Howells, Henry James, Mark Twain, Sarah Orne Jewett, Edith Wharton, Willa Cather** or others.

5. American Naturalism

Explain the basic principles of **American Naturalism** and its relation to Realism. Discuss themes such as determinism, environment, heredity, and the struggle for survival. Analyse naturalistic elements in selected works by **Stephen Crane, Jack London, or Theodore Dreiser**.

6. American Modernism before 1945

Characterise the development of **American Modernism** before 1945. Discuss the main thematic and formal innovations of modernist prose and poetry, and refer to selected writers

such as **Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, or John Steinbeck.**

7. The Lost Generation and Literature of the Interwar Period

Explain the term “**The Lost Generation**” and discuss its main themes, such as disillusionment, alienation, war experience, and the crisis of values. Analyse these aspects in selected works by **Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Gertrude Stein**, with reference to the socio-historical context of the interwar period.

8. Southern Fiction

Discuss the main features of **Southern fiction** in American literature. Explain how Southern writers represent memory, tradition, guilt, race, violence, religion, and the decline of the South. Refer to selected works by **William Faulkner, Carson McCullers, Flannery O’Connor, or Eudora Welty.**

9. Walt Whitman and the Emergence of Modern American Poetry

Comment on the specificity and innovation of **Walt Whitman’s poetry**. Discuss his poetic form, free verse, democratic vision, and representation of the self, the body, nature, and America. Refer also to Whitman’s ideas on literature, art, religion, and culture as expressed in “**Preface to Leaves of Grass**” and **Democratic Vistas**.

10. Imagism and Modern American Poetry

Discuss the main features of **Imagism** and its importance for the development of modern American poetry. Explain the principles of precision, brevity, concrete imagery, and free verse. Refer to selected poems by **Ezra Pound, H.D., Amy Lowell, and William Carlos Williams.**

12. The Harlem Renaissance

Characterise the **Harlem Renaissance** as a literary and cultural movement. Discuss its socio-historical background, major themes, and contribution to African American identity and modern literature. Refer to selected works by **Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, and Zora Neale Hurston.**

13. The Beat Generation and Postwar American Literature

Discuss the main features of the **Beat Generation** and its place in postwar American literature. Explain its critique of conformity, materialism, and social conventions, as well as its interest in freedom, spirituality, and experimentation. Refer to selected works by **Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti.**

14. African American Literature in the Twentieth Century

Discuss major themes and representative forms of **African American fiction** in the twentieth century. Analyse issues such as racial identity, inequality, invisibility, memory, gender, and resistance in selected works by **Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Toni**

Morrison, Alice Walker or contemporary African American authors. Literature of the **Hip Hop Generation**.

15. Native American Literature

Discuss the characteristic features of **Native American literature** in the second half of the twentieth century. Explain how selected authors represent storytelling, identity, tribal memory, land, spirituality, historical trauma, and survivance. Refer to works by **Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, Gerald Vizenor, or Sherman Alexie**.

16. Jewish American Literature

Discuss selected developments and characteristic themes of **Jewish American literature** in the twentieth century. Explain how selected authors represent identity, memory, migration, assimilation, ethnicity, family, trauma, and cultural belonging. Refer to works by **Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, Philip Roth, Cynthia Ozick, or Art Spiegelman**.

17. Latino/a American Literature

Discuss the characteristic features of **Hispanic American literature** in the second half of the twentieth century. Explain how selected authors address identity, migration, bilingualism, gender, marginalisation, and cultural memory. Refer to works by **Sandra Cisneros, Gloria Anzaldúa, Helena María Viramontes, Junot Diaz** and/or others.

18. Asian American Literature

Discuss selected developments and major themes of **Asian American literature** in the twentieth century. Explain how selected authors represent immigration, family, memory, bicultural identity, assimilation, and intergenerational conflict. Refer to works by **Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan, Jhumpa Lahiri, or other relevant Asian American authors**.

19. American Postmodern Fiction

Define the characteristic features of **American postmodern fiction**. Discuss techniques such as metafiction, fragmentation, irony, parody, intertextuality, and historiographic play. Refer to selected works by **Richard Brautigan, Donald Barthelme, John Barth, Thomas Pynchon, Kurt Vonnegut, Paul Auster** or other relevant authors.

20. Feminist Writing in American Literature

Discuss the development of **feminist writing** in modern and contemporary American literature. Explain how selected women writers challenge traditional representations of gender, body, identity, and power. Refer to works by **Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Maya Angelou, Kathy Acker, Nicole Krauss, or other relevant authors**.

COMPULSORY READING LIST

British Literature

- Anonymous: *Beowulf*
- Cædmon: *Cædmon's Hymn*
- Geoffrey Chaucer: *The Canterbury Tales*
- Sir Philip Sidney: *Astrophel and Stella* (Sonnet 41)
- Thomas Wyatt: "Whoso List to Hunt"
- William Shakespeare: *Hamlet, The Merchant of Venice*
- Jonathan Swift: *Gulliver's Travels*, "A Modest Proposal"
- Daniel Defoe: *Robinson Crusoe*
- William Blake: "The Tyger", "The Lamb"
- William Wordsworth: "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud", *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*
- Samuel Taylor Coleridge: "Kubla Khan", *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*
- Percy Bysshe Shelley: "Ozymandias"
- John Keats: "La Belle Dame sans Merci"
- Jane Austen: *Pride and Prejudice*
- Walter Scott: *Ivanhoe*
- Mary Shelley: *Frankenstein*
- Emily Brontë: *Wuthering Heights*
- Charles Dickens: *Oliver Twist*
- Oscar Wilde: *The Picture of Dorian Gray*
- Gerard Manley Hopkins: "Pied Beauty"
- Robert Browning: "Porphyria's Lover", "My Last Duchess"
- Alfred Lord Tennyson: "The Lady of Shalott"
- Joseph Conrad: *Heart of Darkness*
- Virginia Woolf: "Kew Gardens"
- D. H. Lawrence: "The Odour of Chrysanthemums"
- James Joyce: "Araby"
- W. B. Yeats: "Sailing to Byzantium"
- T. S. Eliot: "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", *The Waste Land*
- Wilfred Owen: "Anthem for Doomed Youth"
- George Orwell: *1984*
- John Fowles: *The French Lieutenant's Woman*
- Angela Carter: "The Company of Wolves"
- Ian McEwan: "Solid Geometry"
- Salman Rushdie: "The Prophet's Hair"
- Hari Kunzru: "Drones"

American Literature

Edgar Allan Poe: "The Fall of the House of Usher" or other short story

Nathaniel Hawthorne: "Young Goodman Brown" or other short story

- Mark Twain: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Stephen Crane: "The Open Boat" or other short story

- Walt Whitman: *Song of Myself, Democratic Vistas*
- Ezra Pound: “In a Station of the Metro”, “A Pact”
- William Carlos Williams: “The Red Wheelbarrow”
- Langston Hughes: “Theme for English B” or other poem
- Allen Ginsberg: “Sunflower Sutra” or other poem
- Ernest Hemingway: *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* or other short story/novel
- Kurt Vonnegut: *Slaughterhouse-Five* or his other novel
- John Barth: “A Night-Sea Journey” or his other story
- Sherman Alexie: *Class* or his other story
- Amy Tan: “Two Kinds” or other story by Asian American author
- Toni Morrison: *Song of Solomon* or her other novel
- Sandra Cisneros: “Barbie-Q” or her other short story
- Bernard Malamud: “Idiots First” or his other short story
- Charlotte Perkins Gilman: “The Yellow Wallpaper”

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