


Studying Literature: Ridding Yourself of GCSE

LO: To understand how studying literature at A-Level is different to GCSE

A-Level Literature will look very different to GCSE. Some students find the difference incredibly frustrating; some find it liberating. The aim of this lesson is to help you understand how A-Level Literature aims to build on, but mostly tear down what you've been taught to do in English.



“Basically, forget about everything you learned at GCSE. A-Level is so different.”

-A-Level Student 2019

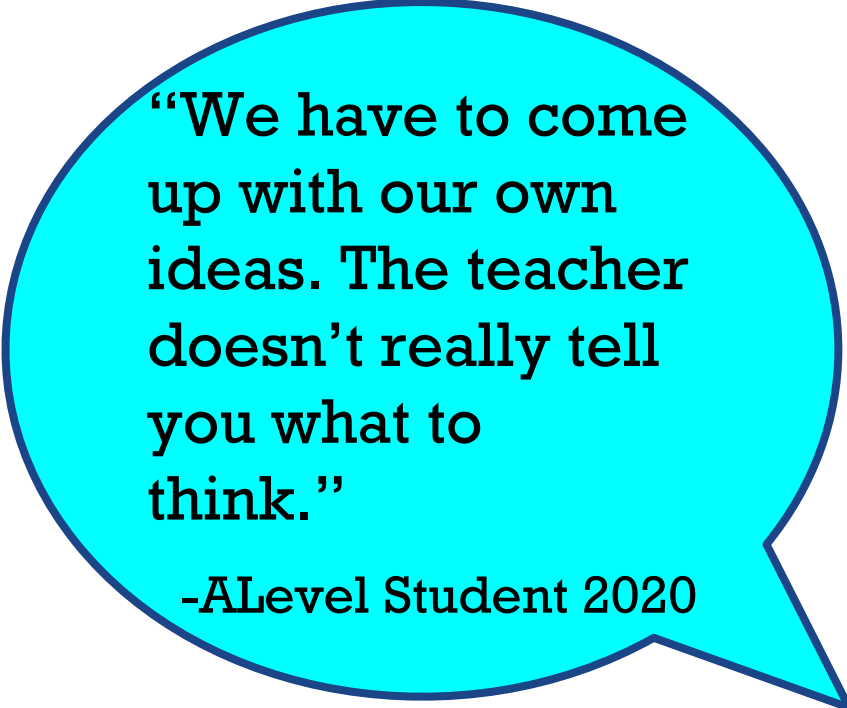
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A-Level focuses on **original ideas**. Discussions and writing recognise that characters aren't real; they are vehicles used to develop the writer's ideas OR our own interpretations.

Let's look at your GCSE texts and turn them into A-Level ideas.

PS: You will never hear PEE paragraph again!



“We have to come up with our own ideas. The teacher doesn't really tell you what to think.”

-A-Level Student 2020

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An Inspector Calls GCSE:

Mr Birling is presented as an incredibly selfish and naive character.

An Inspector Calls A Level:

Priestley uses Mr Birling as a symbol of the pitfalls of capitalism in order to perpetuate his own socialist agenda.

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Macbeth GCSE:

Lady Macbeth challenges Macbeth's masculinity in order to develop a sense of control.

Macbeth ALevel:

Shakespeare's presentation of a fragile male ego highlights the parallel between masculinity and power.

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Jekyll and Hyde at GCSE:

Stevenson presents Jekyll as a man who cannot reconcile his internal conflict between good and evil.

Jekyll and Hyde at ALevel:

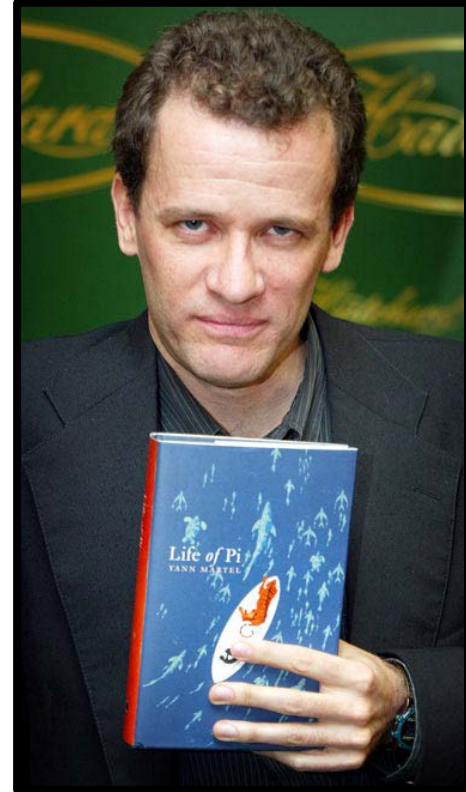
Stevenson's concern with the incongruous nature of man highlights the impossible moral codes of the Victorian era.

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We Ate the Children Last by Yann Martel is a piece of micro-fiction first published in *The New Yorker* in 2004. It tells how a man dying from intestinal cancer volunteers for an experimental treatment which involves receiving the transplanted digestive system of a pig. The transplant is successful, but leaves him with a pig-like penchant for consuming garbage. Considering this an acceptable trade-off for a medical breakthrough, society initially accepts the widespread adoption of the technique, but eventually collapses as the transplant recipients' insatiable appetites evolve into cannibalism.

- **Task:** Read the story and annotate with a focus on what **ideas** the writer is trying to develop *and* what original **ideas** you have about the deeper meaning of the story.



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Task: Turn the following GCSE statements into ALevel ideas. The best way to do this is to consider **WHY???** Turn the observation into an idea!

- The principal character is dehumanised and nameless. → *The dehumanisation of Patient D reflects a loss of individuality as scientific progress leads us to an increasingly uniform society, devoid of originality and uniqueness of human spirit.*
- The tone of the story is rather scientific in nature and feels methodical and detached.
- The text is structured to show how man is behaving increasingly savage.
- The theme of consumption permeates the text.
- The writer creates a sense of disorder and chaos.
- There is a marked shift at the end.
- Your own?

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Task: Watch the 2011 Adaptation of *We Ate the Children Last*.

- What do you think of it?
- How does the director draw on and develop what's in the text?
- Does watching it add to your understanding of the text? How?

