

How do I help my child with their GCSE English courses?

The GCSE English Language and English Literature are two separate qualifications which are assessed at the end of Year 11 through examination. There is no longer a coursework unit or tiering. Both literature exams are closed book and the language exams contain unseen material. The writing tasks are now more heavily assessed on spelling, punctuation and grammar than in previous years. Students are therefore facing challenges with more difficult texts and skills than at KS3. Your help is vital to assist what English teachers are delivering in class. The following list suggests what you can do to help your child and further information on where to find resources and the course content.

English Language Paper 1 and 2:

Reading section:

- Look at the wider reading lists on the English department area of the website and select with your child some fiction/non-fiction that may interest them. The library has a varied range of different genres and books for various age groups/abilities.
- Discuss what they think of the plot, characters and writers' techniques in telling the story. What do they think of the opening/ending? Why do they like/dislike the text?
- Encourage your child to read a range of broadsheet newspapers on a variety of different subjects. Discuss the type of language a journalist might use to get across a point of view, for example level of formality, factual language, use of bias.
- Research some 19th century newspaper articles/diaries/letters. Dickens is a good source for this.

Writing section:

- Google an image e.g a spooky place. Encourage your child to make a list of adjectives that would be useful to describe it.
- Discuss why those words would be effective and use a dictionary to add to the original list.

- Encourage your child to write a description in 50 words. Perhaps write your own and compare ideas, vocabulary and sentence structures. Would they interest a reader?
- Ask your child to make a list of spellings that they find difficult or tend to get wrong. The method of look/cover/write/check is really effective. A spelling dictionary is also a useful resource to have in the home.
- Having read a broadsheet paper article, discuss what the opposing view might be. Encourage your child to write a response and to use a thesaurus to widen their vocabulary.
- Challenge your child to write this piece again using different sentence structures e.g listing, starting a sentence with a verb, using a rhetorical question, including a short sentence to create an effect etc. This may affect the meaning of the piece.
- Help your child to practise proof – reading skills and working out what a word might mean through the context of a sentence or a whole text.

English Literature:

- Arrange theatre visits, particularly to see Shakespeare or adaptations of 19th century classics
- Encourage your child to read widely using the lists on the website in the English area. We suggest particularly that year 10/11 students are exposed to as much 19th century literature as possible as this is what they struggle with most.
- Perhaps read the set 19th century text aloud together (see set text list on the website) and discuss difficult words and easier synonyms to help them access the text better
- Discuss their opinions about characters, plot and how the story is told
- Watch film adaptations (although be careful they stick close enough to the original text so they don't confuse)
- Encourage your child to write a piece where they mimic the style of a writer e.g Dickens
- Research a writer's life and works
- Encourage your child to keep a reading log of their set texts e.g what happens in each scene/chapter

- Diagrams and mind maps are a useful way of linking ideas/themes in poems, prose and drama and are a good visual aid
- Read through your child's notes in their exercise books and encourage them to do the same to consolidate their learning. This is also a good opportunity to discuss teachers' feedback and targets.
- For learners targeting the higher grades of 6-9, a good idea is to read literary criticism on set texts. Students can find these in the library with the help of the librarian. Critical reading like this is very advanced; however you could read and discuss some of this material so that your child is approaching texts at a higher level.

Course outlines, wider reading lists, set text/revision textbook lists, extension tasks and rationale for grouping in Year 10 can all be found on the English department area of the website.

You can also go to the VLE Moodle on the website where the English department are continually adding resources and candidate sample answers.

Websites like Bitesize: www.bbc.co.uk/education and www.shakespearesglobe.com are useful online resources.