

GCSE English Literature:

*Inspirational new
texts and poetry*

Spark something **powerful**



Foreword

We know that being able to design an inclusive curriculum matters to you and your students and it also matters to us.

As market leaders, we realise the unique influence and position we have in education. We're delighted to share that we're making exciting changes to our GCSE English Literature set texts to make our offer more balanced and inclusive.

By updating our specification, we aim to support you to further diversify your curriculum. These changes form part of our wider ranging, ongoing commitment (see our blog post at bit.ly/EDI-blog) to make meaningful change.

For first teaching from September 2023, we're introducing three powerful and uplifting modern texts and a brilliant, new poetry cluster – *Worlds and lives*. These great works of literature offer rich opportunities to engage with issues and ideas that will resonate with young people and introduce further award-winning writers to our specification.

You can read more about each of the following new texts on pages 6 – 7.

- *Princess & The Hustler* by Chinonyerem Odimba
- *Leave Taking* by Winsome Pinnock
- *My Name is Leon* by Kit de Waal

It matters to us that we make the right changes. To help us do this we've talked with teachers about diversity and the curriculum, consulted with external experts and academics, and spent time with publishers to inform the decisions we've made.

Whilst exploring the options, we also wanted to maintain the assessment philosophy and design principles of the GCSE English Literature exam that work successfully for you and your students. Integral to this is our *Statement of importance* (see page 4) that sits at the heart of our qualification. Found in every mark scheme, it captures what it means to study literature and underpins how it's assessed.

We recognise that any changes we make have an impact on you, your students and the curriculum. Because we already have 12 modern set texts, to make space for new literature we had the challenging task of removing three of our existing texts – action we haven't taken lightly.

Decisions about which texts to withdraw were informed using a number of different lenses.

We considered:

- the popularity of different texts with our centres currently
- the accessibility and relevance of the themes and issues they explore
- how successfully students responded to the texts in the exam compared to others
- a review of question setting over time.

Applying these principles, we've decided to withdraw:

- *The History Boys* by Alan Bennett
- *Never Let Me Go* by Sir Kazuo Ishiguro
- *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Simon Stephen and Mark Haddon.

These texts will be last examined in summer 2024.

Spark something real and join us as we take these steps towards ensuring current and future generations of young people experience an English literature curriculum that better resonates with their lives. If you have questions or need further support, please contact us at english-gcse@aqa.org.uk



“

We all have the right to learn so we should all have the right to be **represented** in the curriculum. As society changes so should the things we learn about.”

Chloe, student

Key dates

The timeline below will help you understand when the changes are taking place.



September 2023:
First teaching of
new texts



Summer 2024:
Withdrawn
texts last
examined



Summer 2025:
New texts first
examined

Our Statement of importance

GCSE English Literature is the study of how writers communicate their ideas about the world, and how readers might respond to these ideas. It aims to develop a critical understanding of the ways in which **literary texts are a reflection of, and exploration of, the human condition**, the study of which develops empathic understanding of human nature. High-quality English literature is writing which displays recognisable literary qualities and, although shaped by particular contexts, transcends them and **speaks about the universality of the human condition**. GCSE English Literature aims to enable students to appreciate these qualities, developing and presenting informed, critical responses to the ideas in literary texts and the ways writers present these ideas. It aims to enable students to make links between a variety of written texts and between the text and the context within which it was shaped.



The changes in detail

Modern texts

We've introduced two plays and a novel to our selection of texts for Paper 2 Section A: Modern texts.

From September 2023 students have the option to study one of the new texts from the list below:

Drama

JB Priestley	<i>An Inspector Calls</i>
Willy Russell	<i>Blood Brothers</i> (musical version)
Chinonyerem Odimba	<i>Princess & The Hustler</i> new
Dennis Kelly	<i>DNA</i>
Winsome Pinnock	<i>Leave Taking</i> new
Shelagh Delaney	<i>A Taste of Honey</i>

Prose

William Golding	<i>Lord of the Flies</i>
AQA Anthology	<i>Telling Tales</i>
George Orwell	<i>Animal Farm</i>
Meera Syal	<i>Anita and Me</i>
Kit de Waal	<i>My Name is Leon</i> new
Stephen Kelman	<i>Pigeon English</i>

new first examined in summer 2025.

All three of the new texts are by women writers and while they tell very different stories, they all have some qualities in common:

- They're funny and moving, evocative and uplifting stories.
- The narratives all centre around family relationships and explore universal themes including love and loss, belonging and connection.
- They each have historical and contemporary relevance, addressing important social and political issues and ideas which will resonate for young people.
- Each text tackles some challenging and sensitive topics presented through the characters' hardships but these aren't stories of struggle; they're layered and complex and ultimately empowering and positive.

Princess & The Hustler by Chinonyerem Odimba

Princess & The Hustler is a play about the world of a 10-year old girl and her family living in 1960s Bristol.

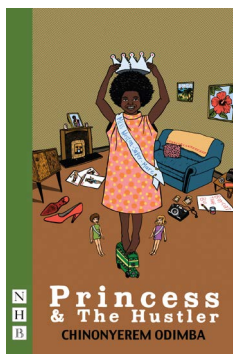
A picture of everyday family life set against the backdrop of the Bristol bus boycott, this heart-warming play brings a previously untold, yet significant chapter in Black British history into the spotlight.

This play presents opportunities to explore both big political issues and ideas that remain relevant today and the more personal and universal pursuit of dreams and aspirations.

Princess, in all her innocence and joy, searches for her sense of beauty as she dreams of winning the Weston-super-Mare beauty contest.

'Mi 'ave dreams too Wendell. Small, quiet dreams but dem still alive in 'ere... And every day, mawning and night mi fall on my knees and pray that dis country Hingland truly see de possibilities of our children... dat dem juss see dat...'

Mavis, page 102



QUOTES: © Princess & The Hustler by Chinonyerem Odimba. Nick Hern Books, 2019.

COVER: © Princess & The Hustler by Chinonyerem Odimba. Nick Hern Books, 2019.

Find out more about Chinonyerem Odimba at nickhernbooks.co.uk/chinonyerem

Leave Taking by Winsome Pinnock

Leave Taking is a funny and moving play about the lives and relationships of a British Caribbean mother and her two daughters living in North London.

It's a portrait of three striking women all searching to reconcile their own sense of identity in very different ways: hard-working mum Enid seeks spiritual guidance from an Obeah woman, conscientious Viv absorbs herself in her studies, and rebellious Del runs wild.

It's a drama with layers of conflict at its heart – portraying the tensions between two generations, two sisters, the past and the present, individual and society, personal and political.

First produced in 1987 and revived multiple times since, *Leave Taking* has a timeless quality with the characters' personal stories continuing to resonate with new audiences today.

'Oh, I knew all the answers. Pat me on the head and they all come tumbling out, say exactly what the examiners want to hear. But no matter how much I search for myself in them books, I'm never there.'

Viv, page 53



QUOTES: © Leave Taking by Winsome Pinnock. Nick Hern Books, 2018.

COVER: © Leave Taking by Winsome Pinnock, Nick Hern Books, 2018.

Find out more about Winsome Pinnock at nickhernbooks.co.uk/winsome-pinnock

My Name is Leon by Kit de Waal

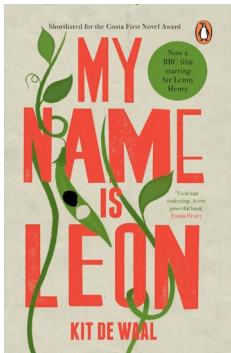
My Name is Leon is a novel about the world of a loving and loyal 9-year old boy who is on a mission to reunite his family and on the way finds a new home and family in unexpected places.

This coming-of-age story follows Leon and his baby brother who are separated from their mother to live under the foster care of Maureen.

Whilst this novel centres on some heavy and sensitive subjects, it's far from a tale of tragedy and misery. Sprinkled with sunshine throughout, *My Name is Leon* is an inspirational, empowering and uplifting story that positively portrays the experience of growing up in foster care in the 1980s.

'The sun,' he says, closing his eyes and turning his face to the sky, 'is a healer. When the sun comes out everybody smiles. World looks different. You can manage in the sun what you can't manage in the rain.'

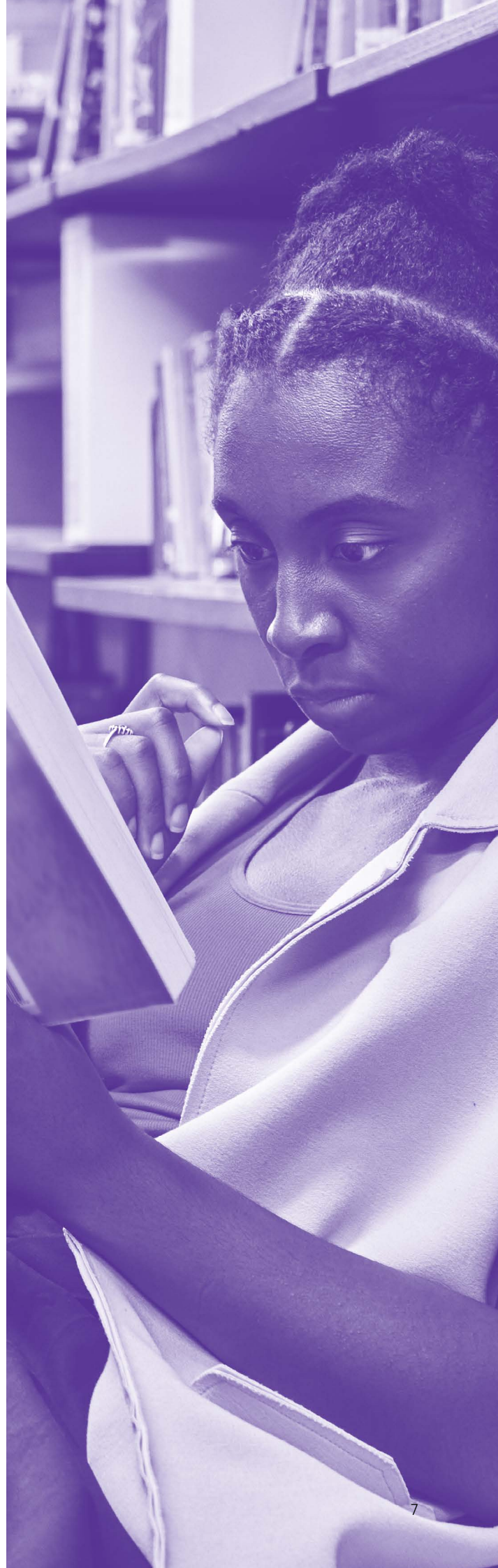
Tufty, page 94



QUOTES: Text from *My Name is Leon* by Kit de Waal, published by Penguin. Text copyright © Kit de Waal 2016. Reproduced by permission of Penguin Books Ltd.

COVER: © Cover from *My Name is Leon* by Kit de Waal published by Penguin. Reproduced by permission of Penguin Books Limited.

Find out more about Kit de Waal at penguin.co.uk/authors/123057/kit-de-waal





“

It's important the curriculum reflects the modern day so we can be provided with the skills and knowledge to prepare us for real life. A relevant curriculum enables us to develop into **responsible citizens** who are aware of the world around us and are able to contribute to society.”

Charlie, student

Poetry

We've added a third cluster of poems to our poetry anthology for Paper 2 Section B.

Students study one of these poetry clusters:

- *Love and relationships*
- *Power and conflict*
- *Worlds and lives**

* first teaching from September 2023 and first examined in summer 2025.

Introducing Worlds and lives

Ignite your students' passion for poetry with our new cluster, *Worlds and lives*. It's an exciting, contemporary collection of poems that includes some well-known, familiar names amongst new, current voices.

It's distinct from *Love and relationships* and *Power and conflict* in that two thirds of the poems in this new collection are published post-2000. Whilst very modern, the poems selected are rooted in the revolutionary spirit of the Romantics, which we hope will ignite young people's enthusiasm for poetry.

The collection as a whole is both personal and political, providing opportunities to explore collective concerns about the world we live in as well as universal themes to which we can all relate as individuals, including our relationship with places and ideas about home, heritage, belonging and connection.

Spark something **different**: Teaching *Worlds and lives* is an easy way to introduce new, diverse writers and topics to your students.

The cluster at a glance:

Lines Written in Early Spring
William Wordsworth

England in 1819
Percy Bysshe Shelley

Shall earth no more inspire thee Emily
Brontë

In a London Drawingroom
George Eliot

On an Afternoon Train from Purley to Victoria, 1955
James Berry

Name Journeys
Raman Munday

pot
shamshad khan

A Wider View
Seni Seneviratne

Homing
Liz Berry

A century later
Imtiaz Dharker

The Jewellery Maker
Louisa Adjoa Parker

With Birds You're Never Lonely
Raymond Antrobus

A Portable Paradise
Roger Robinson

Like an Heiress
Grace Nichols

Thirteen
Caleb Femi

Online anthologies can be seen at onlineservices.aqa.org.uk



Support and resources

Available now

- Updated sample assessment materials covering the new texts available in Centre Services (onlineservices.aqa.org.uk).
- On-demand eLearning module (bit.ly/English-eLearning) walking you through the changes in more detail.
- Visit our Teach page (bit.ly/English-Lit-Teach) for resources and a selection of curated links to discover more about the new texts.
- On-demand eLearning modules for each of the new modern texts and the new poetry cluster. (aqa.org.uk/professional-development)
- Example student responses and accompanying examiner commentary to questions from the GCSE English Literature Paper 2 Sample Assessment Material. (onlineservices.aqa.org.uk)
- Recommended reading: A research digest of diversity and inclusion in English teaching. We've selected some of the most influential, inspiring and accessible pieces of research to support your thinking and discussions about diversity and inclusion in English teaching. (bit.ly/recommended-reading-guide)
- Companion guide: Sparking conversation about curriculum change. A framework of prompts to spark and enrich discussions about designing a diverse and inclusive English curriculum. (bit.ly/curriculum-change)
- Videos of the authors introducing their text in their words. (bit.ly/meet-authors)
- Videos of the authors answering questions submitted by teachers and students. (bit.ly/author-answers)
- Recordings of our Spark Conversation online events for each of the new texts. (bit.ly/English-Lit-Teach)
- Teaching guide: Worlds and lives poetry. Produced in collaboration with major publisher, Collins, this guide supports teachers with their understanding of the poems in preparation for the classroom. (bit.ly/worlds-lives-guide)

“

Reading the *Worlds and lives* cluster makes me incredibly proud and excited for English and poetry teaching.

We can **better understand** these poems and the worlds and lives they originate from because the poets can tell us themselves. ”

Niquelle LaTouche, English teacher and AQA panel member

Contact us

We'd love to hear from you if you've used this resource and found it helpful.

Tel: 0161 953 7504

Email: english-gcse@aqa.org.uk

Twitter: @AQAEnglish

Spark something powerful

aqa.org.uk/spark-something