

'In effect we are, bending and breaking the rules of the language. And if someone were to ask why we do it, the answer is simply: for fun.' David Crystal

English Language at A Level is very different from your experience at GCSE. The depth and challenge of topics is great, with opportunities for you to follow your own research and experiment. One of the best challenges of this course is that language is always changing, so topics are generally new and reflecting on modern society.



In your first year, you will cover these themes: gender, occupation, ethnicity, social groups and region. On top of that, you will also be working on writing articles and creative writing as part of the coursework.

Transitional Tasks

We would like you to come to us in September showing your interest in the course and the topics.

Task 1:

Please choose one topic from the list below:

1. To what extent is there still gender bias in the English language? (Try and focus on 2-3 areas. Could be sport, adverts, occupation etc.)
2. How do people in power use language to influence others?
3. How has social media affected the English language? (Remember you can talk about emoji use etc.)
4. 'Teenagers are destroying English' To what extent do you agree?

Remember:

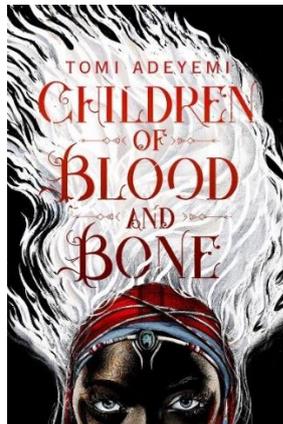
- Use a variety of critical sources (see below for a list)
- Make sure you have an introduction and conclusion
- Write no more than 2 pages – no less than 1.
- Make sure you have proof-read for clarity and SPaG.
- This will not be marked, but we will look at it and get a clear view of your strengths and areas to develop

Task 2

One of the coursework tasks is either an opinion article or piece of creative writing. Task 2 will be focusing on your knowledge of creative writing in the first instance.

It is based on inspiration from texts, and at the end of this document you will find three texts: *The Wasp Factory* by Iain Banks, *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy and *The Children of Blood and Bone* by Tomi Adeyemi.

1. Choose one of these extracts to read and make a few notes on the author's style. Points to consider:
 - a. What is the voice of the piece like?
 - b. Are there any interesting semantic fields?
 - c. How does the writer structure their punctuation and paragraphs?
 - d. How do they craft character voice?
 - e. How do they craft setting and mood?
2. Write a piece of fiction (1-2 pages) inspired by the piece you studied. It could be experimenting with setting like your extract. Or it could be using their style of punctuation or voice.
3. It is to be your own work, own characters and only using the piece of published fiction to inspire yours.



Please bring them to the first lesson. You will not receive your timetable until the first day, so bring these pieces ready. Any help or questions, please email Miss Sturman or Mrs Midgley:

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Further reading/listening:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qtzn/episodes/player>

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/apr/23/allow-me-to-womansplain-the-problem-with-gendered-language>

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2015/may/27/emoji-language-dragging-us-back-to-the-dark-ages-yellow-smiley-face>

<https://www.bl.uk/british-accent-and-dialects/articles/changing-voices-an-introduction-to-english-language-change#>

<https://www.bl.uk/british-accent-and-dialects/articles/lexical-change-in-the-english-language#>

<https://www.bl.uk/british-accent-and-dialects/articles/caribbean-english#>

<http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/evolvingenglish/accessvers/index.html>

The Wasp Factory (1984), by Iain Banks

In the early morning, while my father slept and the cold light filtered through the sharp overcast of young cloud, I rose silently, washed and shaved carefully, returned to my room, dressed slowly, then took the jar with the sleepy-looking wasp in it up to the loft, where the Factory waited.

I left the jar on the small altar under the window and made the last few preparations the Factory required. Once that was done I took some of the green cleaning jelly from the pot by the altar and rubbed it well into my hands. I looked at the Time, Tide and Distance Tables, the little red book that I kept on the other side of the altar, noting the time of high tide. I set the two small wasp candles into the positions the tips of the hands of a clock would have occupied on the face of the Factory if showing the time of local high tide, then I slid the top off the jar a little and extracted the leaves and the small piece of orange peel, leaving the wasp in there alone.

I set the jar on the altar, which was decorated with various powerful things; the skull of the snake which killed Blyth (tracked down and sliced in half by his father, using a garden spade — I retrieved it from the grass and hid that front part of the snake in the sand before Diggs could take it away for evidence), a fragment of the bomb which had destroyed Paul (the smallest bit I could find; there were lots), a piece of tent fabric from the kite which had elevated Esmerelda (not a piece of the actual kite of course, but an off-cut) and a little dish containing some of the yellow, worn teeth of Old Saul (easily pulled).

I held my crotch, closed my eyes and repeated my secret catechisms. I could recite them automatically, but I tried to think of what they meant as I repeated them. They contained my confessions, my dreams and hopes, my fears and hates, and they still make me shiver whenever I say them, automatic or not. One tape recorder in the vicinity and the horrible truth about my three murders would be known. For that reason alone they are very dangerous. The catechisms also tell the truth about who I am, what I want and what I feel, and it can be unsettling to hear yourself described as you have thought of yourself in your most honest and abject moods, just as it is humbling to hear what you have thought about in your most hopeful and unrealistic moments.

Once I had gone through this I took the wasp without further ado to the underside of the Factory, and let it in.

The Wasp Factory covers an area of several square metres in an irregular and slightly ramshackle tangle of metal, wood, glass and plastic. It is all based around the face of the old clock which used to hang over the door of the Royal Bank of Scotland in Porteneil.

The clock face is the most important thing I have ever recovered from the town dump. I found it there during the Year of the Skull and rolled it home down the path to the island and rumbled it over the footbridge. I stored it in the shed until my father was away for the day, then I strained and sweated all day to get it up into the loft. It is made of metal and is nearly a metre in diameter; it is heavy and almost unblemished; the numerals are in roman script and it was made along with the rest of the clock in Edinburgh in 1864, one hundred years exactly before my birth. Certainly not a coincidence.

Of course, as the clock looked both ways, there must have been another face, the other side of the clock; but, although I scoured the dump for weeks after I found the face I do have, I never did discover the other one, so that it, too, is part of the mystery of the Factory — a little Grail legend of its own. Old Cameron in the ironmonger's shop in the town told me that he heard a scrap-metal dealer from Inverness took the workings of the clock, so perhaps the other face was melted down years ago, or now adorns the wall of some smart house on the Black Isle built from the profits of dead cars and the varying price of lead. I'd rather the former.

There were a few holes in the face which I soldered up, but I left the hole in the dead centre where the mechanism connected with the hands, and it is through that the wasp is let into the Factory. Once there it can wander about the face for as long as it likes, inspecting the tiny candles with its dead cousins buried inside if it likes, or ignoring them if it would rather.

Having made its way to the edge of the face, though, where I have sealed it with a wall of plywood two inches high, topped with a metre-circle of glass I had the glazier in the town make specially, the wasp can

enter one of twelve corridors through little wasp-sized doors, one opposite each of those — to the wasp-vast numerals. If the Factory so chooses, the weight of the wasp trips a delicate see-saw trigger made from thin pieces of tin can, thread and pins, and a tiny door closes behind the insect, confining it to the corridor it has chosen. Despite the fact that I keep all the door mechanisms well-oiled and balanced, and repair and test them until the slightest tremor sets them off — I have to tread very lightly when the Factory is doing its slow and deadly work — sometimes the Factory does not want the wasp in its first choice of corridor, and lets it crawl back out on to the face again.

Sometimes the wasps will fly, or crawl upside down on the bottom of the circle of glass, sometimes they stay a long time by the closed-off hole in the centre through which they enter, but sooner or later they all choose a hole and a door which work, and their fate is sealed.

The Road (2006), by Cormac McCarthy

Nights dark beyond darkness and the days more gray each one than what had gone before. Like the onset of some cold glaucoma dimming away the world. His hand rose and fell softly with each precious breath. He pushed away the plastic tarpaulin and raised himself in the stinking robes and blankets and looked toward the east for any light but there was none. In the dream from which he'd wakened he had wandered in a cave where the child led him by the hand. Their light playing over the wet flowstone walls. Like pilgrims in a fable swallowed up and lost among the inward parts of some granitic beast. Deep stone flues where the water dripped and sang. Tolling in the silence the minutes of the earth and the hours and the days of it and the years without cease. Until they stood in a great stone room where lay a black and ancient lake. And on the far shore a creature that raised its dripping mouth from the rimstone pool and stared into the light with eyes dead white and sightless as the eggs of spiders. It swung its head low over the water as if to take the scent of what it could not see. Crouching there pale and naked and translucent, its alabaster bones cast up in shadow on the rocks behind it. Its bowels, its beating heart. The brain that pulsed in a dull glass bell. It swung its head from side to side and then gave out a low moan and turned and lurched away and loped soundlessly into the dark.

With the first gray light he rose and left the boy sleeping and walked out to the road and squatted and studied the country to the south. Barren, silent, godless. He thought the month was October but he wasn't sure. He hadn't kept a calendar for years. They were moving south. There'd be no surviving another winter here.

When it was light enough to use the binoculars he glassed the valley below. Everything paling away into the murk. The soft ash blowing in loose swirls over the blacktop. He studied what he could see. The segments of road down there among the dead trees. Looking for anything of color. Any movement. Any trace of standing smoke. He lowered the glasses and pulled down the cotton mask from his face and wiped his nose on the back of his wrist and then glassed the country again. Then he just sat there holding the binoculars and watching the ashen daylight congeal over the land. He knew only that the child was his warrant. He said: If he is not the word of God God never spoke.

When he got back the boy was still asleep. He pulled the blue plastic tarp off of him and folded it and carried it out to the grocery cart and packed it and came back with their plates and some cornmeal cakes in a plastic bag and a plastic bottle of syrup. He spread the small tarp they used for a table on the ground and laid everything out and he took the pistol from his belt and laid it on the cloth and then he just sat watching the boy sleep. He'd pulled away his mask in the night and it was buried somewhere in the blankets. He watched the boy and he looked out through the trees toward the road. This was not a safe place. They could be seen from the road now it was day. The boy turned in the blankets. Then he opened his eyes. Hi, Papa, he said.

I'm right here.

I know.

An hour later they were on the road. He pushed the cart and both he and the boy carried knapsacks. In the knapsacks were essential things. In case they had to abandon the cart and make a run for it. Clamped to the handle of the cart was a chrome motorcycle mirror that he used to watch the road behind them. He shifted the pack higher on his shoulders and looked out over the wasted country. The road was empty. Below in the little valley the still gray serpentine of a river. Motionless and precise. Along the shore a

burden of dead reeds. Are you okay? he said. The boy nodded. Then they set out along the blacktop in the gunmetal light, shuffling through the ash, each the other's world entire.

They crossed the river by an old concrete bridge and a few miles on they came upon a roadside gas station. They stood in the road and studied it. I think we should check it out, the man said. Take a look. The weeds they forded fell to dust about them. They crossed the broken asphalt apron and found the tank for the pumps. The cap was gone and the man dropped to his elbows to smell the pipe but the odor of gas was only a rumor, faint and stale. He stood and looked over the building. The pumps standing with their hoses oddly still in place. The windows intact. The door to the service bay was open and he went in. A standing metal toolbox against one wall. He went through the drawers but there was nothing there that he could use. Good half-inch drive sockets. A ratchet. He stood looking around the garage. A metal barrel full of trash. He went into the office. Dust and ash everywhere. The boy stood in the door. A metal desk, a cashregister. Some old automotive manuals, swollen and sodden. The linoleum was stained and curling from the leaking roof. He crossed to the desk and stood there. Then he picked up the phone and dialed the number of his father's house in that long ago. The boy watched him. What are you doing? he said.

On the far side of the river valley the road passed through a stark black burn. Charred and limbless trunks of trees stretching away on every side. Ash moving over the road and the sagging hands of blind wire strung from the blackened lightpoles whining thinly in the wind. A burned house in a clearing and beyond that a reach of meadowlands stark and gray and a raw red mudbank where a roadworks lay abandoned. Farther along were billboards advertising motels. Everything as it once had been save faded and weathered. At the top of the hill they stood in the cold and the wind, getting their breath. He looked at the boy. I'm all right, the boy said. The man put his hand on his shoulder and nodded toward the open country below them. He got the binoculars out of the cart and stood in the road and glassed the plain down there where the shape of a city stood in the grayness like a charcoal drawing sketched across the waste. Nothing to see. No smoke. Can I see? the boy said. Yes. Of course you can. The boy leaned on the cart and adjusted the wheel. What do you see? the man said. Nothing. He lowered the glasses. It's raining. Yes, the man said. I know.

The Children of Blood and Bone (2018), by Tomi Adeyemi

“Silence,” she orders. The last of the girls give me sympathetic looks. They rub their behinds, probably calculating how many lashes my own is about to get.

Twenty for ignoring the exercise . . . fifty for speaking out of turn . . . a hundred for almost getting us killed . . .

No. A hundred would be far too generous.

I stifle a sigh and brace myself for the sting. *It'll be quick*, I coach myself. *It'll be over before it—*

“Sit, Zélie.”

Mama Agba hands me a cup of tea and pours one for herself. The sweet scent wafts into my nose as the cup's warmth heats my hands.

I scrunch my eyebrows. “Did you poison this?”

The corners of Mama Agba's lips twitch, but she hides her amusement behind a stern face. I hide my own with a sip of the tea, savoring the splash of honey on my tongue. I turn the cup in my hands, fingering the lavender beads embedded in its rim. Mama had a cup like this—its beads were maroon and white, decorated in honor of Oya, the goddess of life and death.

For a moment the memory distracts me from Mama Agba's disappointment, but as the tea's flavor fades, the sour taste of guilt seeps back in. She shouldn't have to go through this. Not for me.

“I'm sorry.” I pick at the beads along the cup to avoid looking up. “I know . . . I know I don't make things easy for you.”

Like Yemi, Mama Agba is a *kosidán*, an Orishan who doesn't have the potential to do magic. Before the Raid we believed the gods chose who was born a *divîner* and who wasn't, but now that magic's gone, I don't understand why the distinction matters.

Free of the white hair of *divîners*, Mama Agba could blend in with the other Orishans, avoid the guards' torture. If she didn't associate with us, the guards might not bother her at all. Part of me wishes she would abandon us, spare herself the pain. With her tailoring skills, she could probably become a merchant, get her fair share of coin instead of having them all ripped away.

“You're starting to look more like her, did you know that?” Mama Agba takes a small sip of her tea and smiles. “The resemblance is frightening when you yell. You inherited her rage.”

My mouth falls open; Mama Agba doesn't like to talk of those we've lost.

Few of us do.

I hide my surprise with another taste of tea and nod. “I know.”

I don't remember when it happened, but the shift in Baba was undeniable. He stopped meeting my eyes, unable to look at me without seeing the face of his murdered wife.

“That's good.” Mama Agba's smile falters into a frown. “You were just a child during the Raid. I worried you'd forget.”

“I couldn't if I tried.” Not when Mama had a face like the sun. It's that face I try to remember.

Not the corpse with blood trickling down her neck.

"I know you fight for her." Mama Agba runs her hand through my white hair. "But the King is ruthless, Zélie. He would sooner have the entire kingdom slaughtered than tolerate divîner dissent. When your opponent has no honor, you must fight in different ways, smarter ways."

"Does one of those ways include smacking those bastards with my staff?"

Mama Agba chuckles, skin crinkling around her mahogany eyes. "Just promise me you'll be careful. Promise you'll choose the right moment to fight."

I grab Mama Agba's hands and bow my head, diving deep to show my respect. "I promise, Mama. I won't let you down again."

"Good, because I have something and I don't want to regret showing it to you."

Mama Agba reaches into her kaftan and pulls out a sleek black rod. She gives it a sharp flick. I jump back as the rod expands into a gleaming metal staff.

"Oh my gods," I breathe out, fighting the urge to clutch the masterpiece. Ancient symbols coat every meter of the black metal, each carving reminiscent of a lesson Mama Agba once taught. Like a bee to honey, my eyes find the *akofena* first, the crossed blades, the swords of war. *Courage does not always roar*, she said that day. *Valor does not always shine*. My eyes drift to the *akoma* beside the swords next, the heart of patience and tolerance. On that day . . . I'm almost positive I got a beating that day. Each symbol takes me back to another lesson, another story, another wisdom. I look at Mama, waiting. Is this a gift or what she'll use to beat me?

"Here." She places the smooth metal in my hand. Immediately, I sense its power. Iron-lined . . . weighted to crack skulls.

"Is this really happening?"

Mama nods. "You fought like a warrior today. You deserve to graduate."

I rise to twirl the staff and marvel at its strength. The metal cuts through the air like a knife, more lethal than any oak staff I've ever carved.