

## Curriculum Overview

### Year 8 – English 2020-2021



#### Rationale for Year 8 English

Studying English in Year 8 allows our students to practise, apply and hone the skills they first developed over the course of year 7. We continue to cover texts from a broad contextual background but build challenge by expecting students to be able to unpick underlying meanings and nuance with increasing ease, whilst searching for the subtleties of the writing. Students hone their own writing and speaking and listening skills as both authors and presenters, using a more complex range of genres and talking points. Topical social issues, significant contexts and different cultural ideologies are woven through students' studies of English

#### What will students learn and why?

Initially, students explore 'Nature Poetry' whilst simultaneously creating a poetry anthology. Students study the Romantics, such as Byron, Bysshe and Keats, which is aided by their prior knowledge of the Victorian period studied in Year 7 and furthered in their studies this year, as well as a host of modern poets, whose writing is based around the theme of nature. The unit covers a series of poetic forms and specific devices, and this in turn equips students with the knowledge to create their own anthology of poetry, practising and applying the stylistic devices demonstrated by the masters. By learning first-hand how to use poetic devices in their own poetry, students will naturally be able to spot them being used by others, making poetic analysis much more achievable and productive.

The subsequent topics of study are collectively entitled 'Displacement and Belonging'. Students study a modern novel: Benjamin Zephaniah's 'Refugee Boy' – a novel that covers a complex subject matter that allows for excellent discussion of topical concerns: social, political and theological subjects. Studies are related to analysis of theme, context and authorial intention. This is linked with a parallel transactional writing unit over the course of the two terms of study, allowing students to explore topical non-fiction writing, helping them to explore, develop and present their own opinions through a range of writing forms.

The next topic is entitled 'People that Changed the World'. This is focused primarily around the study of the 'young adult' edition of the autobiography 'I am Malala'. This topic develops comprehension, analytical ability and comparison skills through the form of literary non-fiction. Like the previous unit of study, the poignant context of the text and its interrelated topical issues allow for stimulating discussion. The study of Malala's autobiography is interleaved with lessons focusing on other key monumental individuals, both from real life (whose stories are explored through a variety of non-fiction mediums) and literary characters that have had a significant impact. These lessons are closely linked to transactional writing.

Students then focus on the prevailing theme of 'power' through the study of 'Animal Farm'. Students study Orwell's political intentions and his expression of them through allegory and satire. This challenging topic will accentuate the importance of contextual knowledge and its influence on how a text is produced and received. This topic is also interleaved with a series of topic-specific transactional writing lessons to develop students' appreciation and application of non-fiction.

Finally, students study their first Shakespeare play, *Romeo and Juliet*. Studying Shakespeare is an essential component of literary studies and the subject as a whole, rooted as his texts are in the source genre of Tragedy. Students are engaged through the thought-provoking details of plot, and are guided through the challenging language variation, developing an appreciation of drama and Shakespeare's seminal art. This topic is underpinned by speaking and listening, allowing students to access the play in its natural form.

How will students learn?

Students will develop a deeper understanding of topics by interleaving skills and providing more time to explore and digest the content of each unit. The texts and units of study ensure that students are exposed to high standards of literature to model and inspire their own writing. Throughout the academic year, students will have the opportunity to read and write poetry and prose. Knowledge organisers are also provided for every assessed topic as a revision resource of the minimum required knowledge and students are tested on this in class. Teaching techniques such as: retrieval, modelling and elaboration are used to improve understanding and encoding of information into the long-term memory. Low stakes-testing in the form of vocabulary tests are used every term to expand students' vocabulary and improve their confidence.

By studying a modern novel, in addition to literary heritage texts and topical non-fiction literature, students are both engaged and challenged by the high-value literature that runs throughout Year 8. We end the year by exploring Shakespeare: by this stage, students are able to cope with the complex subject matter of Shakespearean Tragedy. There is also a focus on acting and performance, which the students relish.

How will students be assessed?

Assessment has been mapped out to ensure students are assessed on a broad range of content and skills with appropriate differentiation and challenge as they progress throughout KS3. Students are tested three times in the year: three comprehensive reading and writing papers, which test the relevant key skills taught across the year. Students will experience assessment in literary and non-fiction reading as well as non-fiction and imaginative writing. The first assessment will combine Nature Poetry and imaginative writing with the expectation that students draft an extended essay response and short story narrative. Later in the year, students will undertake an exam in 21<sup>st</sup> century non-fiction and transactional writing. The reading section will include a combination of questions styles, encouraging students to identify, explain and analyse. The writing section will require students to respond a non-fiction form using the correct tone, style and register. Finally, students will end the year completing an extract and whole text question in response to 'Animal Farm' and an imaginative writing assessment.

What is the aim for learners by the end of the year in comparison to the previous year?

By the end of Year 8, we aim to have created a cohort of students who can confidently and independently demonstrate the skills of comprehension, analysis and in some cases, critical interpretation, in addition to writing for a range of contexts and forms. We continue the momentum by ensuring the standards of the texts studied are maintained, and explore literary periods that are both new and exciting, from Shakespeare to the modern day refugee crisis. It is important that students can recognise the relevance of the texts they study as well as the texts they write, so by making clear links to topical social and historical contexts, it allows for an examination of social, political and ideological change. Year 8 allows us to show to our students the importance of our subject and where their newly refined skills could take them in the wider world.