

GCSE English Literature

Essay Plans · A* Frameworks

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6 entries

Ready-to-use, top-grade essay skeletons for the most commonly set AQA English Literature tasks. Each plan gives a CONCEPTUALISED THESIS (a precise argument, not a description), three analytical points building toward it, the short quotations that anchor each point, the AO3 context to weave in (not bolt on), and a conclusion that develops rather than repeats. Use these as scaffolds: learn the thesis line and the anchor quotations, then write the analysis in your own words under timed conditions. AOs targeted: AO1 (argument + textual reference), AO2 (analysis of method), AO3 (context).

Macbeth · Shakespeare (AQA Paper 1, Section A)

How does Shakespeare present ambition as a destructive force in Macbeth?

THESIS. Shakespeare presents ambition not as a flaw Macbeth possesses but as a force that, once unleashed, consumes conscience, masculinity and finally identity itself - a warning to a Jacobean audience about the cost of disturbing God's order.

POINT 1 - ambition awakened. The aside "vaulting ambition" and Macbeth's "horrid image" show ambition arriving as an external, almost demonic temptation he recognises as wrong even as he yields to it. *Method:* soliloquy / aside reveals inner conflict.

POINT 2 - ambition corrupting. "Stars, hide your fires" - the imperative shows Macbeth actively choosing darkness; by Act 3 ambition has become paranoia ("full of scorpions is my mind"), the metaphor showing self-inflicted torment.

POINT 3 - ambition self-destructing. "Tomorrow and tomorrow" - the weary repetition and metaphor of life as "a brief candle" show ambition has hollowed him into nihilism; he has gained the crown and lost all meaning.

AO3 (woven). Divine Right of Kings and the Great Chain of Being - regicide is cosmic crime; written for James I (Gunpowder Plot, 1605, witchcraft fears) so the play endorses order and punishes the usurper.

CONCLUSION. Ambition is destructive precisely because it is presented as *moral* decay, not mere defeat: Macbeth's tragedy is that he sees his own damnation and proceeds anyway.

Romeo and Juliet · Shakespeare (AQA Paper 1, Section A)

How does Shakespeare present conflict in Romeo and Juliet?

THESIS. Shakespeare presents conflict as both public and private - the inherited feud, the clash between love and hate, and the internal struggle between desire and duty - ultimately arguing that it is the older generation's hatred, not the lovers, that is to blame.

POINT 1 - civic / generational conflict. The Prince's "civil blood makes civil hands unclean" - the oxymoronic phrasing shows a society at war with itself; the feud is "ancient", inherited rather than chosen.

POINT 2 - love versus hate. The oxymorons of "loving hate" and "brawling love" embody the central conflict; the structural placing of the lovers' meeting against Tybalt's rage stages love as the casualty of hatred.

POINT 3 - internal conflict. Romeo's "O, I am fortune's fool" after killing Tybalt shows conflict turned inward - loyalty to Juliet versus the masculine code of honour and revenge.

AO3 (woven). Elizabethan patriarchy and the honour code; the duty of vengeance and arranged marriage (Juliet / Paris); a society where public male violence and family loyalty override individual feeling.

CONCLUSION. The "glooming peace" of the ending suggests conflict is only resolved through sacrifice: Shakespeare indicts the feud itself, making the young the victims of their elders' hate.

A Christmas Carol · Dickens (AQA Paper 1, Section B)

How does Dickens present the importance of redemption in A Christmas Carol?

THESIS. Dickens presents redemption as both possible and urgent: Scrooge's transformation argues that no individual is beyond reform, and that the redemption of the rich is a moral and social duty toward the poor.

POINT 1 - the unredeemed man. "Solitary as an oyster", "tight-fisted" - the simile and adjective establish Scrooge as closed, cold and isolated; the pathetic-fallacy cold that "carried his own low temperature always about with him" externalises his moral state.

POINT 2 - the catalyst for change. Marley's chains "I forged in life" and the vision of Ignorance and Want force Scrooge (and the reader) to confront consequence; redemption is shown to require fear, memory and pity.

POINT 3 - redemption achieved. "I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel" - the similes and exclamatory tone show joyful rebirth; his raising Bob's salary makes redemption ACTIVE and social, not merely felt.

AO3 (woven). Victorian poverty, the 1834 Poor Law and workhouses; Dickens's own experience; the novella as a deliberate allegory urging the wealthy reader to charitable social responsibility.

CONCLUSION. Scrooge's redemption matters because Dickens makes it a model: if the worst miser can change, the reader has no excuse not to, making personal redemption a public argument.

An Inspector Calls · Priestley (AQA Paper 2, Section A)

How does Priestley present ideas about responsibility in An Inspector Calls?

THESIS. Priestley presents responsibility as collective and inescapable: through the Inspector he argues that society is "members of one body", and through the generational divide he locates hope for social change in the young.

POINT 1 - the capitalist refusal. Birling's "a man has to mind his own business" and "community and all that nonsense" - the dismissive register and dramatic irony (Titanic, war) discredit individualism before the audience.

POINT 2 - the socialist message. The Inspector's "We are members of one body" and "fire and blood and anguish" - the collective pronoun and biblical, prophetic register turn the play into a warning; he is Priestley's mouthpiece.

POINT 3 - generational hope. Sheila's "these girls aren't cheap labour, they're people" and Eric's guilt show the young ACCEPTING responsibility, while the elders learn "nothing" - structure (the final phone call) reopens judgement.

AO3 (woven). Written 1945, set 1912 - dramatic irony from hindsight; post-war appetite for the welfare state; Priestley's socialism versus Edwardian class complacency.

CONCLUSION. Responsibility is presented as a choice the audience must make: the cyclical ending implies that those who refuse to learn will repeat the catastrophe.

Power and Conflict Poetry · Pairings (AQA Paper 2, Section B)

Compare how poets present the effects of power / conflict in two Power and Conflict poems.

HOW THE COMPARISON IS MARKED. One named poem is given; YOU choose the second. Pick for CONTRAST or development of idea, structure the essay by THEME (not poem-by-poem), and compare in every paragraph ("whereas", "similarly").

PAIRING A - the arrogance of power: Ozymandias / My Last Duchess. Both expose tyrants undone by their own pride. "sneer of cold command" (Shelley) versus "I gave commands" (Browning); Shelley's ironic ruin shows power erased by time, Browning's dramatic monologue shows power preserved yet self-incriminating.

PAIRING B - the suffering of soldiers: Exposure / Bayonet Charge. Both strip war of glory. Owen's "merciless iced east winds" makes nature the enemy and the refrain "But nothing happens" enacts futility; Hughes's "cold clockwork of the stars" and the soldier's lost "king, honour, human dignity" show patriotism collapsing into raw fear.

PAIRING C - the cost on the individual: Remains / War Photographer. Both explore trauma's aftermath. "his bloody life in my bloody hands" (colloquial, haunting repetition) versus "running children in a nightmare heat" - both show conflict pursuing the survivor home.

AO3 (woven, brief). Romantic critique of tyranny (Shelley); WW1 reality versus propaganda (Owen); modern conflict and PTSD (Armitage); the bystander's guilt (Duffy).

CONCLUSION TIP. End on the SHARED idea refined - e.g. that power is ultimately impermanent, or that conflict's deepest wounds are psychological.

Unseen Poetry · Method (AQA Paper 2, Section C)

Unseen poetry: how to approach Q1 (single poem) and Q2 (comparison of methods).

READING THE UNSEEN (5 mins). Read twice. Ask: WHAT is the situation, HOW does the speaker FEEL, and where does the feeling SHIFT? Mark the volta (turn), the title, and the last line - meaning usually lives there.

Q1 SKELETON (24 marks - on the poem itself). THESIS naming the poem's central feeling and how attitude develops. *Point 1:* opening tone + a key image (analyse a single word's connotations). *Point 2:* the SHIFT - track how language / tone changes. *Point 3:* form / structure (stanza shape, rhyme, enjambment, the final line) and its effect. CONCLUSION: the overall message.

Q2 SKELETON (8 marks - compare METHODS of the two poems). This is a comparison of TECHNIQUE, not content. One clear similarity or difference in method. Template: "Both poets use [method] to convey [feeling], but whereas A uses X to suggest..., B uses Y to suggest..." Cover ONE strong comparison well rather than three thin ones.

METHOD TERMS TO REACH FOR. Imagery, metaphor, personification, semantic field, tone, enjambment / caesura, structure, volta, first-person voice, repetition - always tied to EFFECT.

GOLDEN RULE. No context is needed or rewarded for unseen poetry (no AO3) - spend every second on the words on the page and what they make the reader feel.