



So we beat on, boats against the  
current, borne back ceaselessly  
into the past.

- F. Scott Fitzgerald The Great  
Gatsby

What a piece of work is a man! How noble in  
reason! how infinite in faculty

-William Shakespeare Hamlet

When I'm old... when I've forgotten  
my own face, the shape of my hands,  
or what those hands did. I will  
remember your face . Your hands.  
And that's enough for me. That's  
enough.

—Jez Butterworth The Ferryman

## A-level English Literature



## Why study Literature?

**A scientist would say:**

- **It's a facilitating subject**
- **It's highly thought of by all universities**
- **It is the ideal partner of other subjects for Arts routes, Science routes, Engineering, Law, Politics, etc**
- **It ensures that you have all paths left open to you for University**
- **It provides you with a good background in research skills and independent study**
- **It ensures your ability to think analytically and structure an argument**

**But...**

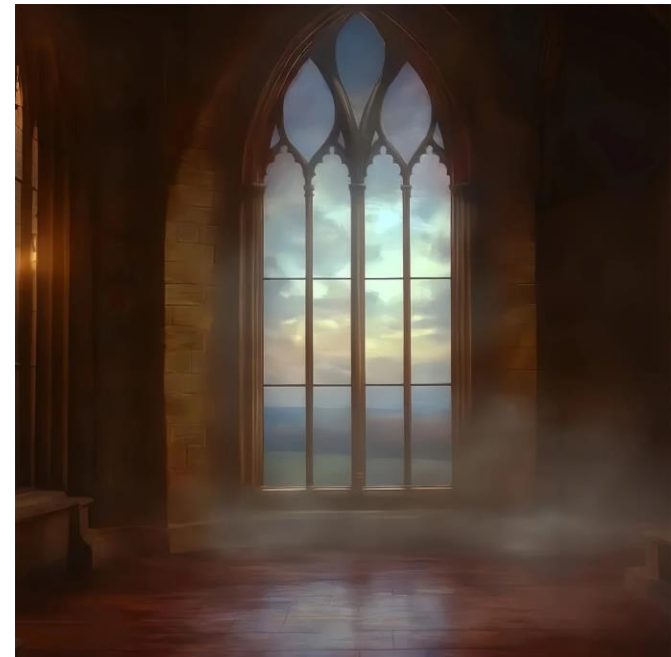
*Books are sometimes windows, offering views of the world that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange.*

*These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author.*

*When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror.*

*Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience.*

**Rudine Sims Bishop**





## How are you assessed?

<b>Drama and Poetry</b> <b>Hamlet, Chaucer and Ibsen</b>	<b>2.5 hours</b> <b>(60 marks)</b>	<b>40% of total</b> <b>A Level</b>
<b>American Literature</b> <b>The Great Gatsby and The</b> <b>Grapes of Wrath</b> <b>+ unseen component</b>	<b>2.5 hours</b> <b>(60 marks)</b>	<b>40% of total</b> <b>A Level</b>
<b>Literature post-1900</b> <b>Yeats' poetry, The</b> <b>Ferryman and Dubliners</b> <b><u>Coursework</u></b>	<b>(40 marks)</b>	<b>20% of total</b> <b>A Level</b>

# Results

Headline	2024	2025	National
Entries	15	15	
%A*/A	26	35	24.6
%A*-B	80	85	31
%A*-C	100	92 (1 student)	81.7



## □ Year 12:

### ● Term 1

- The Merchant's Tale and Prologue
- The Great Gatsby

### ● Term 2

- The Grapes of Wrath
- Unseen American
- Hamlet

### ● Term 3

- Hamlet
- Coursework: Yeats' poetry
- Coursework: Dubliners

## ● Year 13:

### ←Term 1

- ↓ Coursework: Dubliners and The Ferryman
- ↓ Coursework: Yeats
- ↓ A Doll's House
- ↓ Unseen American

### ←Term 2

- ↓ Revision- all texts

### ←Term 3

- ↓ Revision- all texts
- ↓ Exams

**Coursework is 20%**



# BEECHEN CLIFF

- The Merchant's Tale and Prologue is the rather lewd story of an old man who marries a young woman out of lust and is cuckolded.
- January, a 60-year-old knight, convinces himself that the path to happiness must be through marriage.
- Despite the warnings of other men who warn him that a wife will prove his 'purgatorie', he chooses to wed the aptly named May, whose youthful beauty is exchanged for the old knight's status and wealth.
- January creates a garden where they may perform acts not appropriate in the bedroom and finds himself struck blind- perhaps as punishment for his immoral thoughts!
- Damyan and May plot to use January's blindness as a means of acting out their lust for one another.
- The Gods, Pluto and Proserpina intervene- grant May (and all women after her) the ability to talk her way out of trouble and Pluto gives January his sight back.





# BEECHEN CLIFF

## A Doll's House

Ibsen's play is a consideration of the institution of marriage. Unlike *The Merchant's Tale*, this is the story of a wife who is fiercely dedicated to supporting her husband and ensuring that she allows him to keep his dignity intact by keeping this a secret.

The secret haunts her and this play reveals the strength in women but also the great barriers that can exist even within what we make think of as our closest relationships.







## BEECHEN CLIFF

Widely recognised as the epitome of the 'Great American Novel', Fitzgerald's examination of the decadence of the Jazz Era following the Economic Boom in 1920's America is a masterpiece of modernism and lyricism.

Combining romantic imagery and a modernist narrative perspective, Fitzgerald's novel examines the rise and fall of American idealism to become a cautionary tale examining the death of the American Dream.

Fitzgerald's characters are brilliantly enigmatic and yet painted so vividly you can't help but convince yourself you've understood them.





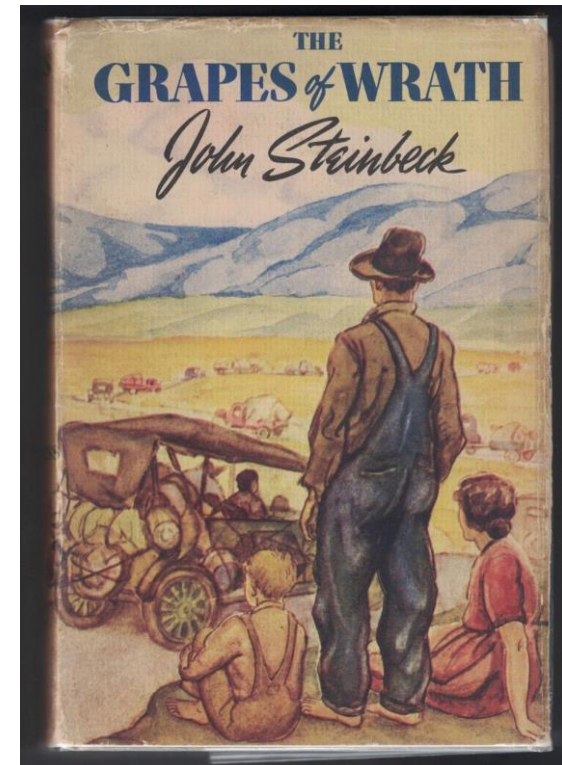
## BEECHEN CLIFF

Following on from Fitzgerald's examination of Jazz Era 'Boom' time America, Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* considers the harrowing social effects of the economic crash in 1929.

In contrast to Fitzgerald's modernism and romanticism, Steinbeck's text is a realistic depiction of the lives of the tenant farmers forced out of their homes and into the difficult life of migrant work.

Steinbeck wrote: "I want to put a tag of shame on the greedy bastards who are responsible for this [the Great Depression and its effects]." He famously said, "I've done my damndest to rip a reader's nerves to rags."

Steinbeck's description is incredibly beautiful and will stick with you for the rest of your lives.





## BEECHEN CLIFF

Hamlet is an examination of the human condition – asking questions about what it means to be a human being and how we find a place in the world- as well as a consideration of the power of the human mind.

Mourning the loss of his father and the speedy remarriage of his mother to his uncle, Hamlet finds himself disgusted by the immorality of the world around him and

Thousands, if not millions, of critics have sought to define his character and yet he refuses to be pinned down. In one scene a tragic hero, another a scorned lover, another a self-lacerating melancholic boy, and another a witty clown, Hamlet's character has taken on a life beyond the play itself.

An odd sort of bildungsroman, we see Hamlet transform from a sympathetic, although rather introspective, boy to a malicious, revenge hero, losing almost all aspects of his character that made him so endearing.

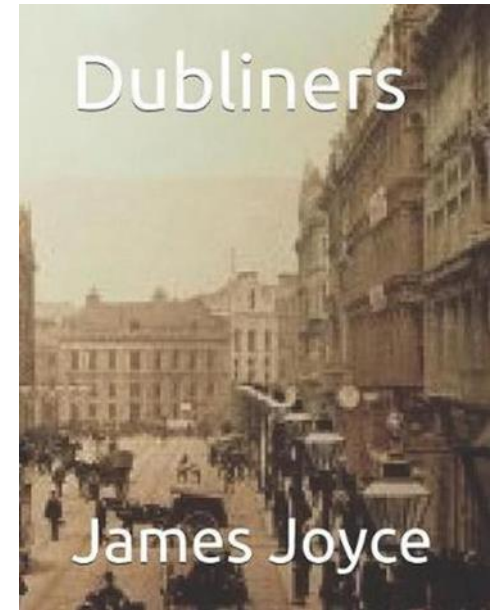




## BEECHEN CLIFF

Joyce's modernist collection of short stories examines the psyche of the Irish people following hundreds of years of colonisation, the decimating effects on population of The Famine and the choke hold of the Catholic Church that dictated every aspect of Irish life.

Joyce's aim of allowing the Irish people to have 'one good look at themselves in [his] nicely polished looking-glass' is very much achieved and even caused him to reflect on the more positive aspects of Irish life- adding a more hopeful depiction of Irish life in his final short story in the collection -The Dead.





## BEECHEN CLIFF

Like Joyce, Yeats lived in a tumultuous era in Irish History but unlike Joyce, he sought to define the Irish identity by looking to the past.

His early compilation of folklore sought to teach a literary history that had been suppressed by British rule, and his early poems were odes to the beauty and mystery of the Irish countryside. This work frequently integrated references to myths and mythic figures, including Oisín and Cú Chulainn.

Yeats believed that art and politics were intrinsically linked and used his writing to express his attitudes toward Irish politics, as well as to educate his readers about Irish cultural history.

Yeats believed that art could serve a political function: poems could both critique and comment on political events, as well as educate and inform a population.

### EASTER, 1916

I HAVE met them at close of day  
Coming with vivid faces  
From counter or desk among grey  
Eighteenth-century houses.  
I have passed with a nod of the head  
Or polite meaningless words,  
Or have lingered awhile and said  
Polite meaningless words,  
And thought before I had done  
Of a mocking tale or a gibe  
To please a companion  
Around the fire at the club,  
Being certain that they and I  
But lived where motley is worn:  
All changed, changed utterly:  
A terrible beauty is born.



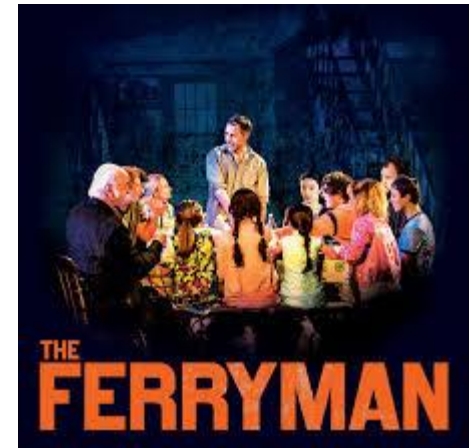


## BEECHEN CLIFF

Jez Butterworth's *The Ferryman* is an exciting play that considers the effects of The Troubles in Northern Ireland on a family living in Co. Armagh in 1981. In equal parts joyful and harrowing, *The Ferryman* will make you love everyone of the Carney clan and will likely make you want to throw your text at the wall when you've finished reading it.

Reading it as a class is the most joyful experience as you see Jez's mastery of Northern Irish dialect when each student takes on their character with ease.

In the words of one of last year's year 13's 'It's bangin'.'





## How do they all fit together?

### Style and universal themes

Gatsby – Realism, Romanticism, Naturalism, Modernism

Grapes of Wrath- Naturalism

A Doll's House-Realism

The Ferryman-Realism and Naturalism

Dubliners-Realism

Yeats-Romanticism and Modernism

### Universal themes

Love, marriage, ambition, existentialism, family relationships, war, conflict, hope, warmth, the importance of relationships and knowing yourself



# BEECHEN CLIFF

## Beyond the classroom support:

## Revision booklets Vocabulary lists Reading booklets of literary criticism

### Some critical readings of 'Gatsby'

1. James E Miller jr. The Fictional Technique of F Scott Fitzgerald (1957) 65-67, 71 'icon Critical Guide']

*A Structuralist and Reader-Response reading: Miller discusses the form and function of a 'modernist novel'. He undertakes a key discussion of Nick's first person narration – eye witness accounts and 'reconstruction' of events from explicit or implied sources or from Nick's imagination, also reporting another narrative. Miller discusses the alteration of the chronological narrative – the 'realism' of getting to know someone as you night in real life – moving from first impressions to more detailed points.....*

There are three methods by which Nick Carraway informs the reader of what is happening or what has happened in Gatsby: most frequently he presents his own eye-witness accounts of other people, sometimes in their own words, sometimes his own, and sometimes he reconstructs an event from various sources – newspapers, servants, his own imagination – but presents his version as a connected narrative. He is initially placed on the edge of the story, but through Jordan... Nick becomes... involved in Gatsby's pursuit of Daisy, the material symbol of his dream....

Fitzgerald's use of modified first person enables him to avoid 'the large false face peering around the corner of a character's head' (Fitzgerald – letters 1934) and achieve a realism impossible to an 'omniscient' author... through Nick, Fitzgerald places the reader in direct touch with the action, eliminating himself as the author entirely.... After his brief but dramatically impressive first glimpse of Gatsby, Fitzgerald works 'backwards and forwards' over his past until the complete portrait finally emerges at the end of the book.'

2. Victor A Donyo 'Patterns in The Great Gatsby' (1969) [82 - 8]

Donyo applies 'New Criticism' to the patterns and unity of the book, praised much by New Critics. He looks for 'code's and 'leitmotifs' in the book, but does not go as far as some new critics in suggesting that one does not need to take the author's intentions (expressed or inferred) into account, as some New Critics did, calling this the 'intentional fallacy'. Donyo relates patterns he finds in Gatsby to Fitzgerald's revisions and concludes he fulfilled his intention to produce 'a consciously artistic achievement'. Donyo uses formalist approaches that were dominant in criticism of the 1960s.

'Several patterns of the novel are obvious. The first three chapters present the different settings and social groupings of three evenings. Fitzgerald calls attention to this pattern when he has Nick say: 'Reading over what I have written so far I see I have given the impression that the events of three nights several weeks apart were all that absorbed me'. Similarly, the patterning presents two very different characters, George Wilson and Tom Buchanan, as cuckolded husbands: 'I stared at him and then at Tom, who had made a parallel discovery less than an hour before'. Clearly Fitzgerald is aware of these patterns and wants the reader to share the awareness.

Fitzgerald indicates the relationship between sense by presenting for example the same tableau twice: Daisy and Jordan both in white (in chapter 1) when Nick renews his acquaintance, the second when Gatsby intends to reclaim Daisy. In the later scene Jordan and Daisy say together 'We can't move', in the first Daisy says as her first direct statement in the novel 'I'm p-paralyzed with happiness'. This statement however was inserted after the second

### The Great Gatsby: F. Scott Fitzgerald

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similar thing. The reader's attitude is more frequently shaped by an ironic juxtaposition of such themes as romantic idealization and realistic disillusionment.

Nick's scornful attitude toward romance primarily refers to the love of Gatsby for Daisy, but the situation parallels Myrtle's first meeting with Tom and reflects a disillusioned view of such an event. Myrtle's desperate romanticism and Nick's uncomfortable realism... is juxtaposed to and qualifies the other. A similar attempt to influence the reader's attitudes occurs with analogous scenes in the codas of chapters V and VIII... In each case, Nick sees a tableau of Daisy sitting and talking with a man holding her hand. Fitzgerald balances the moment of romantic bliss (when G has just re-won Daisy and is experiencing sublime happiness) with a decidedly realistic description of Daisy after the auto accident sitting with Tom; 'He was talking intently across the table at her and in his earnestness his hand had fallen upon and covered her own'. This second scene signals Gatsby's loss of Daisy. I addition, the repetition destroys the uniqueness of Gatsby's moment of happiness and thereby makes the reader question the validity of his romantic idealization.

The reader's attitude toward romantic idealisation and realistic disillusionment is also shaped by the elaborate patterning of a man and woman kissing.... The presentation of the 'kiss at her cheek' of the movie director and his star (LV) ... relates to Nick's description of Gatsby kissing Daisy in the coda of the same chapter, with its dominant tone of romantic idealisation, culminating in the flower simile: 'At his lips touch she blossomed for him like a flower.' The idealization is touching, but Nick's sarcastic insertions and similar incidents qualify the reader's response. A similar incident from a less romantic point of view occurs in the coda of chapter IV between Nick and Jordan, where Nick reserved his emotional commitment. Even Nick calls attention to the relationship between the kisses by saying 'Unlike Gatsby...'

It is clear that Fitzgerald fulfilled his intention to 'write a 'consciously artistic achievement', and a knowledge of the ways in which the novel is 'intricately patterned' from minor details up to large structural units partially explains how Fitzgerald created a novel that is 'something extraordinary and beautiful and simple' (Brucoli and Duggan 1980)

2. Leyland J Person "Herstory" and Daisy Buchanan' in 'American Literature'(1978/9):116, 17, 118, 121

Person attempts to 'win back' focus on Daisy. As a Feminist reading, it takes the view that Daisy is demonised by Nick and disempowered by Gatsby, who takes her story and makes it his and then into history; creating a platonic ideal for her that no human could live up to. Nick does the same and Person suggests he makes her 'stand for the corruption of the American dream'. Daisy's tale has its own dream and desires, and Person views her as ultimately Gatsby's 'femle double'. Person takes a psychoanalytic approach much favoured in the 1970s.

Few (male) critics write about Daisy without entering the unofficial competition of maligning her character. Marjorie Bewley refers to her 'vicious emptiness', Alfred Kazin judges her 'vulgar and inhuman', finally Leslie Fiedler sees her as 'a dark destroyer, a purveyor of 'corruption and death' and 'the first notable anti-virgin of our fiction, the prototype of the blasphemous portraits of Fair Goddess as bitch in which C20th fiction abounds'. (1967) Such an easy polarization into Good Boy/Bad Girl however, arises from a kind of critical double standard, Daisy in fact is more victim than victimizer; she is victim first of Tom's 'cruel' power, but then of Gatsby's increasingly depersonalised vision of her. She becomes the unwitting 'grail' in Gatsby's adolescent quest to remain faithful to his seventeen-year-old conception of self. Thus, Daisy's reputed failure of Gatsby is inevitable; no woman, no human being, could ever

### American concepts

#### Individualism:

- > Idea that everyone is a self-made man.
- > Selfish concept- rugged individualism.
- > There is an ambition, not just to be better, but the best at all costs.
- > They celebrate ambition and achievement.

#### American Dream:

- > The dream is only accessible for those who already obtain a position of status
- > It is closely associated with individualism.
- > Illusion that anyone can become whatever they want to, through hard work and determination.
- > Without the individual, there is no dream- ironic as Gatsby loses himself whilst trying to chase a dream; link this to his naivety.

#### Cultural diversity:

- > Melting pot theory- Immigrants assimilating into American culture and becoming 'American.'
- > There are many mulatto people- mixed race.
- > Society welcomes legal immigrants of diverse backgrounds.
- > Salad Bowl theory- Immigrants retain their separate identities but adopt a hyphenated American name i.e. Chi-Chican (Chinese-American).

#### Tolerance:

- > Religious tolerance is one of the first principles of American life.
- > Issues on gender, race and sexual orientation are on the rise.

### American History Timeline 1860-1940

#### Native American Period (Freedom)

- > Oral tradition of songs and stories but original authors remained anonymous; written accounts only came after colonisation.
- > Inclusion of creation stories, myths and totems.
- > Archetypes of trickster and conjurer characters.
- > Literature focused on the natural world being sacred and the importance of land space.
- > Many relied on supernatural stories to explore the nature of human behaviour.
- > There was a heavy emphasis on explaining why the world was they way it is; they wanted to make sense of the world.

#### Colonial Period (1620-1750)

- > Colonists arrived, created villages, towns and established new governments.
- > Colonists enforced old ways of Europe onto American land.
- > Immigrants included French, Swedes, Dutch, Germans, Scot-Irish, Spanish and Africans (slaves).
- > Most immigrants did not consider themselves American until mid-1700s





## Beyond the classroom

- Students have completed research projects on an additional text from American Literature 1880-1940 and held a symposium in which they taught one another about their texts to provide a wider overview of American Literature as a whole for unseen literature.
- We run after school masterclasses focused on key skills and texts in the run up to mocks and exams run by a rotation of members from the faculty.
- Members of the faculty give lectures on other key texts and genres e.g. the modernist novel in America, Senecan revenge tragedy to widen students understanding of texts both in and beyond the curriculum.
- Hamlet viewing Wednesdays- a key scene is discussed at the start of the session and then students watch a section of a performance of approx. 30 minutes including this scene and discuss the staging of it in comparison with other productions as well as the dramatic effects of the performance itself.



# BEECHEN CLIFF

## **Beyond the classroom**

- Previous trips to lectures in Cambridge and Birmingham
- Stratford Upon Avon for lectures on Hamlet
- American Museum lecture on American Literature and context
- Theatre trips



# BEECHEN CLIFF

## Entry Requirements and support

At least 6 in English Language and English Literature at GCSE

Love of reading

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