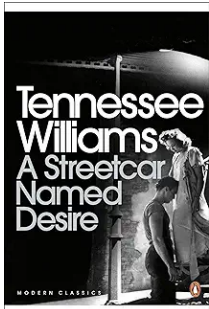




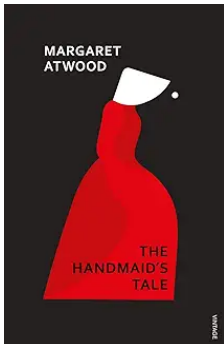
A level English Literature Transition Tasks

In preparation for your new course you must be familiar with the set texts. We will not read them in their entirety in class. Therefore, between now and September you must buy and read the following texts. Please ensure that you buy the correct versions of texts, as this will make looking for quotations easier in class

A Streetcar Named Desire by Tennessee Williams (Modern Classics)



The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood (Vintage)

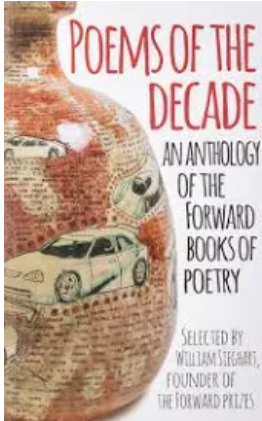


Frankenstein by Mary Shelley (Oxford World's Classics)





The Poems of the Decade: An Anthology of the Forward Books of Poetry. (to buy only)



Answer the following questions on each text.

A Streetcar Named Desire by Tennessee Williams

- Who was Tennessee Williams? Produce a short biography of his life
- Research the 'New America'
- What was the American Civil War about? What divisions did it create?
- What is a 'Southern Belle'?

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood

- Who was Margaret Atwood? Produce a short biography of her life
- Why might the novel be classed as 'speculative fiction'?
- What does Puritanism mean and how does it apply to the text?

Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus by Mary Shelley

- When did The French Revolution take place?
- What is 'galvanism'? How is it applicable to Frankenstein?
- What is the Age of Enlightenment?
- What is Romanticism?
- What is Physiognomy?
- Who wrote Paradise Lost and what is it about?
- What is the story of Prometheus?
- What loss had Mary Shelley experienced in her life?

Literary Criticism

1. Research the following schools of thought
 - Marxist literary criticism
 - Feminist literary criticism
 - Psychoanalytic theory
 - Post-colonial theory



2. Apply the above theory to the attached extract from *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith.

Consider:

- How a Marxist critic would read this.
- How a feminist critic would read this.
- How a psychologist would read this.
- How a post-colonialist would read this.

In this extract, fifteen year old Irie Irie is obsessed with her weight and general appearance, mostly because she is also obsessed with Millat Iqbal. Unfortunately for Irie, Millat regards her as his most important friend, and nothing more. To attract Millat, Irie gets her hair straightened and dyed red, an experiment that ends with most



11 The Miseducation of Irie Jones

There was a lamp-post, equidistant from the Jones house and Glenard Oak Comprehensive, that had begun to appear in Irie's dreams. Not the lamp-post exactly, but a small, handmade advert which was sellotaped round its girth at eye level. It said:

LOSE WEIGHT TO EARN MONEY
081 555 6752

Now, Irie Jones, aged fifteen, was big. The European proportions of Clara's figure had skipped a generation, and she was landed instead with Hortense's substantial Jamaican frame, loaded with pineapples, mangoes and guavas; the girl had weight; big tits, big butt, big hips, big thighs, big teeth. She was thirteen stone and had thirteen pounds in her savings account. She knew she was the target audience (if ever there was one), she knew full well, as she trudged schoolwards, mouth full of doughnut, hugging her spare tyres, that the advert was speaking to her. It was *speaking* to her. LOSE WEIGHT (it was saying) TO EARN MONEY. You, you, *you*, Miss Jones, with your strategically placed arms and cardigan, tied around the arse (the endless mystery: how to diminish that swollen enormity, the Jamaican posterior?), with your belly-reducing knickers and breast-reducing bra, with your meticulous lycra corseting – the much lauded nineties answer to whalebone – with your elasticated waists. She knew the advert was talking to *her*. But she didn't know quite what it was saying. What were we talking about here? Sponsored slim? The earning capacity of thin people? Or something altogether more Jacobean, the brain-child of some sordid Willesden Shylock, a pound of flesh for a pound of gold: *meat for money?*

Rapid. Eye. Movement. Sometimes she'd be walking through school in a bikini with the lamp-post enigma written in chalk over her brown bulges, over her various ledges (shelf space for books, cups of tea, baskets or, more to the point, children, bags of fruit, buckets of water), ledges genetically designed with another country in mind, another climate. Other times, the sponsored slim dream: knocking on door after door, butt-naked with a clipboard, drenched in sunlight, trying to encourage old men to pinch-an-inch and pledge-a-pound. Worst times? Tearing off loose, white-flecked flesh and packing it into those old curvaceous Coke bottles; she is carrying them to the corner shop, passing them over a counter; and Millat is the bindi-wearing, V-necked corner shopkeeper, he



is adding them up, grudgingly opening the till with blood-stained paws, handing over the cash. *A little Caribbean flesh for a little English change.*

Irie Jones was obsessed. Occasionally her worried mother cornered her in the hallway before she slunk out of the door, picked at her elaborate corsetry, asked, 'What's up with you? What in the Lord's name are you wearing? How can you breathe? Irie, my love, you're fine – you're just built like an honest-to-God Bowden – don't you know you're fine?'

But Irie didn't know she was fine. There was England, a gigantic mirror, and there was Irie, without reflection. A stranger in a stranger land.

Nightmares and daydreams, on the bus, in the bath, in class. Before. After. Before. After. Before. *After.* The mantra of the make-over junkie, sucking it in, letting it out; unwilling to settle for genetic fate; waiting instead for her transformation from Jamaican hourglass heavy with the sands that gather round Dunn River Falls, to *English Rose* – oh, you know her – she's a slender, delicate thing not made for the hot suns, a surfboard rippled by the wave:



Mrs Olive Roody, English teacher and expert doodle-spotter at distances of up to twenty yards, reached over her desk to Irie's exercise book and tore out the piece of paper in question. Looked dubiously at it. Then inquired with melodious Scottish emphasis, 'Before and after *what?*'

'Er... what?'

'Before and after *what?*'

'Oh. Nothing, Miss.'

'Nothing? Oh, come now, Ms Jones. No need for modesty. It is obviously more interesting than Sonnet 127.'

'Nothing. It's *nothing.*'

'Absolutely certain? You don't wish to delay the class any more? Because... some of the class need to listen to – *nae*, are even a wee bit *interested*



in – what I have to say. So if you could spare some time from your dooodling-’

No one but no one said ‘doodling’ like Olive Roody.

‘-and join the rest of us, we’ll continue. Well?’

‘Well what?’

‘Can you? Spare the time?’

‘Yes, Mrs Roody.’

‘Oh, *good*. That’s cheered me up. Sonnet 127, please.’

‘*In the old age black was not counted fair,*’ continued Francis Stone in the catatonic drone with which students read Elizabethan verse. ‘*Or if it were, it bore not beauty’s name.*’

Irie put her right hand on her stomach, sucked in and tried to catch Millat’s eye. But Millat was busy showing pretty Nikki Tyler how he could manipulate his tongue into a narrow roll, a flute. Nikki Tyler was showing him how the lobes of her ears were attached to the side of her head rather than loose. Flirtatious remnants of this morning’s science lesson: *Inherited characteristics. Part One (a)*. Loose. Attached. Rolled. Flat. Blue eye. Brown eye. Before. After.

‘*Therefore my mistress’ eyes are raven black, her brows so suited, and they mourners seem... My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun; Coral is far more red than her lips’ red; If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun.. .*’

Puberty, real full-blown puberty (not the slight mound of a breast, or the shadowy emergence of fuzz), had separated these old friends, Irie Jones and Millat Iqbal. Different sides of the school fence. Irie believed she had been dealt the dodgy cards: mountainous curves, buck teeth and thick metal retainer, impossible Afro hair, and to top it off mole-ish eyesight which in turn required bottle-top spectacles in a light shade of pink. (Even those blue eyes – the eyes Archie had been so excited about – lasted two weeks only. She had been born with them, yes, but one day Clara looked again and there were brown eyes staring up at her, like the transition between a closed bud and an open flower, the exact moment of which the naked, waiting eye can never detect.) And this belief in her ugliness, in her *wrongness*, had subdued her; she kept her smart-ass comments to herself these days, she kept her right hand on her stomach. She was all *wrong*.

Whereas Millat was like youth remembered in the nostalgic eyeglass of old age, beauty parodying itself: broken Roman nose, tall, thin; lightly veined, smoothly muscled; chocolate eyes with a reflective green sheen like moonlight bouncing off a dark sea; irresistible smile, big white teeth. In Glenard Oak Comprehensive, black, Pakistani, Greek, Irish – these were races. But those with sex appeal lapped the other runners. They were a species all of their own.

‘*If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.. .*’



She loved him, of course. But he used to say to her: ‘Thing is, people rely on me. They need me to be Millat. Good old Millat. Wicked Millat. Safe, sweet-as, Millat. They need me to be cool. It’s *practically* a responsibility.’

And it practically was. Ringo Starr once said of the Beatles that they were never bigger than they were in Liverpool, late 1962. They just got more countries. And that’s how it was for Millat. He was so big in Cricklewood, in Willesden, in West Hampstead, the summer of 1990, that nothing he did later in his life could top it. From his first Raggastani crowd, he had expanded and developed tribes throughout the school, throughout North London. He was simply too big to remain merely the object of Irie’s affection, leader of the Raggastanis, or the son of Samad and Alsana Iqbal. He had to please all of the people all of the time. To the cockney wide-boys in the white jeans and the coloured shirts, he was the joker, the risk-taker, respected lady-killer. To the black kids he was fellow weed-smoker and valued customer. To the Asian kids, hero and spokesman. Social chameleon. And underneath it all, there remained an ever present anger and hurt, the feeling of belonging nowhere that comes to people who belong everywhere. It was this soft underbelly that made him most beloved, most adored by Irie and the nice oboe-playing, long-skirted middle-class girls, most treasured by these hair-flicking and fugue-singing females; he was their dark prince, occasional lover or impossible crush, the subject of sweaty fantasy and ardent dreams...

And he was also their *project*: what was to be done about Millat? He simply *must* stop smoking weed. We *have* to try and stop him walking out of class. They worried about his ‘attitude’ at sleepovers, discussed his education hypothetically with their parents (*Just say there was this Indian boy, yeah, who was always getting into..* .), even wrote poems on the subject. Girls either wanted him or wanted to improve him, but most often a combination of the two. They wanted to improve him until he justified the amount they wanted him. Everybody’s bit of rough, Millat Iqbal.

‘But you’re different,’ Millat Iqbal would say to the martyr Irie Jones, ‘you’re *different*. We go way back. We’ve got history. You’re a *real* friend. They don’t really *mean* anything to me.’

Irie liked to believe that. That they had history, that she was different in a good way.

‘Thy black is fairest in my judgement’s place.. .’

Mrs Roody silenced Francis with a raised finger. ‘Now, what is he saying there? Annalese?’

Annalese Hersh, who had spent the lesson so far plaiting red and yellow thread into her hair, looked up in blank confusion.