

Subject Curriculum Intent: English

Definition of Subject

In his impassioned argument for the importance and relevance of William Blake's work, John Higgs asserts that it is the visionary artist's ability to "reach across society" that makes him so 'unusual'¹. In English lessons at Ark Blake Academy, we believe that the study of language and literature imbues us all with a similar power: it is through words and stories and voices that we are all able to 'reach across society', glimpsing inside the hearts and minds of people who are both vastly similar and vastly different to ourselves.

It is through the study of English Language that pupils will forge the linguistic keys that will unlock the whole curriculum and a life of learning. It is through the study of English Literature that pupils will explore the human condition in all its beautiful and ugly guises. Through English lessons, we will tell pupils the story of language and literature through time: how it has been shaped and moulded by social, historical and cultural contexts, but also how it remains clay in their hands, ready for them to build a linguistic or literary sculpture of their own.

Nature of Subject

Knowledge in English can be broadly separated into the following areas: knowledge of grammar and vocabulary; knowledge of purpose, audience and form; knowledge of authorial methods and techniques; knowledge of linguistic and literary contexts throughout time; and, knowledge of the powerful themes and ideas that connect texts across time and place. Within these areas, pupils develop a breadth of both substantive and disciplinary knowledge – they learn and remember the 'who', 'what', and 'when' of language and literature, but also learn to interrogate the 'how' and 'why' so that they can engage in complex discourse such as that of authorial intention. Pupils will be able to examine closely individual texts while appreciating how they contribute to the broad domains of language and literature; for example, they may analyse the use of modality in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* while recognising how this text contributes to the literary trope of transformation and metamorphoses.

By mastering this strong body of powerful knowledge, pupils will develop skills that will both enable them to seize greatness within the subject but also seize greatness in all aspects of their life. Pupils will learn to read and write for a range of purposes with fluency and confidence. They will learn to read for pleasure, to read for purpose, and to read analytically. They will learn to write imaginatively, discursively and persuasively. Pupils will learn to speak with control and flair, and they will practise listening to both empathise and scrutinize. Their success in mastering these skills will reach far out into the wider curriculum and their wider lives.

On their journey through the curriculum, pupils will encounter a number of threshold concepts that will change the way they read, write, speak and listen for good. Compared to 'portals' by Jan Meyer

¹ John Higgs, *William Blake Now: Why He Matters More Than Ever*, (London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2019) p. 3.

and Ray Land, once pupils pass these threshold concepts, their understanding of the subject will be irreversibly changed, opening a door to further depth and richness in the curriculum.² Pupils will encounter threshold concepts such as that:

- The use of language, including their own, can affect readers and audiences in different ways.
- Texts are constructs, and that language, structure and form can be exploited.
- Context matters: the effects of language and literature change in the hands of different people, in different times, and in different places.
- Writers, authors and poets are not the same as speakers, narrators and voices.

Purpose of Subject

The purpose of English as a subject is multi-faceted. Not only does it intend to equip pupils with a confident mastery of the functional skills required to participate fully in all aspects of society, but it also seeks to enlighten the human condition and spark the flames of curiosity so that they become readers and writers for life. Pupils at Ark Blake Academy study English not because it is compulsory, but because it is important: the subject has a richness that will continue to give back to pupils throughout their lives. When pupils finish studying English at Ark Blake Academy, they leave with a mastery of reading and writing for purpose, the ability to think critically about language and the world around them, and a rich body of knowledge that spans the history of language and literature through time. The study of English has the power to be truly transformative: it is one of the greatest levers in enabling pupils to seize their greatness.

Design of Subject

Knowledge and skills in English lessons are mapped backwards from the demands of university study, Key Stage 5, and Key Stage 4, so that the entirety of the curriculum drives students onwards towards greatness. The design of the English curriculum is built upon six principles that are undergirded by the ‘Design Principles’ of the wider Ark Blake Academy Curriculum:

1. Reading texts from the traditional canon empowers pupils with powerful knowledge; reading texts from outside the traditional canon is equally powerful in providing access to the rich breadth of literature.
2. Reading confidently is often a test of knowledge rather than skill, and so pupils must become experts in the domain of texts.
3. Creativity, imagination and skill in writing is best encouraged by ensuring pupils have a deep understanding of the subject’s foundations.
4. Skills, such as technical or grammatical skills, need to be over-learned to the point of mastery and automaticity.
5. Explicit instruction of concepts, tier-2 and tier-3 vocabulary, and procedural knowledge will enable pupils to know more, remember more and do more most effectively.
6. The curriculum is cumulative and integrated so that all content and knowledge is connected.

² Jan Meyer and Ray Land, “Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Linkages to Ways of Thinking and Practising within the Disciplines”, ETL Project, Occasional Report 4, May 2003

In KS3, the three strands of the English Mastery Curriculum (Literary Heritage, Mastery Writing and Reading for Pleasure) support pupils to build upon the firm foundations of their KS2 study. The curriculum expects pupils to read widely and in depth, building on the statutory requirements at KS2 for reading. The emphasis on Reading for Pleasure, which will be supported through the Tutor Time programme, supports the expectation at KS2 that schools are responsible for helping pupils to maintain positive attitudes to reading. The Mastery Writing strand of the English Mastery curriculum builds on the expectations of KS2 learning and ensures that pupils do not forget foundational skills and instead master them to automaticity. The third strand, Literary Heritage, embraces texts from the traditional canon so that pupils are supported to develop powerful knowledge and cultural capital that will stay with them for life. In KS4, the texts pupils study will build firmly on the knowledge pupils have developed at KS3: for example, their study of *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* will rely upon their knowledge of Victorian England as encountered through *Oliver Twist* in Year 7 and *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* in Year 8, while also extending their knowledge of the Gothic as encountered through *Jane Eyre* in Year 9. In KS5, pupils will be equipped with this broad knowledge of language and literature so that they can approach the study of English Language or English Literature with confidence and a burgeoning expertise.

In addition to independent reading, homework in English is an opportunity for pupils to systematically retrieve prior knowledge through strategies such as self-quizzing; to practise skills so that they are over-learned to the point of automaticity; and, to use their knowledge and skills as a platform for creative endeavour. Throughout their study of English, homework will reinforce and build upon what pupils learn in the classroom so that pupils attend lessons every day feeling aspirational about what they can learn next.

Extension of Subject

As a subject, there are a multitude of enrichment opportunities that pupils will have access to during their time at Ark Blake Academy. Three cornerstones of the English enrichment programme include a Debate Club, Poetry By Heart and a Student Newsroom. Further to their successful study of English at Ark Blake Academy, pupils will be equipped with the knowledge and skills to support any ambition. Whether or not pupils choose to study subjects directly linked to English at university, such as English Literature, English Language or Journalism, they will have the linguistic skills to succeed in any discipline. The English curriculum at Ark Blake Academy absolutely intends on nurturing some of the country's future writers and poets and playwrights, but also recognises its vital importance in preparing pupils for any path to greatness that they may choose to take.