



Re-founded 1555

# Ripon Grammar School

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24th September, 2020

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Re – Changes to GCSE English Literature examinations for 2021

In light of the school closure earlier this year and the impact this has had on students' learning, Ofqual have decided that GCSE examinations in English Literature will be altered to reduce the number of texts upon which students are assessed in their final examinations. The precise way in which these changes are to be implemented by examination boards was only confirmed last week and I am writing now to explain what these changes will mean for our current year 11 students (there are currently no proposed GCSE changes for students in year 10).

Here at Ripon, we follow the AQA specification. Last week AQA confirmed that the 2021 examinations will be arranged as follows:

English Literature - Paper 1 Students to respond to 2 of 3 sections: 1A – AQA Poetry Anthology – Power and Conflict 1B – 19th Century Novel – A Christmas Carol 1C – Modern Drama - An Inspector Calls or The History Boys English Literature – Paper 2 Compulsory Section A – Shakespeare – Romeo and Juliet Section B – Unseen Poetry

All students must have studied and be assessed on a Shakespeare play and an unseen element and schools have no choice in whether to teach these parts of the course. As you can see, the compulsory elements of the course now form Paper 2, while Paper 1 contains a choice of 3 texts with students expected to respond to just 2 of these.

At Ripon our curriculum is arranged so that the vast majority of the Paper 1 texts are taught in year 10 with the challenge of the Shakespeare play reserved for the beginning of year 11. This means that we are faced with 'dropping' a text which we have already taught quite comprehensively, while the one text that we have not yet taught is compulsory and cannot be dropped.

After much discussion, the English department has decided that we will drop the 19th century novel (A Christmas Carol) and continue with our teaching and revision of the poetry and the modern play.

A Christmas Carol was studied and enjoyed by students in the autumn term of year 10, but in the absence of our usual year 10 end of year examination it has not been returned to since. It is, therefore, some considerable time since students studied the novel and significant curriculum time would need to be dedicated to revisiting and revising this text.

In addition, analysis of how our students have typically performed at GCSE in recent years shows that the Dickens question is, on average, where our students perform slightly less well. Though the difference was not great, this was a factor we took into consideration. Though it is sad to drop this text, I would stress that students will have gained much from their study of the novel and that the skills and knowledge developed will be of great benefit to them in other areas of the course.

In terms of the texts we have chosen to keep, we feel that the modern play, which was largely studied remotely during lockdown, but which we have consolidated in recent weeks, is the text which students are most familiar with at this point of the course. We also feel that this text provides a healthy balance

to the course, which might otherwise become dominated by writers from the nineteenth century and earlier.

We know that some of our students often feel nervous about the poetry anthology and I strongly suspect that if we had given them a vote, the anthology might have been what the students chose to drop from the course. However, analysis of previous examination data shows that on average our students often perform best in this part of the examination. In addition we also feel that the skills students develop through their analysis and comparison of poems in this part of the course are essential to their success in the unseen poetry element of the final examinations. To cut the poetry anthology from the course would have been to limit students' chances in the unseen poetry.

These changes will allow us to dedicate greater time to revising literature texts studied in year 10 and preparing students for the examinations in English Language, where the final examinations remain unchanged. We believe these changes should reduce the pressures on our students this summer and, though it is sad to have to drop a text we love, we think that the benefits to our students will be significant.

I hope that this letter makes clear what the changes are, the decisions that we have made and the implications for our students. In making these decisions we have been guided by our knowledge and experience of the course, our knowledge of our students and their progress and our desire to help them to achieve their very best next summer. These changes will be explained by class teachers in the coming weeks, but if parents have any further queries or questions on this subject, please do get in touch with me.

With best wishes,

Mr B. Fearnley

Head of English

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