

Saint Ambrose College

English Literature Paper 2 Revision List

Unseen Prose Extracts and Comparison of Poetry (*Skirrid Hill*) and
Drama (*A Streetcar Named Desire*)

Although not an exhaustive list of aspects of Modern times (post-1945), areas that can usefully be explored include:

- wars and the legacy of wars
- personal and social identity
- changing morality and social structures
- gender, class, race and ethnicity
- political upheaval and change
- resistance and rebellion
- imperialism, post-imperialism and nationalism
- engagement with the social, political, personal and literary issues which have helped to shape the latter half of the 20th century and the early decades of the 21st century.

Other ideas:

- Desire
- Confrontation
- Illusion/Reality
- Resilience
- Masculinity
- Setting
- Passage of Time
- Gender
- Societal Expectations
- Loss
- Isolation/Social Isolation
- Loneliness
- The struggle to communicate and barriers to communication
- Female Experience and Struggle
- Identity
- Agency
- Conflict
- Changing social attitudes
- Setting
- Cultural Differences
- Relationships
- Fear

Other ways to connect *Skirrid Hill* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Loss and Decay: Both works deal with the theme of loss and decay, whether it's the loss of innocence, relationships, or ideals. In "A Streetcar Named Desire," characters like Blanche and Stanley grapple with the decay of their past lives and relationships. In "Skirrid Hill," Sheers explores loss through various lenses, including the loss of loved ones, historical loss, and the decay of the natural world.

Identity and Self-Deception: Both works delve into the complexities of identity and the ways in which characters deceive themselves and others. Blanche's fabrications about her past in "A Streetcar Named Desire" reflect her desperate attempt to maintain a certain image of herself. Similarly, many of the poems in "Skirrid Hill" explore the masks people wear and the illusions they create to cope with reality.

Conflict and Power Dynamics: Both works depict various forms of conflict and power struggles. In "A Streetcar Named Desire," there's tension between characters like Blanche and Stanley, as well as themes of gender and class struggle. In "Skirrid Hill," Sheers explores power dynamics in personal relationships, as well as broader societal conflicts.

Memory and Trauma: Memory and its impact on characters' lives is another shared theme. Blanche's troubled past haunts her throughout "A Streetcar Named Desire," influencing her actions and relationships. Similarly, "Skirrid Hill" delves into the ways in which memory shapes individual and collective identities, often in the context of trauma and loss.

Isolation and Alienation: Both works examine the themes of isolation and alienation. Blanche's isolation from reality in "A Streetcar Named Desire" and her inability to connect with others reflect a profound sense of alienation. Similarly, many of the poems in "Skirrid Hill" convey a sense of isolation, whether it's from loved ones, nature, or the past.

Desire and Longing: Both works explore the theme of desire and longing, whether it's for love, connection, or a sense of belonging. Characters in "A Streetcar Named Desire" yearn for fulfillment and validation, while many poems in "Skirrid Hill" express a longing for connection and understanding.

Reality vs. Fantasy: Both works confront the tension between reality and fantasy. Blanche's retreat into fantasy in "A Streetcar Named Desire" serves as a defense mechanism against the harsh realities of her life, while in "Skirrid Hill," Sheers often contrasts the real with the imagined, highlighting the blurry lines between the two.

Gender Roles and Expectations: Gender roles and expectations are themes explored in both works. "A Streetcar Named Desire" grapples with traditional gender roles and the ways in which they shape characters' identities and relationships. Similarly, "Skirrid Hill" examines the impact of gender expectations on individuals and society.

Social Class and Status: Both works touch upon the theme of social class and status. In "A Streetcar Named Desire," characters like Blanche and Stanley come from different social backgrounds, leading to tensions and power struggles. "Skirrid Hill" also addresses class disparities and the ways in which they impact people's lives.

Loneliness and Isolation in Urban Environments: Both works depict the loneliness and isolation that can accompany life in urban environments. Blanche's sense of displacement in the bustling city of New Orleans mirrors the themes of urban isolation found in many of the poems in "Skirrid Hill."

The Fragility of Identity: The fragility of identity is a recurring theme in both works. Characters in "A Streetcar Named Desire" struggle to maintain a sense of self amidst external pressures and internal conflicts. Similarly, many of the poems in "Skirrid Hill" explore the fluidity and vulnerability of identity.

Betrayal and Deception: Betrayal and deception are themes that permeate both works. Characters in "A Streetcar Named Desire" betray each other's trust, while in "Skirrid Hill," Sheers often explores the ways in which people deceive themselves and others in order to cope with reality.

The Search for Meaning and Purpose: Both works grapple with the theme of the search for meaning and purpose in life. Blanche's quest for love and validation in "A Streetcar Named Desire" reflects a deeper search for meaning, while many of the poems in "Skirrid Hill" explore existential questions and the human search for meaning in a chaotic world.

Violence and Aggression: Violence and aggression are themes that emerge in both works. In "A Streetcar Named Desire," characters like Stanley exhibit violent behavior, while in "Skirrid Hill," Sheers explores the destructive power of violence, both physical and emotional.

The Passage of Time and Its Effects: Both works examine the theme of time and its effects on characters and their surroundings. "A Streetcar Named Desire" unfolds over a short period of time, yet the events have a profound impact on the characters' lives. Similarly, many of the poems in "Skirrid Hill" reflect on the passage of time and its implications for memory, identity, and change.

The Handmaid's Tale Revision

List of themes/characters which have been used in A-level exams:

- Rituals and Ceremonies
- The final words of the novel
- Nick
- Resistance
- Serena Joy
- Male Victimhood
- Sexual Violence
- Uniforms and Costumes
- The Red Centre

List of possible themes/characters to revise:

- The Aunts
- Mothers/motherhood
- The Commander
- Fertility/ Reproductive control/ the female body
- Surveillance/Fear
- Religion
- Language
- Identity
- Memory
- Luke
- Moira

Revision Strategies:

1. **Mind Maps and Diagrams:** Create mind maps for each theme, character, or symbol in the novel. Connect different quotes, ideas, and their significance.
2. **Practice Essays:** Write essay responses to past exam questions, focusing on using quotes and detailed analysis. This helps build a structured, critical response.
3. **Flashcards:** Make flashcards with key themes, symbols, characters, and important quotes to test yourself regularly.
4. **Discussion Groups:** Engage in discussions with classmates or in study groups. Explaining and debating ideas with others can help clarify and solidify your understanding.
5. **Past Papers:** Work through past exam papers and mark schemes. Familiarise yourself with the types of questions and practice timed essays to improve your exam technique.
6. **Use of Resources:** Watch interviews with Atwood, read critical essays, or use study guides (e.g., York Notes, SparkNotes) to gain a deeper insight into the novel.

Assessment Objectives Overview

AO1 - Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using associated concepts and terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression.

Breakdown:

- You make a range of clear, relevant points in relation to the question.
- You use a range of literary terms correctly, e.g. narrative voice, flashback, irony, metaphor, alliteration.
- You address the topic clearly across the text, outlining your thesis and providing a clear conclusion.
- You signpost and link your ideas fluently about the theme/character within *The Handmaid's Tale*.
- You offer a personal interpretation which is insightful, well-argued and convincing

AO2 - Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts.

Breakdown:

- You explain the techniques and methods Atwood uses to present the theme/character, e.g. through Offred's narrative voice and the way the narrative is structured to recover her identity.
- You explain in detail how such examples shape meaning in the text, e.g. you explain how the palimpsestic text overlays Offred's bleak present with vibrant, sensory detail from her past.
- You comment on spoken language, setting and structure in a thoughtful, sustained way.

AO3 - Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received.

Breakdown:

- You demonstrate your understanding of literary context
- You demonstrate your understanding of relevant historical and social context

AO4 - Explore connections across literary texts.

Breakdown:

- You demonstrate an awareness of genre, whether dystopian, postmodern, speculative etc.
- You demonstrate an awareness of how the relevant themes are presented in texts from modern times.

AO5 - Explore literary texts informed by different interpretations

Breakdown:

- Where appropriate, you incorporate and comment on critics' views in relation to the question
- You assert your own independent view clearly
- You engage with different perspectives in relation to the question, exploring alternative interpretations where relevant