Your notes

GCSE English Language: revision notes

Edexcel IGCSE anthology: poetry and prose

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Start here: Paper 2 and the anthology

- Paper 2 (Poetry and prose texts and imaginative writing) has an essay on one text from Part 2 of the anthology, then a piece of imaginative writing.
- The text is printed in the exam. Know each text's story or situation, its main ideas and its key methods, so you can plan quickly.
- You are asked how the writer presents something, such as a character, a place or a feeling, using language and structure.

The poems

- Disabled (Wilfred Owen): a young soldier who has lost his legs sits in a wheelchair, remembering his life before the war. **Contrasts** between his past and present show the cost of war and his isolation.
- Out, Out— (Robert Frost): a boy cutting wood with a buzz saw is badly hurt and dies. The calm, matter-of-fact ending, as everyone returns to their work, shocks the reader. The title echoes Macbeth.
- An Unknown Girl (Moniza Alvi): in an Indian market, a girl paints henna patterns on the speaker's hand. It explores identity and belonging between two cultures.
- The Bright Lights of Sarajevo (Tony Harrison): during the siege of Sarajevo in the 1990s, young people meet in the dark streets. A small moment of romance shows hope surviving in war.
- Still I Rise (Maya Angelou): a defiant poem against racism and oppression, with a repeated **refrain**, **rhetorical questions** and confident images of rising.

The prose texts

- The Story of an Hour (Kate Chopin): a woman told that her husband has died feels, after grief, a surprising sense of freedom, but the story ends with a shocking **twist**.
- The Necklace (Guy de Maupassant): Mathilde borrows a diamond necklace for a ball and loses it. She and her husband spend ten years paying for a replacement, then learn the original was fake.
- Significant Cigarettes (Rose Tremain): Lev, a widower from Eastern Europe, travels by coach to London to find work. The extract shows his loneliness, grief and hope.
- Whistle and I'll Come to You (Susan Hill, from The Woman in Black): Arthur Kipps, cut off at Eel Marsh House, hears terrifying sounds of an accident in the fog of the marshes. **Gothic** setting and sound build fear.
- Night (Alice Munro): a woman remembers being a teenager who couldn't sleep and had frightening thoughts, and the calm night-time conversation with her father that helped her.

How to write about these texts

- Start with the big idea: what the writer wants us to think or feel.
- Write about structure as well as language: openings, turning points, **contrasts** and endings, and in poems the stanzas, rhyme, rhythm and repetition.
- Use short, embedded quotations and explain the effect of particular words.
- Bring in context only where it explains the text, such as the First World War for Disabled.

Key terms

Refrain	A line or phrase repeated through a poem.
Twist	An unexpected turn at the end of a story.
Gothic	Writing that creates fear with dark, isolated settings and the supernatural.
Contrast	Putting two different things side by side to show how they differ.
Rhetorical question	A question asked for effect, not for an answer.
Imagery	Language that creates a picture in the reader's mind.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. Which poem is about a soldier who has lost his legs?
2. What injures the boy in Out, Out—?
3. What does the girl paint on the speaker's hand in An Unknown Girl?

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4. Where is The Bright Lights of Sarajevo set?
5. What is a key feature of Still I Rise?
6. What does Mathilde lose in The Necklace?
7. What does Mathilde learn at the end of The Necklace?
8. Who travels to London in Significant Cigarettes?

Answers

1. Disabled
2. A buzz saw
3. Henna patterns
4. Sarajevo during the siege in the 1990s
5. A repeated refrain and rhetorical questions
6. A borrowed diamond necklace
7. The original necklace was fake
8. Lev

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Try 3 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

Free revision for GCSE and KS3 at lycolearn.co.uk. Some notes are for one exam board only, and say so in brackets.

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