



Syllabus

Cambridge O Level Literature in English 2010

Use this syllabus for exams in 2026.

Exams are available in the June and November series.

This syllabus is **not** available in all administrative zones.

Please check the syllabus page at www.cambridgeinternational.org/2010 to see if this syllabus is available in your administrative zone.



Why choose Cambridge International?

Cambridge International prepares school students for life, helping them develop an informed curiosity and a lasting passion for learning. We are part of the University of Cambridge.

Our Cambridge Pathway gives students a clear path for educational success from age 5 to 19. Schools can shape the curriculum around how they want students to learn – with a wide range of subjects and flexible ways to offer them. It helps students discover new abilities and a wider world, and gives them the skills they need for life, so they can achieve at school, university and work.

Our programmes and qualifications set the global standard for international education. They are created by subject experts, are rooted in academic rigour and reflect the latest educational research. They provide a strong platform for learners to progress from one stage to the next, and are well supported by teaching and learning resources. Learn more about our research at www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/our-research/

We believe education works best when curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment are closely aligned. Our programmes develop deep knowledge, conceptual understanding and higher-order thinking skills, to prepare students for their future. Together with schools, we develop Cambridge learners who are confident, responsible, reflective, innovative and engaged – equipped for success in the modern world.

Every year, nearly a million Cambridge students from 10 000 schools in 160 countries prepare for their future with the Cambridge Pathway.

School feedback: ‘We think the Cambridge curriculum is superb preparation for university.’

Feedback from: Christoph Guttentag, Dean of Undergraduate Admissions, Duke University, USA

Quality management



Cambridge International is committed to providing exceptional quality. In line with this commitment, our quality management system for the provision of international education programmes and qualifications for students aged 5 to 19 is independently certified as meeting the internationally recognised standard, ISO 9001:2015. Learn more at www.cambridgeinternational.org/about-us/our-standards/

Contents

Why choose Cambridge International?	2
1 Why choose this syllabus?	4
2 Syllabus overview	7
Aims	7
Content overview	7
Assessment overview	8
Assessment objectives	9
3 Subject content	10
Set texts for examination in 2026 – Paper 1	10
Set texts for examination in 2026 – Paper 2	12
4 Details of the assessment	14
Paper 1 – Poetry and Prose	14
Paper 2 – Drama	14
Command words	16
5 What else you need to know	17
Before you start	17
Making entries	18
Accessibility and equality	18
After the exam	19
How students and teachers can use the grades	20
Changes to this syllabus for 2026	21

Important: Changes to this syllabus

For information about changes to this syllabus for 2026, go to page 21.



1 Why choose this syllabus?

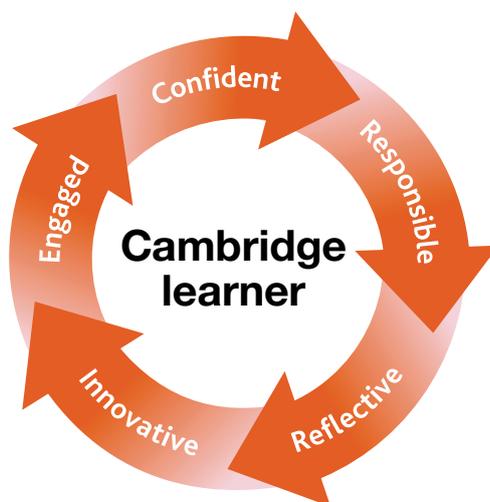
Key benefits

Cambridge O Level is typically for 14 to 16 year olds and is an internationally recognised qualification. It has been designed especially for an international market and is sensitive to the needs of different countries. Cambridge O Level is designed for learners whose first language may not be English, and this is acknowledged throughout the examination process.

Our programmes promote a thorough knowledge and understanding of a subject and help to develop the skills learners need for their next steps in education or employment.

Cambridge O Level Literature in English offers learners the opportunity to read, interpret, evaluate and respond to a range of literature in English. The range includes drama, prose and poetry from the works of Shakespeare to contemporary literature. This course enables learners to deepen their understanding and appreciation of the ways in which writers use English to express meaning and achieve effects. Cambridge O Level Literature in English will stimulate learners to read for pleasure and to explore wider and universal issues, promoting a better understanding of themselves and the world.

Our approach in Cambridge O Level Literature in English encourages learners to be:



School feedback: ‘Cambridge O Level has helped me develop thinking and analytical skills which will go a long way in helping me with advanced studies.’

Feedback from: Kamal Khan Virk, former student at Beaconhouse Garden Town Secondary School, Pakistan, who went on to study Actuarial Science at the London School of Economics

International recognition and acceptance

Our expertise in curriculum, teaching and learning, and assessment is the basis for the recognition of our programmes and qualifications around the world. The combination of knowledge and skills in Cambridge O Level Literature in English gives learners a solid foundation for further study. Candidates who achieve grades A* to C are well prepared to follow a wide range of courses including Cambridge International AS & A Level English.

Cambridge O Levels are accepted and valued by leading universities and employers around the world as evidence of academic achievement. Cambridge students can be confident that their qualifications will be understood and valued throughout their education and career, in their home country and internationally. Many universities require a combination of Cambridge International AS & A Levels and Cambridge O Levels or equivalent to meet their entry requirements.

Learn more at www.cambridgeinternational.org/recognition

Supporting teachers

We believe education is most effective when curriculum, teaching and learning, and assessment are closely aligned. We provide a wide range of resources, detailed guidance, innovative training and targeted professional development so that you can give your students the best possible preparation for Cambridge O Level. To find out which resources are available for each syllabus go to our School Support Hub.

The School Support Hub is our secure online site for Cambridge teachers where you can find the resources you need to deliver our programmes. You can also keep up to date with your subject and the global Cambridge community through our online discussion forums.

Find out more at www.cambridgeinternational.org/support

Support for Cambridge O Level			
Planning and preparation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Syllabuses Schemes of work Specimen Question Papers and Mark Schemes Teacher guides 	Teaching and assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Endorsed resources Online forums 	Learning and revision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Example candidate responses Past papers and mark schemes Specimen paper answers 	Results <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Candidate Results Service Principal examiner reports for teachers

Sign up for email notifications about changes to syllabuses, including new and revised products and services, at www.cambridgeinternational.org/syllabusupdates

Syllabuses and specimen materials represent the final authority on the content and structure of all of our assessments.

Professional development

Find the next step on your professional development journey.

- Introductory Professional Development – An introduction to Cambridge programmes and qualifications.
- Extension Professional Development – Develop your understanding of Cambridge programmes and qualifications to build confidence in your delivery.
- Enrichment Professional Development – Transform your approach to teaching with our Enrichment workshops.
- Cambridge Professional Development Qualifications (PDQs) – Practice-based programmes that transform professional learning for practising teachers. Available at Certificate and Diploma level.

Find out more at:

www.cambridgeinternational.org/support-and-training-for-schools/professional-development/



Supporting exams officers

We provide comprehensive support and guidance for all Cambridge exams officers.

Find out more at: www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide

2 Syllabus overview

Aims

The aims describe the purposes of a course based on this syllabus.

The aims are to enable students to:

- enjoy the experience of reading literature
- understand and respond to literary texts in different forms and from different periods and cultures
- communicate an informed personal response appropriately and effectively
- appreciate different ways in which writers achieve their effects
- experience literature's contribution to aesthetic, imaginative and intellectual growth
- explore the contribution of literature to an understanding of areas of human concern.

Content overview

This syllabus enables learners to read, interpret and evaluate texts through the study of literature in English.

By studying poetry, prose and drama learners develop an understanding of literal meaning, relevant contexts and of the deeper themes or attitudes that may be expressed. Through their studies, they learn to recognise and appreciate the ways in which writers use English to achieve a range of effects, and will be able to present an informed, personal response to the material they have studied.

All learners study four texts for the O Level: one poetry text, one prose text, and two drama texts.

The syllabus encourages the exploration of wider and universal issues, promoting learners' better understanding of themselves and of the world around them.

Cambridge Assessment International Education is an education organisation and politically neutral. The contents of this syllabus, examination papers and associated materials do not endorse any political view. We endeavour to treat all aspects of the exam process neutrally.



This O Level syllabus shares content with other Literature in English syllabuses. For further support see the School Support Hub for IGCSE Literature in English (0475). Textbooks endorsed to support IGCSE Literature in English (0475) are suitable for use with this syllabus.



Assessment overview

All candidates take two components. Candidates will be eligible for grades A* to E.

All candidates take:

Paper 1 1 hour 30 minutes
 Poetry and Prose 50%
 50 marks
 Two questions on two texts: one poetry and one prose
 Externally assessed

and:

Paper 2 1 hour 30 minutes
 Drama 50%
 50 marks
 Two questions on two texts
 Externally assessed

Information on availability is in the **Before you start** section.

Assessment objectives

The assessment objectives (AOs) are:

AO1

Show detailed knowledge of the content of literary texts in the three main forms (drama, poetry and prose), supported by reference to the text.

AO2

Understand the meanings of literary texts and their contexts, and explore texts beyond surface meanings to show deeper awareness of ideas and attitudes.

AO3

Recognise and appreciate ways in which writers use language, structure and form to create and shape meanings and effects.

AO4

Communicate a sensitive and informed personal response to literary texts.

Weighting for assessment objectives

The approximate weightings allocated to each of the assessment objectives (AOs) are summarised below.

Assessment objectives as a percentage of the qualification

Assessment objective	Weighting in O Level %
AO1	25
AO2	25
AO3	25
AO4	25
Total	100

Assessment objectives as a percentage of each component

Assessment objective	Weighting in components %	
	Paper 1	Paper 2
AO1	25	25
AO2	25	25
AO3	25	25
AO4	25	25
Total	100	100

3 Subject content

Set texts regularly rotate on the syllabus and may change from one year of examination to the next. Before you begin teaching, check the set text list for the year in which your candidates will take their examinations.

This syllabus gives you the flexibility to design a course that will interest, challenge and engage your learners. Where appropriate you are responsible for selecting texts, resources and examples to support your learners' study. These should be appropriate for the learners' age, cultural background and learning context as well as complying with your school policies and local legal requirements.

The set texts for each year of the syllabus are listed. For some texts we specify which edition to use. Where the edition is not specified, candidates may use any edition of the set text, provided it is not an abridgement or a simplified version.

Set texts for examination in 2026 – Paper 1

Section A: Poetry

Candidates answer on **one** set text in Section A (Poetry).

From *Songs of Ourselves Volume 1*, the following 15 poems:

Aphra Behn, 'Song: Love Armed'
 Sujata Bhatt, 'A Different History'
 William Blake, 'The Chimney-Sweeper'
 Elizabeth Brewster, 'Where I Come From'
 Boey Kim Cheng, 'Report to Wordsworth'
 Gillian Clarke, 'Lament'
 Kevin Halligan, 'The Cockroach'
 Seamus Heaney, 'Follower'
 Liz Lochhead, 'Storyteller'
 Charles Mungoshi, 'Before the Sun'
 Katherine Philips, 'A Married State'
 Alexander Pope, From 'An Essay on Man'
 Carol Rumens, 'Carpet-weavers, Morocco'
 William Shakespeare, 'Sonnet 18'
 Judith Wright, 'Hunting Snake'

These may be found in *Songs of Ourselves Volume 1: The University of Cambridge International Examinations Anthology of Poetry in English* (Cambridge University Press). Poems printed in the paper will be as printed in this text.

Set texts for examination in 2026 – Paper 1 continued

Section A: Poetry continued

From *Songs of Ourselves Volume 2*, Part 3, the following 15 poems:

Nancy Fotheringham Cato, 'The Road'
 Sarah Jackson, 'The Instant of My Death'
 Arun Kolatkar, 'The Bus'
 Julius Chingono, 'At the Bus Station'
 Imtiaz Dharker, 'These are the Times We Live in'
 Elizabeth Jennings, 'The Enemies'
 Sampurna Chattarji, 'Boxes'
 W H Auden, 'The Capital'
 Arthur Yap, 'an afternoon nap'
 Elizabeth Smither, 'Plaits'
 Elizabeth Daryush, 'Children of Wealth'
 Thomas Love Peacock, 'Rich and Poor or, Saint and Sinner'
 Musaemura Zimunya, 'A Long Journey'
 Stevie Smith, 'Touch and Go'
 George Szirtes, 'Song'

These may be found in *Songs of Ourselves Volume 2: The University of Cambridge International Examinations Anthology of Poetry in English* (Cambridge University Press). Poems printed in the paper will be as printed in this text.

Kayo Chingonyi, the following 15 poems:

The Colour of James Brown's Scream	Fisherman's Song
Broomhall	Some Bright Elegance
The N Word (I.)	Curfew
Waves	Kumukanda
A Proud Blemish	Grief
Andrews Corner	Kung'anda
'Round Midnight	Baltic Mill
This poem contains gull song	

You can find these poems in *Kumukanda*, by Kayo Chingonyi (Chatto & Windus). Poems printed in the paper will be printed as in this text.

Set texts for examination in 2026 – Paper 1 continued

Section B: Prose

Candidates answer on one set text in Section B (Prose).

Chinua Achebe *Things Fall Apart*
 Jane Austen *Pride and Prejudice*
 Anita Desai *Fire on the Mountain*
 Kiran Desai *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*
 Susan Hill *I'm the King of the Castle*
 Harper Lee *To Kill a Mockingbird*
 H G Wells *The War of the Worlds*

From *Stories of Ourselves Volume 2*, the following 10 stories:

no. 3 Christina Rossetti, 'Nick'
 no. 14 Olive Schreiner, 'The Woman's Rose'
 no. 26 Ralph Ellison, 'The Black Ball'
 no. 30 Mulk Raj Anand, 'The Gold Watch'
 no. 35 Margaret Atwood, 'When It Happens'
 no. 37 J G Ballard, 'The Man Who Walked on the Moon'
 no. 38 Jamaica Kincaid, 'A Walk to the Jetty'
 no. 40 Jane Gardam, 'Showing the Flag'
 no. 47 Aminatta Forna, 'Haywards Heath'
 no. 49 Romesh Gunsekera, 'Fluke'

This selection of 10 short stories may be found in *Stories of Ourselves Volume 2: The University of Cambridge International Examinations Anthology of Short Stories in English* (Cambridge University Press); passages from these stories in the paper will be printed as in this text.

Set texts for examination in 2026 – Paper 2

Candidates must answer on **two** different set texts from the following:

Pearl Cleage *Blues for an Alabama Sky*
 Shelagh Delaney *A Taste of Honey*
 William Shakespeare *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
 William Shakespeare *Antony and Cleopatra*
 Tennessee Williams *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Resources: set text editions for classroom use

There are many editions of set texts available, with newer editions sometimes including notes (often displayed on facing pages), illustrations, activities and further resources which make these texts particularly useful and user-friendly for classroom use.

The edition of Shakespeare used for setting extract questions on examination papers is the Alexander Text of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. Peter Alexander (Collins, 1951; new edition 2006, introduced by Peter Ackroyd). However, this complete, standard one-volume edition is not recommended for classroom study of individual plays.

Although we do not specify editions of individual plays, here are some examples of reliable and useful series:

- Cambridge School Shakespeare series edited R Gibson, V Wienand and R Andrews
- Cambridge Literature series edited J Baxter
- Penguin Shakespeare Penguin
- Oxford School Shakespeare Oxford University Press
- Heinemann Shakespeare Heinemann
- Longman School Shakespeare Pearson-Longman, series editor John O'Connor
(useful for candidates with a second-language English background)

4 Details of the assessment

Paper 1 – Poetry and Prose

1 hour 30 minutes, 50 marks

This is a **compulsory** written paper. It is an externally set assessment, marked by Cambridge International.

Candidates answer **two** questions: one from Section A (Poetry) and one from Section B (Prose). All questions carry equal marks (25 marks each).

There is a choice of two questions on each text.

Relevant passages/poems are printed on the question paper.

Set texts for this component are listed in Section 3 of this syllabus.

Candidates may **not** take their set texts into the exam room.

All questions encourage an informed personal response and test all four assessment objectives.

Candidates will have to demonstrate the following:

- knowledge of the content of the text – through reference to detail and use of quotations from the text (AO1)
- understanding of characters, relationships, situations and themes (AO2)
- understanding of the writer's intentions and methods – response to the writer's use of language (AO3)
- personal response – sometimes directly (answering questions such as 'What do you think?', 'What are your feelings about ...?') and sometimes by implication (answering questions such as 'Explore the ways in which ...') (AO4).

Paper 2 – Drama

1 hour 30 minutes, 50 marks

This is an **compulsory** written paper. It is an externally set assessment, marked by Cambridge International.

Candidates answer **two** questions on two texts. All questions carry equal marks (25 marks each).

There is a choice of two questions on each text: either (a) a passage-based question or (b) an essay question. Candidates must answer one passage-based question and one essay question.

Relevant passages are printed on the question paper.

Set texts for this component are listed in Section 3 of this syllabus.

Candidates may **not** take their set texts into the exam room.

All questions encourage an informed personal response and test all four assessment objectives.

Candidates will have to demonstrate the following:

- knowledge of the content of the text – through reference to detail and use of quotations from the text (AO1)
- understanding of characters, relationships, situations and themes (AO2)
- understanding of the writer’s intentions and methods – response to the writer’s use of language (AO3)
- personal response – sometimes directly (answering questions such as ‘What do you think?’, ‘What are your feelings about ...?’) and sometimes by implication (answering questions such as ‘Explore the ways in which ...’) (AO4).

Command words

Command words and their meanings help candidates know what is expected from them in the exams. The table below includes command words used in the assessment for this syllabus. The use of the command word will relate to the subject context.

Command word	What it means
Explore	write in detail about particular aspects.

5 What else you need to know

This section is an overview of other information you need to know about this syllabus. It will help to share the administrative information with your exams officer so they know when you will need their support. Find more information about our administrative processes at www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide

Before you start

Previous study

We recommend that learners starting this course should have studied a broad curriculum such as the Cambridge Lower Secondary programme or equivalent national educational framework.

Guided learning hours

We design Cambridge O Level syllabuses to require about 130 guided learning hours for each subject. This is for guidance only. The number of hours a learner needs to achieve the qualification may vary according to each school and the learners' previous experience of the subject.

Availability and timetables

All Cambridge schools are allocated to one of six administrative zones. Each zone has a specific timetable. Find your administrative zone at www.cambridgeinternational.org/adminzone. Cambridge O Levels are available to centres in administrative zones 3, 4 and 5.

You can view the timetable for your administrative zone at www.cambridgeinternational.org/timetables

You can enter candidates in the June and November exam series.

Check you are using the syllabus for the year the candidate is taking the exam.

Private candidates can enter for this syllabus. For more information, please refer to the *Cambridge Guide to Making Entries*.

Combining with other syllabuses

Candidates can take this syllabus alongside other Cambridge International syllabuses in a single exam series. The only exceptions are:

- Cambridge IGCSE World Literature (0408)
- Cambridge IGCSE Literature in English (0475)
- Cambridge IGCSE (9–1) Literature in English (0992)
- syllabuses with the same title at the same level.

Cambridge IGCSE, Cambridge IGCSE (9–1) and Cambridge O Level syllabuses are at the same level.

Making entries

Exams officers are responsible for submitting entries to Cambridge International. We encourage them to work closely with you to make sure they enter the right number of candidates for the right combination of syllabus components. Entry option codes and instructions for submitting entries are in the *Cambridge Guide to Making Entries*. Your exams officer has access to this guide.

Exam administration

To keep our exams secure, we produce question papers for different areas of the world, known as administrative zones. We allocate all Cambridge schools to an administrative zone determined by their location. Each zone has a specific timetable.

Some of our syllabuses offer candidates different assessment options. An entry option code is used to identify the components the candidate will take relevant to the administrative zone and the available assessment options.

Support for exams officers

We know how important exams officers are to the successful running of exams. We provide them with the support they need to make entries on time. Your exams officer will find this support, and guidance for all other phases of the Cambridge Exams Cycle, at www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide

Retakes and carrying forward marks

Candidates can retake the whole qualification as many times as they want to. Information on retake entries is at www.cambridgeinternational.org/retakes

Language

This syllabus and the related assessment materials are available in English only.

Accessibility and equality

Syllabus and assessment design

At Cambridge International, we work to avoid direct or indirect discrimination in our syllabuses and assessment materials. We aim to maximise inclusivity for candidates of all national, cultural or social backgrounds and candidates with protected characteristics, which include special educational needs and disability, religion and belief, and characteristics related to gender and identity. We also aim to make our materials as accessible as possible by using accessible language and applying accessible design principles. This gives all candidates the fairest possible opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and understanding and helps to minimise the requirement to make reasonable adjustments during the assessment process.

Access arrangements

Access arrangements (including modified papers) are the principal way in which Cambridge International complies with our duty, as guided by the UK Equality Act (2010), to make 'reasonable adjustments' for candidates with special educational needs (SEN), disability, illness or injury. Where a candidate would otherwise be at a substantial disadvantage in comparison to a candidate with no SEN, disability, illness or injury, we may be able to agree pre-examination access arrangements. These arrangements help a candidate by minimising accessibility barriers and maximising their opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and understanding in an assessment.

Important:

Requested access arrangements should be based on evidence of the candidate's barrier to assessment and should also reflect their normal way of working at school. This is explained in the *Cambridge Handbook* www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide

- For Cambridge International to approve an access arrangement, we will need to agree that it constitutes a reasonable adjustment, involves reasonable cost and timeframe and does not affect the security and integrity of the assessment.
- Availability of access arrangements should be checked by centres at the start of the course. Details of our standard access arrangements and modified question papers are available in the *Cambridge Handbook* www.cambridgeinternational.org/eoguide
- Please contact us at the start of the course to find out if we are able to approve an arrangement that is not included in the list of standard access arrangements.
- Candidates who cannot access parts of the assessment may be able to receive an award based on the parts they have completed.

After the exam

Grading and reporting

Grades A*, A, B, C, D or E indicate the standard a candidate achieved at Cambridge O Level.

A* is the highest and E is the lowest. 'Ungraded' means that the candidate's performance did not meet the standard required for grade E. 'Ungraded' is reported on the statement of results but not on the certificate.

In specific circumstances your candidates may see one of the following letters on their statement of results:

- Q (PENDING)
- X (NO RESULT).

These letters do not appear on the certificate.

On the statement of results and certificates, Cambridge O Level is shown as GENERAL CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION (GCE O LEVEL).

How students and teachers can use the grades

Assessment at Cambridge O Level has two purposes:

- 1 to measure learning and achievement

The assessment confirms achievement and performance in relation to the knowledge, understanding and skills specified in the syllabus.

- 2 to show likely future success

The outcomes help predict which students are well prepared for a particular course or career and/or which students are more likely to be successful.

The outcomes help students choose the most suitable course or career.

Changes to this syllabus for 2026

The syllabus has been updated. This is version 2, published March 2024.

You must read the whole syllabus before planning your teaching programme. We review our syllabuses regularly to make sure they continue to meet the needs of our schools. In updating this syllabus, we have made it easier for teachers and students to understand, keeping the familiar features that teachers and schools value.

Changes to version 2 of the syllabus, published March 2024

Changes to syllabus content

- There is a change to the Set Texts for Paper 1, Section B: Prose on page 12 from Version 1 of this syllabus. The text *The Mill on the Floss* by George Eliot has been replaced with *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen.

Changes to version 1 of the syllabus, published September 2023

Changes to syllabus content

- The set texts have been changed. Please check the set text list for the relevant year of examination in section 3 of this syllabus for the set texts for each year.

Significant changes to the syllabus are indicated by black vertical lines either side of the text.

Any textbooks endorsed to support the syllabus for examination from 2020 are still suitable for use with this syllabus.



We are committed to making our documents accessible in accordance with the WCAG 2.1 Standard. We are always looking to improve the accessibility of our documents. If you find any problems or you think we are not meeting accessibility requirements, contact us at **info@cambridgeinternational.org** with the subject heading: Digital accessibility. If you need this document in a different format, contact us and supply your name, email address and requirements and we will respond within 15 working days.

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