



COURSE OUTLINE

PHILOSOPHY IN LITERATURE

Many works of fiction explore themes centred around the nature and meaning of the human experience.

Philosophy in Literature is a course that examines serious and thought-provoking philosophical issues that find

their expression in the words of authors rather than in philosophy textbooks. A wide range of British, Continental and American authors in a varied spectrum of genres will be studied. Over the four weeks students

will focus on topics which include the balance of good and evil in the self, despair and redemption, freedom and

determinism, meaninglessness and absurdity, death and suffering and the relationship between God and man.

Week One 'Human, All Too Human' - Week one examines the dual nature of the self in Victorian literature. Philosophical insights from around this era will include Freud, Darwin, Marx and Nietzsche. The central text that is studied is 'Jekyll and Hyde' but consideration will be given to these themes in Poe's 'The Telltale Heart', Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness' and Wilde's 'The Picture of Dorian Gray'.

Key text RL Stevenson *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* ISBN 0141439734

Week Two 'Damned To Be Free' - Week two examines the philosophical issue of free will and determinism from both religious and secular perspectives. Textual material is drawn from a range of British and American books and plays. Key thinkers include Hume, Kant, Sartre and Calvin. The central text is 'Of Mice and Men' though the themes will be addressed in Hogg's 'Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner', Greene's 'Brighton Rock', Fitzgerald's 'The Great Gatsby' and Marlowe's 'Dr Faustus'. Do we have choices or is life predestined?

Key text: John Steinbeck *Of Mice and Men* ISBN 0582461464

Week Three 'Judge for Yourselves' - Week three addresses existentialism, a branch of philosophy that has

often emerged in literature from the late 19th to mid 20th Centuries. Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Sartre's ideas will be studied. The main text is Tolstoy's 'The Death of Ivan Ilyich' though we shall also consider themes in Camus's 'The Fall' and Kerouac's 'On the Road'.

Key text Leo Tolstoy *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* ISBN 0553210351

Week Four 'God's Action In The World' - Week four looks at the relationship between God and man,

specifically with regard to the existence of evil and responsibility. A range of philosophers of religion throughout the centuries will be looked at. The main text is Shelley's 'Frankenstein' though themes in Dostoevsky's 'The Brothers Karamazov', Wiesel's 'Night' and King's 'The Dead Zone' will be discussed.

Key text Mary Shelley *Frankenstein* ISBN 0486282112

Students are not expected to read any of the texts other than the key text for that week, though there may be

some extracts or one or two short stories such as Poe's 'The Telltale Heart' or Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper'

to read.

If you are unable to obtain books locally, they may be ordered from

<http://bookshop.blackwell.co.uk>

or

www.amazon.co.uk