

Spotlight on the Rossett Curriculum

English

In the first of our new '**spotlight on the curriculum**' series, we will be exploring English. What is it like to study English at Rossett? What are the key features of the English curriculum and what makes studying English at Rossett special?

"Once you learn to read, you will be forever free"

Frederick Douglass



Developing our students to become **thoughtful, critical readers**, is at the heart of the English curriculum at Rossett. We want all students to be able to access, explore and interrogate the ever-increasing amount of complex written information to which they are exposed. Beyond this, we develop students' ability to present, debate, and write discursively. Our innovative and forward-thinking curriculum helps our students to become powerful advocates for those less fortunate, but also shows them the beauty of the English language and teaches them to appreciate the power of the writer's craft in shaping attitudes.

How did we choose what to teach?

Choosing which texts students should study is a challenge for any school. How do you begin to select a handful of texts from a library of millions? Firstly, we decided what we want the texts to develop in our students. During their time with us, we want students to explore the rich literary heritage of this country - including Shakespeare, Chaucer, and Dickens - so they can appreciate the place British literature occupies on the world stage. We choose texts that uncover 'unheard voices' in society and get students to discover writers from other parts of the world. We believe a focus on diversity is most important in schools where students'

own experiences are limited. Our English curriculum widens and deepens students' social, moral, spiritual, and cultural understanding, and prepares them for life in modern Britain – and beyond. Our mission is to empower our students with the knowledge and empathetic understanding of language and literature and so to address disadvantage and shape a fairer society.

What is special about English at Rossett?

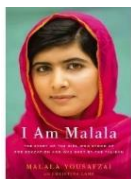
In addition to teaching cornerstone texts such as '**Macbeth**' we have tailored our English curriculum to include a specific focus on the media. In an increasingly media-influenced society, we know the importance of equipping our students with the knowledge to navigate their way through 'fake news'; to differentiate between fact, opinion, and 'truth'; and to understand how media shapes our thoughts and actions in positive and negative ways. We also ensure they can identify how groups of people, particularly minority groups, are represented in the media and understand the wide-reaching implications of these depictions. We develop a sense of connected thinking between the themes students come across in their study of timeless classics, and what they experience in their day-to-day lives.

What do students learn, why do they learn it and why do they learn it then?

Key stage 3

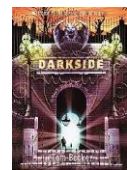
In Year 7, students explore the theme of **identity** to help them find their own voice in a new school setting and enable them to explore a range of narrative voices constructed for a variety of purposes. They will consider how their voices and the words that they choose have a rich cultural heritage. Identity will also be explored through 'meeting' fictional characters: students will explore how both strong and confused identities can be used for comedy and drama.

Students in Year 7 also study extracts from a diverse range of autobiographies such as '**I am Malala**' by Malala Yousafzai. This introduces them to the idea of writing as a construct and how writers use a palette to express



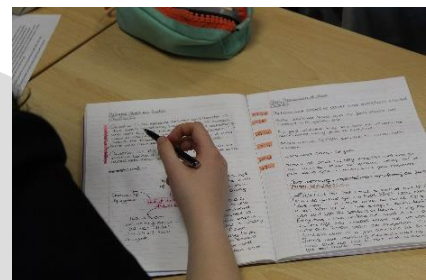
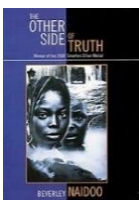
opinion. This exposure to different voices deepens their understanding of identity.

'**Darkside**' by Tom Becker is their first full novel which introduces students to the conventions of gothic fiction and acts as a springboard to develop their skills in comprehension, oracy, inference, retrieval, and language analysis. We don't shy away from challenge and introduce students to Shakespeare in Year 7 with '**Much Ado About Nothing**'. We even introduce students to **Chaucer**, looking at the English



language through a completely different lens - asking students to contemplate history and ever-changing nature of language and what the future holds.

In Year 8, students study the novel '**The Other Side of Truth**', which is the story of two Nigerian children who are sent to London as refugees after their mother is murdered. The story references real political events in Nigeria, most notably the execution of the poet Ken Saro-Wiwa. Like Saro-Wiwa, the father in this story angered Nigerian authorities by criticising their agenda in his writing. This novel links to the identity unit studied in Year 7 and opens 'next steps' discussions about the themes of **justice** and **freedom**. Students also explore a range of poems from other cultures and traditions to reinforce their understanding of not only poetic forms, but of how this genre is used to explore issues surrounding justice and freedom. Finally, they examine justice and freedom in the mystery genre by comparing Conan Doyle's '**The Speckled Band**' and Roald Dahl's '**Lamb to the Slaughter**'. For students who have only ever encountered Dahl as a children's author this text will be a real eye-opener.



The theme of '**big voices**' is covered in Year 9, drawing together the powerful knowledge gained in Year 7 and Year 8, and challenges our students to explore the thoughts and feelings of the marginalised and the oppressed in society. By pushing students to consider life from an alternative perspective, we aim for our students to develop a greater sense of empathy for humanity. Students begin in Year 9 with Dickens' 19th century text '**A Christmas Carol**'. At the heart of the novella is the representation of class divide with the poor represented as oppressed and marginalised. Students study the Victorian period including the crime and punishment of the time, and the 'Poor Law'. The poetry we introduce students to focuses on the voices of the oppressed and includes a range of forms across a broad time period including song lyrics. This will enable students to see the contemporary significance of poetry. Authors and poets we study include Maya Angelou, Billie Holiday, and rapper Dave.

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The choice of Shakespeare play for Year 9 is '**The Merchant of Venice**'. Students explore the historical context of this play, examining the representation of different religious groups in Elizabethan times. This play centres on the themes of identity, justice and freedom enabling students to draw upon knowledge and reference points from their Year 7 and Year 8 studies in the analysis of the play. Finally, we finish by exploring the use of allegory in Orwell's '**Animal Farm**'. This novel, as with all others studied at KS3, is viewed within its historical context. Students will examine the inequalities within the farmyard and what they represent and the presentation of socialist ideas. They also consider the importance of being politically aware and active as a young person today.

Throughout this journey of exploration at Key Stage 3, we celebrate the writer's craft and develop students' cultural understanding by reflecting on examples of literature which are valued for their beauty.

An interview with Year 7 student, Thuli Motalhabai:



What are your English lessons like at Rossett?

"They are really fun. Our teacher makes our lessons interesting and enjoyable. When we were reading Darkside, he did different voices for the different characters. This really helped everyone understand who was speaking and it meant we understood the plot better."

How important is reading to you?

"Reading now will set us up for the future. If it is a fiction book, you can have fun with it. You can put your body and mind into it. The texts we have looked at all have a moral message and about how to treat people fairly."

Do you feel supported in English?

"Yes, the pandemic affected my writing, but my teachers have helped me to catch up."

How have they done this?

"They teach us key words so that we can use them in our writing. Learning new words has made me more confident in English and all my other subjects."

What advice would you give to a new student starting Rossett?

"I think I would say be yourself, try to enjoy reading and ask for help if you need it. Don't pretend you know what some of the words mean."

Key stage 4

In Years 10 and 11, students move on to study for their GCSEs in English Language and English Literature. We have thought carefully about the way we order the topics to help students build their knowledge and remember it. Students will start the GCSE course by being reminded of George Orwell from the end of Year 9, through analysis of '1984' - making links between KS3 and GCSE study. Students explore a range of extracts from dystopian fiction including 'The Hunger Games' and 'Fahrenheit 451' before creating their own. Students then move on to studying 'Jekyll and Hyde' to consider morality, religion, and science. Furthermore, they will build upon their contextual knowledge from KS3 and apply this to the key texts as their responses become exploratory and conceptualised.

Students move on to study 'An Inspector Calls' and develop their contextual knowledge to further include political ideologies, picking up on ideas and concepts learnt during the study of 'Animal Farm'. This also allows students to utilise prior knowledge from 'A Christmas Carol' and consider challenging concepts of manipulation of the lower classes and the importance of understanding political dominance, and power in society.

In their final year of GCSE, students study 'Macbeth'. We have chosen Macbeth to build on the Shakespeare plays studied in Key Stage 3 (Merchant of Venice and Much Ado About Nothing) as this furthers students' understanding of power and justice as key themes in literature.



Year 11 student, Pari Dandy explains what English at Rossett has taught her:

"It has definitely made me think about how to be a better person and what I can do to change unfairness in society. I feel as if we have read things from all corners of the world and this has given me a new perspective"

Key stage 5

We offer a broad range of qualifications at A Level for students who want to study English at a higher level after GCSE. We offer English Language, English Literature and Media Studies. We know that students want to specialise in different aspects of the subject to support their future ambitions.

The curriculum that our students experience from Year 7, builds steadily to support their access to these demanding A-Level choices. With many of our students progressing to study English at University every year, it shows the power of our ambitious curriculum from the point when students set foot in their first English lesson of Year 7.

Year 13 English Literature student, Edward Tiltman, is going to study English at university next year. He reflects on his time at Rossett studying English:

"The thing I really like about English at Rossett is that you are encouraged to think independently. There is a lot of discussion about differing interpretations of the texts we are studying. I also value how teachers signpost us to wider reading to provide further context to our studies"

How can you help your child's progress in English?

Help develop your child's vocabulary - teach them new words and test that they understand them and can use them correctly in a sentence.

- Be a 'reader role model'
- Show them the importance of reading both fiction and non-fiction
- Read aloud with your child and help them improve their fluency
- Ask them to tell you about the texts they are studying
- Help develop their vocabulary

Want to know more? Please visit the **curriculum** pages of our website and click on English.

