



# Get off to a 'Flying Start' in

## English Literature - A Level

Welcome to Flying Start with North Devon College.

We hope that you are excited to join us at North Devon College. We want to help you to focus on your skills for your course with us and so below you will find questions to consider, tasks to complete and some background research to undertake before enrolment.

Please read the instructions and have a go at the activities.

If you get stuck, please see the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) section at the end of this document for help.

### A quick hello and introduction to the course

Please watch this [video](#), introducing you to AS/A Level English Literature at North Devon College.

### To get you started...

1. Begin by watching [this mini-lesson](#) introducing the poem *Eat Me* by Patience Agbabi. This poem is part of the anthology we study in Year 1 of the course. As you watch, make notes directly on your copy of the poem (p3). Be sure to pause the video when prompted.
2. Next, annotate the poem *The Gun* by Vicki Feaver (p4), following the same approach we used in the video. To assist you, here's a helpful resource for technical terminology: [The Gun by Vicki Feaver – Poem Analysis](#).
3. Read the comparative essay on page 5 of this document and annotate your thoughts in the margins. This student-written essay models the structure you will need to follow when organising your ideas for essays in this course.
4. Write a paragraph comparing how gender is presented in *Eat Me* by Patience Agbabi and *The Gun* by Vicki Feaver. Use your notes to support your ideas and try to follow the essay structure demonstrated in the previous task.

### For those who want a bit more...

- **Read the Set Texts** - Make sure you obtain and begin reading the core texts. Refer to the final page of this document for the editions you'll need before the course starts.
- **Watch Adaptations** - You could watch a recorded stage production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, such as the National Theatre's version starring Gillian Anderson, or the classic 1951 film with Marlon Brando.
- **Listen to Podcasts** - BBC Radio 4's *In Our Time* 'Frankenstein' episode offers a rich discussion on Shelley's themes, influences, and historical context.

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### **Q: Will this work be marked and when is it due?**

A: No, your work won't be marked. In the first week we will be looking at Agbabi's poem 'Eat Me' and Vicki Feaver's poem 'The Gun' together, and we encourage you to bring all your notes from this Flying Start along so that they can inform our discussion of the poem.

### **Q: I am not sure if I have got the answers right, what should I do?**

A: Don't worry, just have a go at getting something down and bring it along to the lesson where we can talk it through. There is no need to get anxious about the tasks, we are not expecting you to know everything before you arrive but are interested in your ideas and what you have found easy or difficult as it helps us support you right from the beginning.

### **Q: How long should I spend on the tasks?**

A: This really is an introduction to the poetry unit, and we will look together at it in class. We would recommend that you spend no more than an hour on the poetry task, but of course you are free to spend as much time as you like learning about the other texts on the course by watching the film adaptations, listening to podcasts and reading the texts!

### **Q: Is it okay if I produce the work by hand?**

A: Yes, that's fine! You can either type your answers into a word document and print it or you can hand write your answers.

### **Q: Do I have to do it?**

A: Flying Start isn't compulsory, but many students find it useful for getting them used to thinking about subjects at the next level. Early classroom sessions will also reflect on some of the Flying Start activities.

### **Q: Where can I find more information about the English literature course at North Devon College?**

The exam board we are with at North Devon College is Pearson Edexcel. You can find a link to the specification for the AS qualification here:

<https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/qualifications/edexcel-a-levels/english-literature-2015.html>

## EAT ME

Patience Agbabi

When I hit thirty, he bought me a cake,  
three layers of icing, home-made  
a candle for each stone in weight.

The icing was white but the letters were pink,  
they said, *EAT ME*. And I ate, did  
what I was told. Didn't even taste it.

Then he asked me to get up and walk  
round the bed so he could watch my broad  
belly wobble, hips judder like a juggernaut.

*'The bigger the better' he'd say, I like  
big girls, soft girls, girls I can burrow inside  
with multiple chins, masses of cellulite.*

I was his Jacuzzi. But he was my cook,  
my only pleasure was the rush of fast food,  
his pleasure, to watch me swell like forbidden fruit.

His breadfruit. His desert island after shipwreck.  
Or a beached whale on a king-size bed  
craving a wave. I was a tidal wave of flesh

too fat to leave, too fat to buy a pint of full-fat milk,  
too fat to use fat as an emotional shield,  
too fat to be called chubby, cuddly, big-built.

The day I hit thirty-nine, I allowed him to stroke  
my globe of a cheek. His flesh, my flesh flowed.  
He said, *open wide*, poured olive oil down my throat.

*Soon you'll be forty...* he whispered, and how  
could I not roll over on top. I rolled and he drowned  
in my flesh. I drowned his dying sentence out.

I left him there for six hours that felt like a week.  
His mouth slightly open, his eyes bulging with greed.  
There was nothing else left in the house to eat.

## The Gun

Vicki Feaver

Bringing a gun into a house  
changes it.

You lay it on the kitchen table,  
stretched out like something dead  
itself: the grainy polished wood stock  
jutting over the edge,  
the long metal barrel  
casting a grey shadow  
on the green-checked cloth.

At first it's just practice:  
perforating tins  
dangling an orange string  
from trees in the garden.  
Then a rabbit shot  
clean through the head.

Soon the fridge fills with creatures  
that have run and flown.  
Your hands reek of gun oil.  
And entrails. You trample  
fur and feathers. There's a spring  
in your step; your eyes gleam  
like when sex was fresh.

A gun brings a house alive.

I join in the cooking: jointing  
and slicing, stirring and tasting –  
excited as if the King of Death  
had arrived to feast, stalking  
out of winters woods,  
his black mouth  
sprouting golden crocuses.

Compare the presentation of violence in Patience Agbabi's 'Eat Me' and one other poem of your choice from the *Poems of the Decade* anthology [24 marks]

Both Patience Agbabi in 'Eat Me' and Vicki Feaver in 'The Gun' explore different types of violence, showing how it can be both physical and psychological. In 'Eat Me', violence builds gradually through the feeder's control of his partner and ends in death, while in 'The Gun', violence arrives suddenly and transforms the home of a couple. Although the poems have different narratives they both show how violence is a force that reshapes identity, space, and relationships.

In both poems, violence is shown to change the world around it, becoming almost like a natural force that cannot be stopped. The poets use structure and tone to show how violence becomes part of everyday life. In 'The Gun', Feaver opens with the line "Bringing a gun into a house / changes it," which shows that violence is powerful and unavoidable. The short sentence and line break foreground the ambiguous verb 'changes', making it feel definite and ominous. The gun is described like a dead body—"stretched out like something dead"—using simile to show its connection to death even before it is used. As the poem progresses, the violence increases, starting with shooting tins and ending with a fridge "fill[ed] with creatures / that have run and flown." The shift in imagery from harmless targets to dead animals shows how violence escalates and becomes normal. The free verse form with irregular stanzas perhaps also reflects how this violence spreads without boundaries. In 'Eat Me', we similarly see violence also builds over time, but it's shown through control and forced growth. The speaker is fed until she becomes "a tidal wave of flesh," a metaphor that compares her to a natural disaster. This makes the final act of violence—when she rolls on top of the man and kills him—feel both dramatic and inevitable. The line "I rolled and he drowned / in my flesh" uses enjambment to let the violence spill from one line to the next, adding to the feeling of unstoppable force. Both poems suggest that once violence begins, it becomes part of a system that changes everything.

The poets also use strong sensory language and figurative devices to show how violence is not just seen, but felt and experienced on a physical level. In 'The Gun', the violence is described through disturbing, detailed imagery: "Your hands reek of gun oil. / And entrails." The olfactory (smell) imagery makes the violence visceral and unavoidable. Feaver also links violence to excitement—"There's a spring / in your step; your eyes gleam"—suggesting that it gives energy and power. The metaphor of the "King of Death" creates a surreal, mythic feel, but also turns violence into a kind of celebration. The internal assonance of [ou] in "black mouth / sprouting golden crocuses" creates an ominous, lingering drone that contrasts with the bright image of crocuses, showing the strange beauty found in destruction. 'Eat Me' uses food as a metaphor for violence, which makes the imagery feel both familiar and disturbing. Phrases like "poured olive oil down my throat" suggest forced feeding but also hint at being prepared like food, as the woman is, in a figurative way, 'consumed' by her partner. The final image of the man with "eyes bulging with greed" after death links back to the theme of hunger and shows how violence and desire are connected. The dental anaphora in "too fat to..." emphasises the impact of this slow violence on the speaker's body.

Both poems show how violence enters everyday life and changes everything around it, using structure, imagery and sound to make the reader feel its effects.

## Text choices for AS English Literature

You will need to buy a copy of each of the texts to use in class to record notes. This does not have to be a brand-new copy of the books and does not need to be kept pristine. You will need to buy the same editions of the texts as you will have in the exam, which are listed below with pictures to help you find the correct copy.

The texts you will need for AS English Literature 2026-7 are:

- Poems of the Decade: An Anthology of the Forward Books of Poetry 2002–2011 (Faber and Faber, 2015) ISBN 978-0571325405
- Frankenstein
- The Handmaid's Tale, Margaret Atwood (Vintage Publishing) ISBN: 9780099740919
- A Streetcar Named Desire, by Tennessee Williams (Penguin Modern Classics) ISBN: 9780141190273

## Revision guides

We also suggest that you get hold of a copy of each of the below revision guides for the texts. These are the best books we have come across so far to help aid your self-study of some of the texts. You do not need to bring these to class.

- *Study and Revise Literature Guide for AS/A level: Pearson Edexcel Poems of the Decade* (2019) Faber and Faber
- *AS/A Level Study Guide: Frankenstein* (2012) York Notes
- *AS/A Level Study Guide: A Streetcar Named Desire* (2015) York Notes
- *Study and Revise Literature Guide for AS/A level: a Streetcar Named Desire Workbook* (2018) Faber and Faber
- *Study and Revise Literature Guide for AS/A level: The Handmaid's Tale* (2016) Hodder Education

