

# Reading English Literature

## A Pathway to Further Study

### What does the course aim to achieve?

Most of all, we want you to have an enjoyable experience of returning to study. It's important to realise that this won't be like school. We want you to have your own thoughts and opinions (and disagree with the tutor sometimes!). You will be encouraged to complete work in your own time. Support and advice will be given during the class meetings.

We hope you will go away from the course feeling excited about books and reading. We hope you will have gained the confidence to continue your studies and know what options are open to you. The course will encourage you to develop skills in:

### Reading

Together, the class read a range of prose, poetry and drama. This will include a Shakespeare play, a novel and an anthology of poems.

### Discussion

There will be plenty of class discussion and debate in a friendly and supportive space, plus the opportunity to read texts aloud. This is a great way to improve confidence and to start thinking about what you are reading.

### Essay Writing

Don't panic if you haven't written one before or if you are out of practice! You will be given plenty of support with planning and writing essays.

### How is the course marked?

You will be awarded a grade. This is based on the mark for your final assessed essay. There are **NO EXAMS!** You need 40% overall to pass the course.

### What happens next?

Students are given support in exploring options for further study. There are two BA courses at Bristol which may be of interest. The BA English runs during the day. Alternatively, the BA English Literature and Community Engagement runs part-time on one evening per week.

## Who can apply?

This course is designed for mature students over the age of 21 who wish to return to study. You do not need to have any qualifications to apply. The most important thing is to explain in your personal statement on the application form why you would like to study on the course. We welcome students who may have been out of education for a while. Our students come from a wide range of backgrounds and from a wide age range.

## Course fee

The course fee for Reading English Literature is **£410**.

The University has funding to help students access courses and remain in higher education. Students on low incomes are welcome to apply for funding support. Students who qualify for funding support pay a reduced course fee.

Students on low incomes who do not qualify are welcome to make part payments. A flexible payment plan can be discussed after you attend your informal interview.

Course fees are paid securely through the University Online Shop. Information about when and how to pay your fees will be sent through to you once you have been offered a place on the course.

## How to apply

Please go to our web page and complete the online application form:  
[www.bristol.ac.uk/english/study/part-time/short-courses/reading-englishliterature/](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/english/study/part-time/short-courses/reading-englishliterature/).

We will then invite you to an informal interview to discuss your application.

You may be offered a place on the course which starts in January 2024, or we may encourage you to enrol on one of our short courses.

The course director for Reading English Literature is Marie-Annick Gournet and her email address is [marie-annick.gournet@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:marie-annick.gournet@bristol.ac.uk).

The University has a Mature Student Advisor. If you have any questions about being a mature student, please email [mature-students@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:mature-students@bristol.ac.uk).

## Frequently asked questions

If you have a question that is not covered here, please get in touch. We are happy to help and discuss any concerns you have.

### **Where will the sessions take place?**

From 24 January to 13 March at the University of Bristol micro-campus, Wellspring Settlement, East Bristol.

From 20 March to 8 May at the University of Bristol Arts Complex, Woodland Road, Clifton main campus.

There will be breaks for half-term (14 February) and the Easter vacation (25 March to 12 April).

You will be provided with a University card which will grant you full access to the University library and student study centres.

### **What happens after I apply?**

We will write to invite you for a short informal interview. This can be in-person at the University campus or online. If online, you will be sent a link by email to join your interview.

### **What will I be asked at the informal interview?**

This is an opportunity for you to ask questions about the course and about returning to study. We will ask you what you enjoy reading, why you want to return to study and whether the course will fit in with your other commitments. We will also ask you what you would like to do when the course has finished. We will give you a detailed picture of the course and the routes to further study.

### **I don't have A-Levels or I don't have GCSE English or I didn't do well at school. Can I apply?**

Yes! You do not need to have any previous qualifications to apply for the course. You just need to demonstrate you are motivated and enthusiastic, that you enjoy reading, and that you are committed to the idea of studying at a higher level.

### **How do you decide who gets a place on the course?**

Admission to the course is not based on previous achievements or qualifications. We are looking for students who are motivated, enthusiastic and committed; who have strong reasons for wanting to return to studying; and who can demonstrate that they will be able to manage the demands of study at this level. We hope to accommodate as many students as we can on the course, though it may not be possible to give a place to everyone who applies.

### **What if I am not offered a place?**

Anyone who is not offered a place will be encouraged to talk through other options with the Course Director. We run a large programme of part-time courses at Level C

(equivalent to first-year undergraduate level), and many of these also provide a good route back into studying.

**Will I automatically be offered a place on a degree afterwards?**

No, you will need to apply for a place. You will be encouraged to fill in an application form for a part-time degree towards the end of the Reading English Literature course. You will then be asked for an interview. You will also be given information on a variety of other options for continuing your studies.

**How long does it take to complete a part-time degree?**

After completing the Reading English Literature unit, the main route to continue your studies at Bristol is on the BA English Literature and Community Engagement. This runs part-time one evening per week and takes six years to complete part-time. However, you can request to switch to full-time study, so the degree may take four or five years in total.

**What if I'm not sure I want to continue at the end?**

The Reading English Literature course aims to be useful and enjoyable even if you decide not to apply for a degree. We hope you will have gained important skills and confidence. Successful students are awarded credit points and this evidence of further study at this level can be useful in career progression or in taking on work in the community.

**How can I fit my studies around work and/or family?**

The Reading English Literature course is part of the Department of English's commitment to offer more flexible learning opportunities. The course itself is taught one evening per week, on twelve evenings over five months. This format is designed to make it accessible to a wide range of students. On top of this, we would normally expect you to complete 7-10 hours of work in your own time per week. There will be advice during the course on managing your studies, and you will be with a group of mature students who are faced with similar pressures on their time. The group atmosphere can be helpful in adjusting to the academic demands of the course.

# MATURE STUDENTS' STORIES

## Judith's Story



**I grew up in Knowle West. I wasn't encouraged to do well at school. I used to write really badly, I couldn't even read my own writing. I only had one teacher who realised I was having difficulties and tried to help me make my writing legible.**

I wanted to be a nurse but was told by a careers advisor that I couldn't because of my qualifications – so why didn't I do catering? I left school at 16 and went to college and I was put on a Certificate of PreVocational Education for young people who hadn't done well at school. That was the first time I found out that I hadn't done well and that everything I had worked so hard for didn't amount to much.

I didn't have lots of confidence. One of the tasters we did was childcare. I really liked it and they put me on to the second year to study family and community care. But it didn't qualify me as a nursery nurse and I didn't know that until it finished. I left college a little bit disillusioned. My mum was a single parent, so I got a job full time in catering and planned to stay there. Only later did I train as a nursery nurse, which was hard work. But I got a job and then I fell into youth work, which I love. I work with young people aged 9 to 16. I work and live in St Pauls. I love the people and the community spirit. Only people living here know what it's like. There's nowhere as wonderful and diverse as this area.

Last year I found out, through my work, that I am dyslexic. I always avoided paperwork because I found it hard. It didn't make sense. When I did ask for help in college and school I was treated as if I was stupid. So only this year, at nearly 40, did I get help – but that's partly about undoing the last 30-odd years. I'm a slow burner.

I found out about a Bristol University course called 'Second Skins' in the Black Development Agency newsletter. It was free to people without a degree, which appealed to me as it wasn't too much of a risk. I thought: I'd love to find out more about myself, read with other people and open my mind. I wanted to learn more about who I am as an individual and as part of a community. I felt I could take a chance on it, and try to find out about something new.

I liked that somebody black was teaching it and that she'd done well in the educational system. I didn't know anybody could be passionate about literature or why they would be, but

she was. I didn't always understand the words but you could ask questions, it didn't matter how silly they were.

I loved a book we read called *Black Teacher* by Beryl Gilroy, who was Britain's first black head teacher. I empathised with what she had suffered but also how she used it to empower her and others.

Our tutor told us about the Reading English Literature course and I saw it as a stepping stone. I was nervous about applying for it and spending money on it when I wasn't sure whether I'd like it. But that became a motivating factor too, because I didn't want to waste my money. We were in a beautiful room at the University, full of books and the smell of books! We had another tutor, with even more of a passion for literature.

I loved the short stories we read and *Frankenstein*. It was very hard to read Shakespeare, just trying to get into the mindset and language. I would say *King Lear* and I are friends now, but I wouldn't say we were best friends! But his creativity is amazing, I don't know if any other writer compares to him. There are so many hidden meanings in it. He attacks society without drawing blood, which in that time was a dangerous thing to do. I never thought I'd be inspired by Shakespeare partly because he's a white writer. So that was a pleasant surprise. He was a man beyond his time. He wrote 400 years ago but he's still being read. There were times when I thought I had nothing to say about it, because everyone has said what I think. He was kind of a rebel. He wasn't rich, but he did very well. He didn't go to university like other writers, he did it in his own way. That gave me something to empathise with.

I found it hard to write essays while working full-time and having been out of education. I had to get used to the different standards that were expected, in getting up to university level. It was hard, but it was brilliant watching myself improve with each essay. The tutor showed you what you needed to do. When you'd made a good point, he'd let you know; and when you hadn't, he'd say 'What about this?'

I'm thinking of doing the English Literature and Community Engagement degree or maybe studying youth work. I'd like to do more taster courses too and learn more about other writers. I've got a long list of books to read now, recommended by the tutor and other students. I want to read *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*, D.H. Lawrence, Dickens, Toni Morrison...

I took a chance with the Second Skins course and it took me to a better place...

## Damien's Story



**I went to school in rural Ireland and was taught by the Marist Brothers. I left when I was 12 with no qualifications and was living in London by the time I was 15.**

I didn't become immersed in reading until I was 22. I spent a lot of time in and out of jail between the ages of 16 and 25 down to a heroin and alcohol addiction. While I was there I came across a magazine called *rebel inc*, which had modern writers like Irvine Welsh and extracts from publications that had been banned in earlier periods, like *Hunger* and *Lolita*. I found about ten copies and it spoke to me, I could identify with the literature because it was quite rebellious.

I started reading a lot of Yeats, Burroughs, Faulkner and Hermann Hesse. There is a certain amount of shame when you're outside of society. These books said that I was OK, that everyone has a good and bad side and their own struggles, that I was a part of society.

I got into reading initially out of boredom and escapism. Then I found myself reading stuff I wouldn't have expected to enjoy, like Jeanette Winterson: I love her stuff. The novels I read often contained information that I would have previously known nothing about, this spurred me on to find out more about a variety of subjects. Initially I read people I could identify with, then I started to develop empathy for others, for different cultures and experiences, to ask: 'What's it like for you?' I particularly have a fondness for Latin American literature.

I worked for about 15 years on building sites and labouring, as a sort of jack of all trades. I did a BTEC in dance movement and the therapeutic process. All of the students and tutors were women. I was interested in what life is like for other people. Through that I came into contact with people with learning difficulties and those with brain damage from accidents. I was moved deeply by this course. I've learnt that so much communication isn't verbal, that there's so much else going on. I now work in mental health services for an organization called Supported Independence Ltd. I got the opportunity to do a N.V.Q 3 in health and social care while there.

I had always regretted that although I am well read I am not well educated. I'd always secretly wished I could be and looked to see what was out there, not really believing I could get in to university. When I saw the Reading English Literature course I thought I could do it. It wasn't a huge commitment, and then I would know where I stand. I had doubts about whether I would fit in with the other students. Had I read the right stuff? Had I read enough? I was worried that the way I think and speak are two different things. How would I write an essay?

But the students on the course were fantastic, a wide variety of people with a common interest in literature. It wasn't how I'd imagined school being, it was very open. We were encouraged

to give our opinions. I felt I was giving as well as getting from the tutor. I liked being told what to read and being given the tools to allow a closer inquiry. Now I'm getting more out of what I read.

We went to see *King Lear* in Stratford as part of the course. That was a big deal for me. It was very moving and it opened up doors, to realize that this is mine as well as belonging to other people. I'd read the play 4 or 5 times before we went and had drafted my essay. But seeing it, the language just fell into place; the tragedy and darkness, the love and hope of it. I got 67% for my essay, which was fantastic for my confidence: I didn't believe that mark, I had to re-read it.

I've read obsessively for the last 10 years but now it's gone off the radar, I have 5 books on the go at a time. I'm 39 and there's a new excitement in my life, I'm moving into the complete unknown.

When I tell people what I'm up to, they're amazed that Bristol University would have me, that it has something like the Reading English Literature course and allows so many people from different backgrounds to come into the University.

I've now been offered a place on the English Literature and Community Engagement degree. The community engagement aspect of the course relates to my experience. I wouldn't be in the position I'm in now if I hadn't read. I believe I would not have found the desire to recover from drug addiction had I not read the literature I found. A lot of people are stuck – you don't know what you don't know. You don't think there's a world outside your little world. I have an interesting healthy life, which I enjoy, and a great partner. All of that, and how I relate to people, is down to reading. Without it, I would have been stuck in self. I read to escape out of myself, into the world.