

Research
Based
Curricula



**Literary Legacy: from
Romanticism to Beckett**
Key Stage 5
English
Literature

2020



Resource One

Model Answers



- Answers**
1. The Romantic movement was European in origin and occurred during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Romanticism reacted against the ideals fostered by the Age of Enlightenment, a European intellectual movement of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which emphasised reason over emotional insight. Romanticism was the movement that challenged the perceived strictures of Enlightenment ideology.
 2. Rebellious spirit, restlessness, longing (for freedom and change), emotionalism / emotional extremes, a desire for definitive expression. Students should refer to Blanning and Berlin to elaborate on and support their answer.
 3. The *Sturm und Drang* movement of the late eighteenth century and the French Revolution (1789–1799), of which the former has its roots in German culture. Students should discuss how the emotionalism of *Sturm und Drang* and the radicalism of the French Revolution, and the individualism sparked by both, ignited the revolutionary Romantic spirit in literature.
 4. Students can discuss how aspects such as social unrest, political upheaval and the prevailing atmosphere of emotional intensity spilled over into, for instance, Coleridge's lyric, quoting lines from 'Kubla Khan' such as, 'But oh! that deep romantic chasm', and describing how the long, drawn-out vowel sounds evoke the poet's extreme emotional anguish which chimes with the contemporary climate. Students should reference key events such as the French Revolution to provide context when discussing, for example, Wordsworth's poem; the poet's description of 'the joy / Of elevated thoughts' speaks to the liberal spirit of individualism espoused by the revolutionary and radical atmosphere.

Resource One

Model Answers



- Answers**
5. As long as the student is able to explain their choice, there are many options here. For example, 'a sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused' shows Wordsworth's awareness of the capacity of the word not to name, as he is forced to use the obscure expression 'something' to convey his feeling, whilst 'deeply interfused' suggests how he believes this inexpressible 'something' to be integral to existence.



Resource Two

Model Answers

- Answers**
1. Beckett was awarded the Croix de Guerre in 1945 for his work in a French Resistance Cell called Gloria SMH during WW2. In 1969 he was the recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature, for his writing in both English and French. One prize was for his resistance work and the other for his literary merit, therefore the earlier one relates more to his social and political activities.
 2. Students should think about the impact they believe Beckett's actions, choices and experiences had on him as a man and, if they wish to elaborate further, as a writer during WW2. Key points are; his resistance work, the arrest and death of his friend.
 3. His resignation from a good job as lecturer in French at Trinity College Dublin might suggest that the young man was caught in some sort of silent inner battle. This is further implied by the years of restless travel between different European countries. Clearly his psychological struggle culminated in his seeking psychotherapy with Bion in London circa 1934.
 4. Although the writer claimed that his capacity as a reader was nothing noteworthy, we must not always trust the author completely. Indeed, his following admission that the most significant reading experiences were those best at transporting him 'elsewhere' demonstrates what type of reader he was; he consumed the material and certain aspects of it sent him into his own creative space, which emphasises the importance of his allegedly 'poor' reading to his writing. Beckett himself tells us how he read for his own creative purposes.
 5. Cite the Keats line repeatedly quoted by Beckett and discuss how his attentiveness to the poet can be traced back to his schooldays. Other evidence such as the 1970s meeting with Thompson is also applicable.

Resource Two

Model Answers



- Answers**
6. Any backed-up interpretation is relevant – Beckett’s love of Keats could suggest his affinity with Romantic literature, or perhaps the lack of books on English Romantic writers, the lack of marginalia in the Keats books and his comment on Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria* suggests the writer’s lack of interest in Romanticism. An answer that shows both arguments is the strongest.
 7. In the letter to Thomas McGreevy Beckett references the line ‘Take into the air my quiet breath’ from Keats’s ‘Ode to a Nightingale’. This is the same line he was fond of quoting as a teenager whilst at Portora Royal School, as well as throughout his life. The letter evinces just how deeply Keats permeated Beckett’s thought.
 8. Any of the following options, or preferably a combination of these, are applicable: Beckett’s depiction of the poet’s stance; crouching and squatting as though he is turning inwards and trying to make himself small and invisible, the brooding quality; the poet is portrayed as thoughtful, ‘he doesn’t beat his fists on the table’ is a very simple expression of Beckett’s belief that Keats was not prone to throwing tantrums when something went wrong for him; he was not one for loud or rash displays of annoyance, and of course the quote from ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ with its emphasis on quiet breathing. Overall, the excerpt from Beckett’s letter to McGreevy exhibits Beckett’s discernment of and reverence for a quietist nature in Keats.



Resource Three

Model Answers

Answers

1. Diction, tone, style, semantics. These elements which make up expression enable us to interpret a writer's meaning, the motivation behind what they are saying, and in what frame of mind they (or their character) are speaking.
2. Students should employ expressions such as 'in contrast', 'whereas' or 'as opposed to' to denote the differences between Romantic and Beckettian modes of expression. For example, 'Romantic expression is characterised by exuberance and flowery eloquence, which is indicative of how much of the writing of the Romantic era was governed by emotional extremes, whereas Beckett's mode of expression is reductive, related more to what Ruby Cohn has called 'decreation'.
3. Students should discuss two key factors; firstly, a social and political element, the total fragmentation of war, and secondly, a literary aspect, the movement away from superfluity at the beginning of the twentieth-century, indicated by the Imagist movement and Pound's call to 'Make It New'.
4. When considering the concept of expression as a theme in literature we are not thinking about what expression is, but rather how expression is confronted by writers through the ages. Wordsworth's inability to express was unveiled in Resource One – in 'Tintern Abbey' he was forced to use the word 'something' to describe a thing for which there is no word, which emphasises the Romantic struggle with the limits of expression. Beckett's 'what is the word' is perhaps a much clearer rendition of this age-old struggle with expression, as the hyphenated lines conjure that sense of a word disappearing before we can grasp it. Expression as a literary theme is the consideration of how writers approach the use and form of words on the page, and how this has changed (or not) over time.



Resource Three

Model Answers

Answers

5. 'Could I revive within me' – elaborate on the sounds within the sentence which evoke that sense of yearning (for instance, long vowels).
6. Students should engage with the visual appearance and the typography as well as with the Romantic lyricism versus Beckett's use of few words. A well formed answer will expand on the possible reasons for the differences in expression as discussed in the resource.

Resource Four

Model Answers



Answers

1. Discussion of the visual appearance of Beckett's works before and after the war – i.e. the pre-war works are longer / there is less splintering of words and phrases, whereas the post-war works enact a breakdown of the language and tend to be shorter in length.
2. Cite and explain the content of Beckett's 1931 letter to McGreevy.
3. Beckett's 'Dream' and 'Whoroscope' notebooks were primarily for jotting down ideas, many of which the writer took from his reading material. He would then develop, shape and transform his sources for his own creative purposes. John Piling points out how the 'for interpolation' section of Beckett's 'Whoroscope' notebook shows how much of his reading in English was transferred into his novel *Murphy*.
4. The study of the material read by a writer such as Beckett is integral to our understanding of how and why he wrote the way he did. For example, without knowing about Beckett's engagement with Goethe's *Faust* in 1936 and his noting of two specific phrases from this text, research findings such as the suspected genesis of the expression 'soughing with the bawdy innuendo of eternity' in *Murphy* would not be possible. It is important to engage with Beckett's reading to understand more fully how such influences shade almost imperceptibly into the fabric of his writing.
5. Description of the fragmentation of language and expression as discussed in the resource, with reference to the visual appearance of the excerpt in Section B.



Resource Four

Model Answers

Answers

6. Individual critical interpretations are especially crucial for questions such as these. For example, one student could argue that the play most certainly portrays a post-Holocaust landscape, whereas another could interpret it as Beckett's attempt to introduce reduction to the stage and not just to his prose works in a way totally unrelated to the impact of war's devastation.
7. The anagram is, of course, 'no'. Therefore the writer's desire yet inability to progress is caught in one word.
8. 1. His desire to move away from a compositional strategy less reliant on his reading. 2. The social and culture splintering of war.



Resource Five

Model Answers

Answers

1. Applying knowledge and examples from previous resources, students should discuss the differences between Romantic and Beckettian expression to ensure a firm grasp of the key distinction – mainly that Romanticism’s sentimental overflow in words differs from Beckett’s minimalistic tendencies.
2. Expression is a key theme linking Beckett with Romanticism, particularly the notion of *how* to express. Students can use examples from previous resources to discuss how Beckett’s endeavour to find definitive expression connotes his relation with Romanticism’s creative frustrations.
3. Beckett’s 1930 transcription of Leopardi’s ‘A se stesso’ in conjunction with the letters to Nadeau, Hayman and Waldberg.
4. ‘butin verbal’ was the phrase used by Beckett in a letter to McGreevy to convey his sense of being strangled by the knowledge, words and phrases excised from his reading material.
5. Students should make reference to the comments on knowledge and ignorance by Goethe, Rousseau, Keats and Schlegel, whilst explaining how Beckett was not unfamiliar with these similar Romantic theories, to describe how Beckett’s own comment on knowledge and impoverishment and his wish to move away from all the ‘butin verbal’ was partly influenced by his engagement with this Romantic thought.

Resource Five

Model Answers



Answers

6. Students should be able to develop a counter-argument to the belief that Beckett's creative trajectory was influenced by his knowledge of Romanticism, using examples of other contributing factors from previous resources. For example, Romantic expression could be seen to differ too greatly from Beckett's reductive aesthetic, or Beckett's comment on impoverishment discerns a movement away from Joyce's poetics and does not mention Romanticism, or the social and political climate of the twentieth-century seems to be a greater influence on the writer than his reading of Romanticism.
7. Identify the infinity symbol and phrases within the text which correspond with Beckett's sense that he was caught in an endless loop of infinite yearning. His description of 'the way' – the only way is 'on' which is also always 'back' – inscribes the infinity sign and expresses his feeling of entrapment in wanting more.



Resource Six

Model Answers

Answers

1. Reference Keats's letter of 16th May 1817 as well as how *Samuel Beckett's Library* provides evidence that Beckett's library holds a copy of Keats's letters as well as his poems. Students could also comment on how Beckett's 'I can't go on. I'll go on' reads like a condensed or reduced version of Keats's statement, which corresponds with the view that Beckett's thought is closely related to Romanticism even though his mode of expression is minimalistic.
2. He wrote to Axel Kaun about a 'literature of the unword'.
3. As Beckett's oeuvre, taken as a whole, demonstrates a general movement in the direction of lessness and silence, it appears as though this early work, which was published in *transition* in 1929, not only sets out his creative aspiration but also his inevitable trajectory as a writer.
4. Refer to Beckett's reading of Praz's book. For one thing, this gives us insight into how another writer interpreted certain elements of Romantic thought which are key to our understanding of Beckett's engagement with Romanticism, i.e. Praz too discerned a desire for wordlessness in, for example, Schlegel and Keats. For another, and most importantly, knowing that Beckett read Praz tells us that he knew his aspiration to achieve silence and his belief that words are a contamination or a stain upon the silence to tap a similar Romantic vein.
5. Schlegel believed the word and the form to be accessories, which shows how he thought them to be unnecessary embellishments to expression.
6. Students should refer to Beckett's engagement with Praz's *The Romantic Agony* as well as to Praz's declaration that it is Romantic to believe concrete expression to be a contamination; therefore Beckett's belief that words stain the silence is Romantic, as such a staining is the ultimate contamination.



Resource Six

Model Answers

Answers

7. John Keats – students can combine knowledge and examples from this and other resources to discuss Beckett’s lifelong attraction to Keats, his fondness for quoting the line about quiet breath, and how his attentiveness to Keats lay in his quiet attitude, that of not ‘beating his fists on the table’.
8. ‘Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter’.
9. Students should construct a debate showing how Beckett’s desire for silence can be seen as Romantic due to, for example, his attraction to Keatsian quietism as well as his reading of Praz’s thoughts on Romanticism and wordlessness, whilst also providing the counter-argument that, for instance, Beckett’s descent into lessness, of which the inevitable goal is silence, was more influenced by the unspeakable horrors of war and social and cultural fragmentation than it was by his reading of Romanticism.



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