



The BrBridge to Post-16 Summer Work



English Literature AQA Specification A

This pack contains a programme of activities and resources to prepare you to embark on your Post-16 course in English Literature in September.

It should be completed throughout the remainder of the Summer term and over the Summer Holidays to ensure you are ready to start your course in September.

You MUST have this pack completed before your first lesson in the subject

The resources include:

1. Links to three websites where you can research the topics you will be exploring in the course and get a flavour of what you will be learning about in Post-16
2. Research task on key pre-knowledge topics that will help you to be successful in your course.
3. Other relevant revision/questions to help bridge between GCSE and Post-16 courses
4. Suggested therapies to help you if you are struggling with the tasks

Overall we suggest you spend around 3 hours of total work working through the tasks for English Literature

Therefore in total, across your 3 subjects you should be completing 9 hours of Summer Work.

Useful Websites

<http://www.literaryhistory.com/>

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/>

<https://www.litencyc.com/>

Research Task

1) What is love?

Using any resources that you need, make a list of as many different types or examples of love that you can think of that you think might be represented in the literature that we study.

2) Writers, texts and literary periods

Create a timeline with the details from the list included, with any additional notes that will help you to understand them (e.g. dates, summaries, bullet points. Images, examples of love from these eras or texts, extracts or quotations).

You can decide how to present this: make it something that will be useful to you throughout the course and can be kept in your folder. You will be studying these and adding to it in depth throughout the year, this is just to give you a frame of reference for reading.

Chaucer	Whoso List to Hunt by Sir Thomas Wyatt	She Walks in Beauty by Lord Byron
Medieval to Early Modern		
The English Renaissance	Sonnet 116 by William Shakespeare	Remember by Christina Rossetti
Shakespeare and Marlowe	The Flea by John Donne	The Ruined Maid by Thomas Hardy
The Metaphysical Poets	To His Coy Mistress by Andrew Marvell	At an Inn by Thomas Hardy
The Restoration and the 18 th Century	The Scrutiny by Richard Lovelace	La Belle Dame sans Merci. A Ballad by John Keats
The Romantic Period	Absent from Thee by John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester	Non sum qualis eram bonae sub regno Cynarae by Ernest Dowson
The Victorians	The Garden of Love by William Blake	
Modernism		
The Great Gatsby	Ae Fond Kiss by Robert Burns	
Othello		

Other Tasks

3) Social, political, religious and cultural influences

Add information about these world events to your timeline if you think that they will have impacted love. Justify how these might have impacted how people felt about love or how love is presented in literature.

- Changes to divorce laws
- Changes to marriage laws
- Changes to voting laws
- World War I and II
- Social class division
- Suffragette movement
- Urbanisation
- Legalisation of homosexuality

Suggestions if you are struggling

Focus on the first column in the list, we will not be studying the poetry until after Christmas.

Keep information concise: you only need a few bullet points for each item to help you to have a basic understanding.

Use the attached resources to support task 3).

DIVORCE

Way back in the days of yore, when the church was more powerful than the monarch, marriage was a church institution and so divorce was also the preserve of the church. Marriage was for life and divorce exceedingly rare, although the church would occasionally grant a divorce "a mensa et thoro" which enabled people to live apart if there had been significant cruelty, but not to remarry. (Henry VIII, of course, did whatever he wanted.) In the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, it was possible to get a divorce granted by Act of Parliament, but such an option was only open to the rich. The Matrimonial Causes Act 1857 was the first divorce law of general application.

The 1857 Act introduced divorce through the court. Men were able to "petition the court" for a divorce on the basis of their wife's adultery, which would have to be proved, as would the absence of any collusion or condonation of that adultery. Women who wanted to divorce their husbands needed also to prove an aggravating factor of the adultery, such as rape or incest. The High Court in London was the only place to get your divorce, and proceedings were held in open court, enabling society to be scandalised by the personal details revealed during the process.

The huge social changes in England during and following the First World War, particularly for the role of women in society, led to divorce law reform as it did to reforms in other areas. The Matrimonial Causes Act 1923 put men and women on an equal footing for the first time, enabling either spouse to petition the court for a divorce on the basis of their spouse's adultery. The requirement to prove the deed and the absence of collusion remained, as did the procedural requirements. In 1937 another Matrimonial Causes Act introduced three more options for unhappy spouses to take to court, and so it became possible to divorce on the grounds of cruelty, desertion and incurable insanity as well as adultery. These were termed "matrimonial offences". As before, each allegation needed to be proved by the petitioner's oral evidence. At this stage, parliament also introduced a bar to divorcing in the first three years of marriage.

The Second World War brought about another period of great social change, and a start to the modern era of life as we know it now. Marriages broke down under the strain of war, or its after-effects, in numbers never before experienced and at all levels of society. The church and the government became increasingly concerned that the divorce laws were no longer fit for purpose – unhappy couples would arrange for one spouse to book into a hotel at the seaside for a weekend to commit the adultery necessary for them to divorce. A Royal Commission in the 1950s could not decide the best way forward, and in the mid-1960's the Archbishop of Canterbury took up the baton. His office prepared a report demanding reform of the law to ensure that people could obtain a divorce if they could show the breakdown of their marriage, and the government set the Law Commission to research the most appropriate way to modernise the divorce laws. This process gestated the Divorce Reform Act 1969, which although now consolidated in the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973 still contains the divorce law we are subject to today.

Like a great deal of social policy legislation, the Divorce Reform Act 1969 was a compromise. It enabled either party to seek a divorce on the basis of the irretrievable breakdown of the marriage, as the Archbishop wanted in the 1960s, but requires that the breakdown be proved by evidence of one of five "facts": adultery, behaviour, desertion, or separation for 2 years and the other party's consent to a divorce or separation for five years. You can see that although this Act removed the concept of a matrimonial offence, the old 1937 grounds of cruelty (now termed "unreasonable behaviour") and desertion in essence remained. However, the big advance in 1969 was that there is no "fault" as such involved in petitions based on 2 or 5 years' separation. Procedurally there were also changes: it was possible for the first time to get a divorce through the local county court rather than coming to the High Court in London. During the 1970s, courts developed the "special procedure" of divorce-on-paper that still represents the way things are done in the vast majority of divorces.

There are two more quirks of history to note: the first is that it was not until 1984 that the bar on divorcing before 3 years of marriage had elapsed was reduced to 1 year. The second is that major attempts were made in the mid-90s to enact the "no-fault divorce" for which practitioners are now again clamouring. In fact, the Family Law Act 1996 did exactly that: the procedure was that anyone wanting to get a divorce would have to attend an Information Meeting investigating the possibility of reconciliation and discussing mediation if that was not possible. If he or she (or they) still wanted to divorce, a statement of marital breakdown had to be made to court, not less than 3 months after attending the information meeting. No more than 14 days after the filing of the statement, a period of reflection and consideration would commence – this would last 9 months if the couple had no children under 16, or 15 months if they did. After that, the court could finalise the divorce.

MARRIAGE

In 1753 the Marriage Act declared that all marriage ceremonies must be conducted by a minister in a parish church or chapel of the Church of England to be legally binding. No marriage of a person under the age of 21 was valid without the consent of parents or guardians.

In 1929, in response to a campaign by the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship, Parliament raised the age limit to 16 for both sexes in the Ages of Marriage Act.

Civil Partnership Act 2004, for example, granted civil partnerships to same-sex couples in the United Kingdom.

In 2013, Parliament passed the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act which introduced civil marriage for same-sex couples in England and Wales

Legal age to marry raised to 18 (2023) The law of marriage

Until the middle of the 18th century marriages could take place anywhere provided they were conducted before an ordained clergyman of the Church of England. This encouraged the practice of secret marriages which did not have parental consent and which were often bigamous.

Irregular marriages

It also allowed couples, particularly those of wealthy background, to marry while at least one of the partners was under age. The trade in these irregular marriages had grown enormously in London by the 1740s.

In 1753, however, the Marriage Act, promoted by the Lord Chancellor, Lord Hardwicke, declared that all marriage ceremonies must be conducted by a minister in a parish church or chapel of the Church of England to be legally binding.

Parental consent

No marriage of a person under the age of 21 was valid without the consent of parents or guardians. Clergymen who disobeyed the law were liable for 14 years transportation.

Although Jews and Quakers were exempted from the 1753 Act, it required religious non-conformists and Catholics to be married in Anglican churches.

Restrictions removed

This restriction was eventually removed by Parliament in the Marriage Act of 1836 which allowed non-conformists and Catholics to be married in their own places of worship.

It was also made possible for non-religious civil marriages to be held in register offices which were set up in towns and cities.

Minimum age

In 1929, in response to a campaign by the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship, Parliament raised the age limit to 16 for both sexes in the Ages of Marriage Act. This is still the minimum age.

Civil partnerships

The Civil Partnership Act 2004, for example, granted civil partnerships to same-sex couples in the United Kingdom with rights and responsibilities identical to civil marriage.

Although the Act was intended to apply only to England and Wales, the devolved Scottish Parliament passed a Legislative Consent Motion which allowed Westminster to legislate on behalf of Scotland.

Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013

In 2013, Parliament passed the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act which introduced civil marriage for same-sex couples in England and Wales. The legislation allowed religious organisations to opt in to marry same-sex couples should they wish to do so and protected religious organisations and their representatives from successful legal challenge if they did not wish to marry same-sex couples. The legislation also enabled civil partners to convert their civil partnership into marriage and transsexual people to change their legal gender without necessarily having to end their existing marriage.

In Scotland, the Scottish Parliament has legislated to allow same-sex marriages. The Northern Ireland Assembly has not legislated to allow the marriage of same-sex couples in Northern Ireland.

The first same-sex marriages in England and Wales took place in March 2014

VOTING

1707 Acts of Union passed in the Parliaments of England and Scotland unite the two countries. Scotland allocated 45 seats in the House of Commons

1729 Bribery Act passed to address corruption in elections

1801 Act of Union joins Ireland and Great Britain. Ireland allocated 100 seats in the House of Commons

1832 Representation of the People Act (the first Reform Act) extends vote to men meeting property qualification, reduces rotten boroughs and redistributes Parliamentary seats to better represent urban areas

1838 The People's Charter drawn up for the London Working Men's Association 1839 - First Chartist petition presented to House of Commons

1842 Second Chartist petition presented to House of Commons

1848 Third Chartist petition presented to House of Commons

1867 Representation of the People Act (the second Reform Act) extends vote to urban working men meeting property qualification

1872 Ballot Act introduces the secret ballot at elections

1883 Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act 1883 effectively ends serious corruption in British elections

1884 Representation of the People Act (the third Reform Act) addresses imbalance between men's votes in boroughs and counties

1885 Redistribution Act boundaries redrawn to produce equal electoral districts. Single member seats become the norm

1918 Representation of the People Act extends vote to all men over 21 and most women over 30

1920 Government of Ireland Act 1920 and the Irish Free State Agreement Act 1922 creates the Irish Free State and reduces the number of seats for Irish constituencies at Westminster from 105 to 13 constituencies in Northern Ireland.

1928 Representation of the People Act extends vote to all women over 21

1944 House of Commons (Redistribution of Seats) Act established four permanent boundary commissions for the UK and a regular system for reviewing constituency boundaries.

1969 Representation of the People Act extends vote to men and women over 18

2008 Voting Age (Reduction) Bill - a Private Members' Bill - to reduce voting age to 16 and over. Bill does not become law.

<https://ccrenfaire.com/fatherhood-in-renaissance-england/>

In Renaissance England, relationships between parent and child differed from today. Fatherhood especially meant something different.

Today, fathers are expected to take on many roles throughout their children's lives, i.e., provider, coach, teacher, protector, cheerleader, etc. In the Elizabethan era, they adhered very closely to the fifth commandment. That commandment states "Honor thy father and mother".

Then the emphasis was on "honor thy father".

Following the Protestant Reformation, many books (often called conduct manuals) addressed the subject of marriage and the duties of husbands, wives, parents, and children to one another.

From them, we get a good picture of what was expected of men and their relationship with their children, especially with their daughters.

Elizabethan Life For Men

England at this time was a patriarchal society. Elizabethan family life for men was one of power. The father was the head of the household and not only his wife, but his children were to obey him.

Only fathers held all legal rights over the guardianship of their children, the mother had none. He had complete control over his family; they were considered his property to do with as he pleased.

However, men were expected to support the family. Most likely he would have followed his father's trade, but during this time of growth and expansion, other opportunities could be pursued.

They were also expected to improve the positions of all members of the family through influence and patronage from wealthier people and families other than their own.

Men were advised to be loving, kind, and generous to their wife and children as well.

Relationships With Their Sons

Children of both sexes were subservient to the adults in the family. They were to respect and obey their parents.

Since infant mortality was high during the Elizabethan era, children of the family were cherished. They were given toys to play with – dolls, toy soldiers, hobby horses and the like. Good manners were stressed and bad behavior was punished.

Boys were educated to take over for their fathers. Also a man's sons inherited his lands and titles.

Relationships With Their Daughters

In this male-centered society, women were thought to be of lesser status. A daughter always had to answer to her father, even into adulthood if she was still single.

Rather than being educated in schools or in their father's trade or business, girls were taught skills to help them run their own households and please their husbands.

Because his daughters did not inherit, to ensure they were taken care of, they were married off into another man's household.

Shakespeare dealt with the relationships between father and daughter in many of his works. If this interests you, check out [Domination And Defiance: Fathers and Daughters in Shakespeare](#) by Diane Dreher. Or read [Taming of the Shrew](#), [King Lear](#), and [Romeo and Juliet](#) to see how he explored this bond.

It was expected that fathers choose their daughter's husbands for them. This usually had nothing to do with love, the basis for marriage today.

Even though women were thought to be lesser, they did have value in this transaction. It was hoped that through marrying their daughters off, the man and his family would acquire more land, titles and an increase in social status.

For their part in this contract, he would provide a dowry for his daughter. This could include anything from money to land.

The larger the dowry the more desirable the girl was to her future husband and his family. Girls had little to no say in the matter and most likely did not meet her husband until the wedding day

The first education is the most important and this first education belongs incontestably to women; if the Author of nature had wanted it to belong to men, He would have given them milk with which to nurse the children . . . The laws—always so occupied with property and so little with persons, because their object is peace not virtue—do not give enough authority to mothers. However their status is more certain than that of fathers; their duties are more painful; their cares are more important for the good order of the family; generally they are more attached to the children. . . . Fathers' ambition, avarice, tyranny, and false foresight, their negligence, their harsh insensitivity are a hundred times more disastrous for children than is the blind tenderness of mothers. (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, 1762)

The next century will be the century of the child, just as this century has been the women's century. When the child gets his rights, morality will be perfected. (Amelia Barr, *The Lion's Whelp*, 1901)

Women and the Law in Victorian England

<https://victoriacity.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/women-and-the-law-in-victorian-england/>

'By marriage', according to Sir William Blackstone's **Commentaries on the Laws of England** (Oxford, 1765-69, 'the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during her marriage, or at least is incorporated or consolidated into that of her husband, under whose wing, protection and cover, she performs everything.'

This system of **coverture** underpinned the laws of Victorian England so far as they related to married women. In effect, a woman surrendered her legal existence on marriage. The various amendments to this position during the nineteenth century were piecemeal rather than systematic.

Property

On marriage, the control of and income from a woman's **real property**, that is, property held in the form of freehold land, passed under the common law to her husband, though he could not dispose of it without her consent. Her **personal property**, that is, money from earnings or investments, and personal belongings such as jewellery, passed absolutely into his control, and she could part with them only with his consent; he could, for example, overrule any bequests she made of her personal property. To evade these provisions under the common law, it was necessary to agree a marriage settlement under equity law.

The Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 (see below) denied the husband his right to the earnings of a wife he had deserted, and returned to a woman divorced or legally separated the property rights of a single woman. The **Married**

Woman's Property Act of 1870 allowed women to keep earnings or property acquired after marriage; a further **Married**

Woman's Property Act in 1882 allowed women to retain what they owned at the time of marriage. The property laws before 1882 had further significant consequences, related to the fiction of the legal identity of husband and wife; a married woman could not sue or be sued — if, for example, she felt herself to be libelled, her husband could sue and claim for damages, because he was the only injured party, but she could not. Correspondingly, he became liable for her debts and contracts, and for any breaches of the law committed by her before or during their marriage since it was held that she acted only under her husband's direction (it was this provision that made Dickens' Mr Bumble declare that the law is as an ass). Married women held the same legal status as criminals, minors and the insane.

Post-1882 the possibility of success in the campaign for women's suffrage was greatly improved, since one powerful argument against it — that a married woman was simply an extension of her husband, so that married men would in effect have two votes — was now made less plausible.

Children

These 'little ambassadors of the familiar and the expected', as one feminist called them late in the century, were also the property of the husband. An Act of 1839 allowed an innocent wife custody of her children under the age of seven years (raised to sixteen years in 1873). The Infants Custody Act of 1886 made the welfare of the children the determining factor in deciding questions of custody, but even then the father remained during his lifetime the sole legal guardian.

Consistently with these provisions, a woman's body was also held to belong to her husband. It was not until 1891 that a High Court ruling denied the husband the right to imprison his wife in pursuit of his conjugal rights (it was not until 1991 that a similar ruling denied him the right to rape her).

Divorce

Before the **Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act** of 1857 divorces could only be obtained in England through a cumbersome process involving a suit by the husband against another man for 'criminal conversation' (i.e., for compromising his wife, and therefore diminishing her value, so that he could claim damages), then an ecclesiastical divorce which did not allow the right of re-marriage, and finally a private Act of Parliament which separated the parties *ex vinculis matrimonii* (from the chains of marriage) and did allow re-marriage. The 1857 Act was designed (in effect) to allow moderately wealthy men to divorce their wives. A woman could be divorced on the simple grounds of her adultery (her adultery threatened his ability to pass his property to his male heirs), whereas a woman had to prove adultery aggravated by desertion (for two years), or by cruelty, rape, sodomy, incest or bigamy. The husband could claim damages against the adulterous third party, the wife could not.

There was no provision for consensual divorce, so (for example) the divorce granted Jude and Sue in **Jude the Obscure** would have been invalid since they were not in fact adulterous; and they would have been in breach of the law in allowing it to be supposed that they were.

This was the law until 1923, when the grounds of divorce were made the same for both sexes. Until Legal Aid was available after 1949 divorce remained expensive, and the less well-to-do had to make use of the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1878 which allowed a less costly judicial separation but without the right of re-marriage.

Prostitution

The **Contagious Diseases Acts** (1864, 1866, 1869) were introduced in order to protect members of the home forces from sexually transmitted diseases. In their final form, they provided that where a woman was believed to be acting as a 'common prostitute' (a term not defined in the Act) within ten miles of one of eighteen specified naval and garrison towns, she could be reported to a magistrate and obliged to attend for inspection at hospitals ('Lock ups') created for the purpose. If found to be diseased, she could be detained for up to nine months for treatment; refusal to attend could be met with forcible examination (labelled 'instrumental rape' by opponents of the Acts) or by imprisonment. The Acts were repealed in 1886, following a campaign led by Josephine Butler.

Education

Campaigns to improve women's education continued throughout the century, strengthened by the imbalance of numbers between men and women (there were roughly half a million more women than men). Queen's and Bedford Colleges at London University offered women education at the end of the 1840s, colleges for women at Oxford and Cambridge began in the 1860s and 1870s, while the Girls' Public Day School Trust, Cheltenham's Ladies College and other new institutions sought to improve the intellectual training offered to girls in their teens. Resistance to these developments came especially from the medical profession, who argued that the physical demands of menstruation and the intellectual demands of study were incompatible, and that educated women would become necessarily the mothers of a 'puny, enfeebled, and sickly race'. Key texts in this debate are to be found in the **Fortnightly Review** for 1874, by Henry Maudsley and Elizabeth Garret Anderson (the first woman doctor), under the title 'Sex in Mind and Education'.

Social Class

The Victorian Era in Britain was dominated by the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901). Although it was a peaceful and prosperous time, there were still issues within the social structure. The social classes of this era included the Upper class, Middle class, and lower class. Those who were fortunate enough to be in the Upper class did not usually perform manual labour. Instead, they were landowners and hired lower class workers to work for them, or made investments to create a profit. This class was divided into three subcategories: Royal, those who came from a royal family, Middle Upper, important officers and lords, and Lower Upper, wealthy men and business owners (Victorian England Social Hierarchy).

The expansion of the Middle class during this time was due to the rapid growth of cities and the economy. It was also referred to as the Bourgeoisie, and consisted of those who had skilled jobs to support themselves and their families. Merchants and shopkeepers became popular occupations as trade, both domestic and overseas, flourished. The large scale of new industries such as railroads, banks, and government meant that more labour was needed to make sure the cities were able to function (Loftus). The white collar professions had the ability to move up in the corporate rankings and earn a higher salary. It was helpful to have connections to those in powerful positions as they were able to get jobs more easily. Moreover, the Middle class was also divided into two categories, higher level and lower level. People from the lower middle class typically worked for those in the Higher level (Victorian England Social Hierarchy).

The Working class consisted of unskilled laborers who worked in brutal and unsanitary conditions (Victorian England Social Hierarchy). They did not have access to clean water and food, education for their children, or proper clothing. Often, they lived on the streets and were far from the work they could get, so they would have to walk to where they needed to get to. Unfortunately, many workers resorted to the use of drugs like opium and alcohol to cope with their hardships (Thomas).

The Under class were those who were helpless and depended on the support of others. The poor and young orphans relied on donations to survive (Victorian England Social Hierarchy). Some women who were unskilled and could not get any jobs became prostitutes in order to make a living. As they were extremely controversial, Parliament voted to pass the "Contagious Diseases Act" (1864, 1866, 1869) which allowed prostitution in military towns, but meant the women had to be forcibly checked for diseases (Landow). The act was meant to protect the men from contracting diseases; not the women from being harmed. This mistreatment created a strong feminist movement among Victorian women who yearned for fair treatment. Finally in 1885, Parliament passed the "Criminal Law Amendment Act", which raised the age of consent and prohibited the use of brothels (Landow).

Courtly Love

Courtly Love (*Amour Courtois*) refers to an innovative literary genre of poetry of the High Middle Ages (1000-1300 CE) which elevated the position of women in society and established the motifs of the romance genre recognizable in the present day. Courtly love poetry featured a lady, usually married but always in some way inaccessible, who became the object of a noble knight's devotion, service, and self-sacrifice. Prior to the development of this genre, women appear in medieval literature as secondary characters and their husbands' or fathers' possessions; afterward, women feature prominently in literary works as clearly defined individuals in the works of authors such as Chretien de Troyes, Marie de France, John Gower, Geoffrey Chaucer, Christine de Pizan, Dante Alighieri, Giovanni Boccaccio, and Thomas Malory.

Scholars continue to debate whether the literature reflected actual romantic relationships of the upper class of the time or was only a literary conceit. Some scholars have also suggested that the poetry was religious allegory relating to the heresy of the Catharism, which, persecuted by the Church, spread its beliefs through popular poetry while others claim it represents superficial games of the medieval French courts. No consensus has been reached on which of these theories is correct, but scholars do agree that this kind of poetry was unprecedented in medieval Europe and coincided with an idealization of women. The poetry was quite popular in its time, contributed to the development of the Arthurian Legend, and standardized the central concepts of the western ideal of romantic love.

Education

1699

Foundation of the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK); its chief purpose is to provide education for the poor

1811

National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor founded; it provides education in the Anglican faith

1814

British and Foreign School Society founded to cater for children from dissenting backgrounds

1869

National Education League founded to campaign for free, compulsory and non-religious education for all

1880 - Education Act

Makes school compulsory for all children between the ages of 5 and 10

1893 - Elementary Education (School Attendance) Act

Raises age of compulsory attendance to 11; a further act of 1899 raises it to 12

1893 - Elementary Education (Blind and Deaf Children) Act

Begins specialist education for blind and deaf children

1899 - Elementary Education (Defective and Epileptic Children) Act

Provides further extension of special education in state sector

1902 - Education Act

Reorganises administration of elementary schools and encourages local councils to make provision for secondary education

1906 - Education (Provision of Meals) Act

Provides free meals for needy school children

1918 - Education Act

Raises school leaving age to 14, and abolishes elementary school fees

1944 - Education Act

Raises school leaving age to 15 (with future provision for it to be raised to 16), and provides free secondary education for all pupils

Has marriage always had the same definition?

Actually, the institution has been in a process of constant evolution. Pair-bonding began in the Stone Age as a way of organizing and controlling sexual conduct and providing a stable structure for child-rearing and the tasks of daily life. But that basic concept has taken many forms across different cultures and eras. "Whenever people talk about traditional marriage or traditional families, historians throw up their hands," said Steven Mintz, a history professor at Columbia University. "We say, 'When and where?'" The ancient Hebrews, for instance, engaged in polygamy — according to the Bible, King Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines — and men have taken multiple wives in cultures throughout the world, including China, Africa, and among American Mormons in the 19th century. Polygamy is still common across much of the Muslim world. The idea of marriage as a sexually exclusive, romantic union between one man and one woman is a relatively recent development. Until two centuries ago, said Harvard historian Nancy Cott, "monogamous households were a tiny, tiny portion" of the world population, found in "just Western Europe and little settlements in North America."

When did people start marrying?

The first recorded evidence of marriage contracts and ceremonies dates to 4,000 years ago, in Mesopotamia. In the ancient world, marriage served primarily as a means of preserving power, with kings and other members of the ruling class marrying off daughters to forge alliances, acquire land, and produce legitimate heirs. Even in the lower classes, women had little say over whom they married. The purpose of marriage was the production of heirs, as implied by the Latin word *matrimonium*, which is derived from *mater* (mother).

When did the church get involved?

In ancient Rome, marriage was a civil affair governed by imperial law. But when the empire collapsed, in the 5th century, church courts took over and elevated marriage to a holy union. As the church's power grew through the Middle Ages, so did its influence over marriage. In 1215, marriage was declared one of the church's seven sacraments, alongside rites like baptism and penance. But it was only in the 16th century that the church decreed that weddings be performed in public, by a priest, and before witnesses.

What role did love play?

For most of human history, almost none at all. Marriage was considered too serious a matter to be based on such a fragile emotion. "If love could grow out of it, that was wonderful," said Stephanie Coontz, author of *Marriage, a History*. "But that was gravy." In fact, love and marriage were once widely regarded as incompatible with one another. A Roman politician was expelled from the Senate in the 2nd century B.C. for kissing his wife in public — behavior the essayist Plutarch condemned as "disgraceful." In the 12th and 13th centuries, the European aristocracy viewed extramarital affairs as the highest form of romance, untainted by the gritty realities of daily life. And as late as the 18th century, the French philosopher Montesquieu wrote that any man who was in love with his wife was probably too dull to be loved by another woman.

When did romance enter the picture?

In the 17th and 18th centuries, when Enlightenment thinkers pioneered the idea that life was about the pursuit of happiness. They advocated marrying for love rather than wealth or status. This trend was augmented by the Industrial Revolution and the growth of the middle class in the 19th century, which enabled young men to select a spouse and pay for a wedding, regardless of parental approval. As people took more control of their love lives, they began to demand the right to end unhappy unions. Divorce became much more commonplace.

Did marriage change in the 20th century?

Dramatically. For thousands of years, law and custom enforced the subordination of wives to husbands. But as the women's-rights movement gained strength in the late 19th and 20th centuries, wives slowly began to insist on being regarded as their husbands' equals, rather than their property. "By 1970," said Marilyn Yalom, author of *A History of the Wife*, "marriage law had become gender-neutral in Western democracy." At the same time, the rise of effective contraception fundamentally transformed marriage: Couples could choose how many children to have, and even to have no children at all. If they were unhappy with each other, they could divorce — and nearly half of all couples did. Marriage had become primarily a personal contract between two equals seeking love, stability, and happiness. This new definition opened the door to gays and lesbians claiming a right to be married, too. "We now fit under the Western philosophy of marriage," said E.J. Graff, a lesbian and the author of *What Is Marriage For?* In one very real sense, Coontz says, opponents of gay marriage are correct when they say traditional marriage has been undermined. "But, for better and for worse, traditional marriage has already been destroyed," she says, "and the process began long before anyone even dreamed of legalizing same-sex marriage."

Gay 'marriage' in medieval Europe

Same-sex unions aren't a recent invention. Until the 13th century, male-bonding ceremonies were common in churches across the Mediterranean. Apart from the couples' gender, these events were almost indistinguishable from other marriages of the era. Twelfth-century liturgies for same-sex unions — also known as "spiritual brotherhoods" — included the recital of marriage prayers, the joining of hands at the altar, and a ceremonial kiss. Some historians believe these unions were merely a way to seal alliances and business deals. But Eric Berkowitz, author of *Sex and Punishment*, says it is "difficult to believe that these rituals did not contemplate erotic contact. In fact, it was the sex between the men involved that later caused same-sex unions to be banned." That happened in 1306, when the Byzantine Emperor Andronicus II declared such ceremonies, along with sorcery and incest, to be unchristian.