

***A-Z for English A IB: Glossary of academic vocabulary for IB Diploma,***  
**2nd ed. by Silvia Codita** (Elemi, 2019)

With the new incarnations of English A (both Literature and Language & Literature) due for their first assessment in 2021, teachers and students have been navigating the new course with a certain degree of trepidation. Silvia Codita's *A-Z For English A* will certainly help to reassure staff and their charges alike.

The slim format is already visually appealing, with students likely to feel relieved that this is not yet another hefty tome to wade through. Codita's concise expression and generally friendly and clear style are maintained throughout, with her use of direct address establishing students as the target audience from the outset.

This accessibility is further facilitated via graphological features, such as the use of italics for quotations (which are often laid out in their own paragraph), as well as bold text signposting students to other definitions. Each letter of the alphabet is also given its own colour, helping students to find what they are looking for more easily.

Taking the form of a dictionary, *A-Z For English A* enables students to look up unfamiliar terms quickly, and as such, to use their class time and homework time most effectively (from *absurdism* to *vulgarity*, it's all here). Students are also rightly encouraged to use the blank pages at the back of the book to develop the resource in a way that works for them.

As well as traditionally literary and linguistic terms, such as *phonemes* and *foreshadowing*, the text covers academic and assessment-related terms that students will come across throughout their IB DP, such as "weighted grades" and "academic honesty". These are of course helpful beyond the English curriculum and will see students using the book often throughout their IB DP years (and possibly even at university). The inclusion of terminology specific to the Lit and Lang/Lit assessments and course structure is equally beneficial, such as the patiently explained definitions of each of the areas of exploration (and of course, the term 'areas of exploration' itself). This may make the book a handy reference for teachers, too, as it can be quicker to find the information needed rather than wading through the PDF of the Guide supplied by the IBO (exceeding 100 pages).

Examples are quoted from literary texts where relevant, and these are from a good range of high-quality works, including writers as diverse as Sophocles, Langston Hughes, Charlotte Bronte, and Marjane Satrapi.

Orators feature most prominently in quotation from linguistic texts – Codita draws upon speeches by US presidents and UK prime ministers as well as activist Martin Luther King.

This, however, is unfortunately the extent of quotation from linguistic texts; there is a clear imbalance between this and quotation from works of literature. Even though terms such as ‘feature article’ are defined, there is a lack of quotation from such texts despite the fact that to illustrate points about cartoons via reproduction even of a single frame should be reasonably straightforward (modern literary texts such as *The Things They Carried* are quoted, so this is presumably not a copyright issue).

In general, visual elements (increasingly important in English A and an area in which even many teachers of the subject lack confidence) are neglected. Students studying graphic novels such as *Maus* or *Persepolis* may find definitions for terms such as *emanata* or *graphic weight* useful – but these are not present in this volume. Some terms relating to cartoons are defined (e.g. *frame*) but even though this glossary is clearly not intended to be exhaustive, there is still room for further development in this area. It applies just as significantly to students not studying graphic novels: students of Language & Literature analysing advertisements, for instance, need to be well equipped to study visual texts of this type. In its current form, this book offers little to help students analyse images (such as their size and placement) and other visual elements (such as connotations of colour), as well as graphological features (e.g. font size, font choice, font colour). Infographics, graphic novels, and cartoons are mentioned but glossed over (the closest one gets to images is *imagery*, but this is defined in a purely literary context).

There are other surprising omissions. For example, comma splices are defined, but as these usually arise due to students not knowing the difference between commas and semicolons, it was strange to not see the latter defined and their usage explained alongside this. Similarly, *euphemism* is defined, whereas its opposite (*dysphemism*) is not given, and the more formal terms for *flashback* and *flashforward* (*analepsis* and *prolepsis*) are not mentioned either, even though knowing these might help students to raise the level of their discourse. These omissions are even more surprising when one considers what is included in their place, with some entries even proving patronising: arguably a student who needs basics such as *compassion* (one of the elements of the IB learner profile) to be defined for them should not be taking English A.

Alongside the examples of surprising omissions and inclusions are conflations, which will serve to confuse students more than help them. *Colloquialism* is insufficiently distinguished from *dialect*, and the same is true of *extended metaphor* and *allegory* (all allegories are extended metaphors, but not all extended metaphors are allegories). The definition of *theme*, too, more closely corresponds to what American teachers tend to call a ‘topic’, so these equally need to be further differentiated, as do *lexical field* and *semantic field*. As an examiner, confusion of *theme* and *motif* is something I see often in student essays, but this isn’t addressed here beyond the inclusion of *leitmotif* (which will confuse more than enlighten). Future editions of the glossary would therefore benefit from a ‘commonly confused’ section (whether this takes the form of a discrete section at the end of the book, or as an addendum to each ‘commonly confused’ term).

Along with conflations, the occasional historical error, arising from an anglocentric view of history, also needs to be avoided: for example, Ibsen’s play *A Doll’s House* is not Victorian (as Queen Victoria has nothing to do with life in late 19th-century Norway), as it is deemed to be under the entry for *cultural setting*. Such mistakes do not help students in their studies of the cultural contexts of the works on the syllabus.

Other definitions simply require a little more development in their explanations: the definition of *ethos*, while not incorrect, does not include the crucial detail of being *morally* trustworthy (it goes further than credibility on its own). For example, how far would we trust an organisation which cites an affiliation with the NRA to act ethically? In the same way, breaking the *fourth wall* is not only achieved via direct address to the audience (as implied in its definition): freeze frames may be used, for instance, or actors may interact even more directly with the audience by sitting in seats, mingling during intervals, and so on. (As a side note, other definitions pertaining more to the field of Theatre Studies, which can be helpful when studying plays, such as *proxemics* or *Verfremdungseffekt*, would also be a benefit to this glossary.) The *diction* entry is sparse, too, with students perhaps needing more guidance regarding how to actually use this in an analysis (an example of this could have been provided: for instance, Kafka’s use of formal diction in *Metamorphosis* underscores the difference in social class between Gregor and the clerk when the latter comes to the house to lecture him).

Provision of examples of analysis using some of these techniques, potentially in the manner demonstrated above, would be helpful: definitions alone might just lead to more feature-spotting rather than a raised level

of discourse. Some definitions do better in this regard than others, giving examples as to how they could be interpreted within a text (the definition of consonance at least partially achieves this).

The balance of this book perhaps needs to be tipped more towards the linguistic and visual side, which also play a significant role in English A (the book is very literature-focused at present). This is perhaps not the fault of the author but rather of a scholastic and university system that rather ignores (and at times even maligns) linguistic and media studies. As such, despite the changes that need to be made to future editions, Silvia Codita has produced a promising book that will enable students to make leaps and bounds in their subject-specific knowledge. The concept overall, emerging from young publishing house Elemi, provides a series of reference manuals that will undoubtedly prove valuable to both students and teachers.

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