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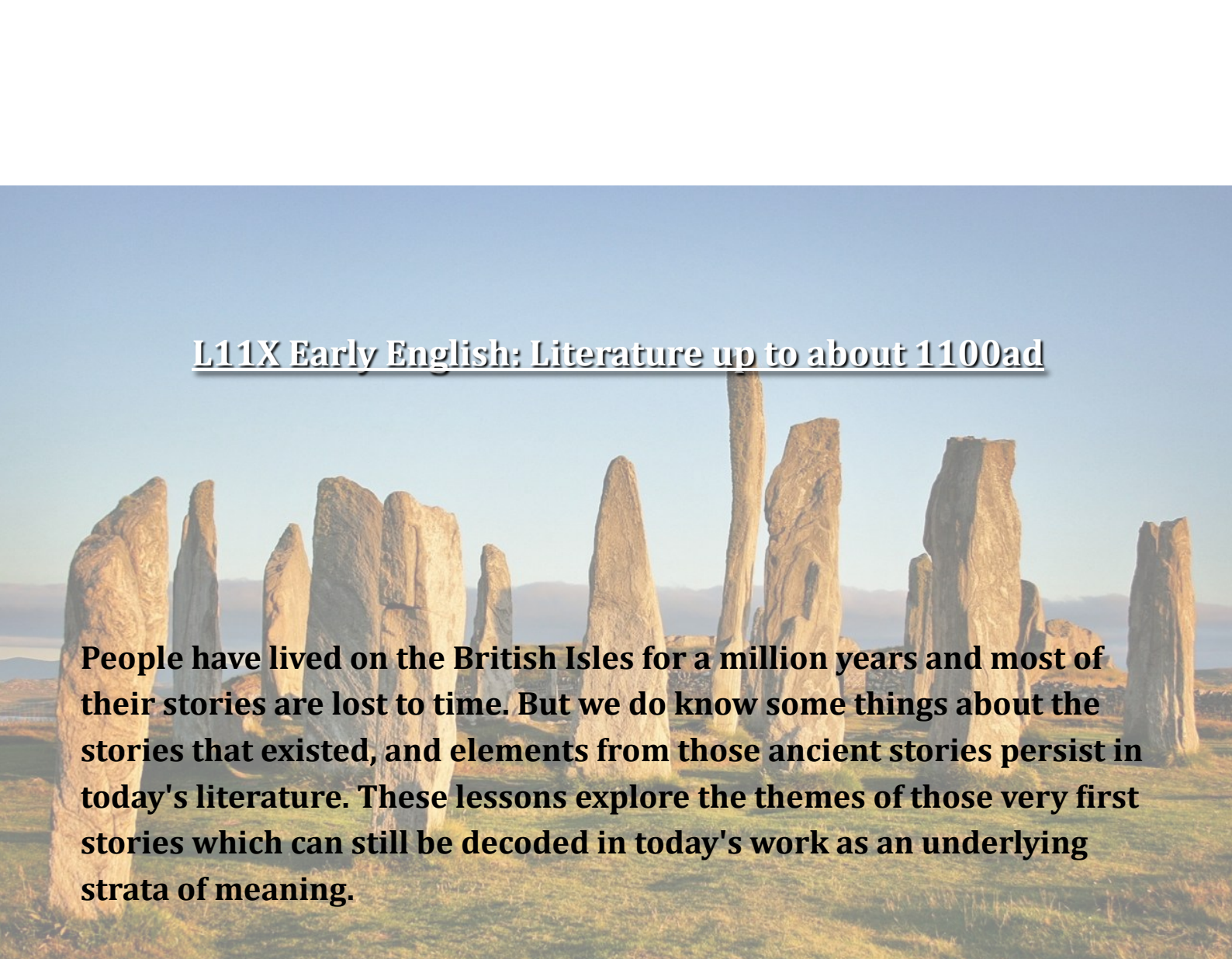
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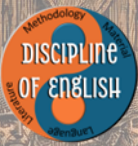
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A photograph of the Stonehenge monument in England, showing several large, grey, rectangular stone pillars standing in a grassy field under a clear blue sky. The stones are arranged in a circular pattern, with some taller than others. The background shows a distant horizon with more stones and a clear sky.

L11X Early English: Literature up to about 1100ad

People have lived on the British Isles for a million years and most of their stories are lost to time. But we do know some things about the stories that existed, and elements from those ancient stories persist in today's literature. These lessons explore the themes of those very first stories which can still be decoded in today's work as an underlying strata of meaning.



L111 How Did the Earliest English Texts Create Meaning? Early English: Heroism, Elegy, and Oral Tradition



Learning Objectives:

Today we are learning how Early English literature created meaning. By the end of the lesson, you will understand that:

- Early English texts reflect a dangerous and unstable world
- Meaning is created through heroism, elegy (mourning), and oral poetry
- These ideas still shape later literature today

Core Knowledge:

Early English literature reflects a world shaped by danger, exile, and fate. Texts emphasise heroic values such as loyalty and courage. Elegiac tone expresses mourning, loss, and nostalgia. Alliterative verse helped oral stories survive through memory.

“Early English stories helped people survive a fragile world.”

Vocabulary

- **Heroic ethos** – values of bravery, loyalty, and honour
- **Elegy** – expressing loss, mourning, or sadness
- **Alliteration** – repeated starting sounds
- **Exile** – separation from home or community
- **Fate** – belief that life is controlled by forces beyond humans
- **Oral tradition** – prior to writing, cultures still had stories but they were spoken, remembered and re-called to others

Sentence Stems

- “This reflects an Early English heroic ethos because...”
- “The elegiac tone shows...”
- “The use of alliterative verse suggests...”

Now apply this to your current text:

*Beowulf has arrived in Denmark and declares why he has come — not for wealth, but out of duty, courage, and loyalty to the suffering king. Beowulf emphasises physical courage and past feats: “stained with the blood of my enemies... five great giants...” His **heroism** is measured through battle-tested strength. He comes because his people “encouraged” him — duty and loyalty to tribe and king motivates action. He fights without weapons, trusting “...the judgment of God,” a direct Early English blend of **fate** and **divine** oversight. Short patterned lines, repetition of heroic credentials and rhythm aids recall so that the story can pass down through an **oral tradition**.*



L112 How did stories survive before books



Today we are learning how stories were remembered before books. By the end of the lesson, you will understand that:

- Early English texts were designed to be remembered
- Mnemonics helped stories survive in oral cultures
- Sound patterns carry meaning as well as memory

Core Knowledge:

Before books were common and long before stories were written down, Early English poetry was performed aloud, not read silently. Stories had to survive by memory alone. Because of this, poets used mnemonics — powerful sound-patterns such as alliteration, rhythm, repetition, and formulaic phrases — to make their poems easier to remember and pass on. Early English literature comes from an oral culture. Mnemonics are memory tools built into language. Alliteration, rhythm, and repetition helped stories survive. Sound patterns reinforced meaning and values. Early English texts are shaped by memory, not pages. Mnemonic features are not decoration. They are survival tools.

Vocabulary

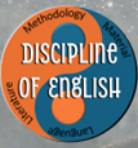
- **Mnemonic** – a memory aid
- **Oral culture** – a culture that shares stories by speaking
- **Alliteration** – repeated starting sounds
- **Repetition** – repeated words or phrases
- **Prosody** – the rhythm and sound of language

Sentence Stems

- “This feature acts as a mnemonic because...”
- “In an oral culture, sound patterns help...”
- “The prosodic nature helps commit to memory...”

Now apply this to your current text:

The seafarer is clearly influenced by literature from oral traditions; we can see how the language has been constructed as a memory aid. Prosodic features (that is, language features focused around sound effects) are used to help the story stick in the memory of the story teller; "storm in the shop" and "song of the swan" connects emotions (sorrow) to physical nouns (the ship) through alliterative sounds, therefore remembering the noun of the story and the emotion is easier because there are fewer sounds to remember. Another sound effect (prosody) is the repetition in phrases like "nor so honored... nor so brave", "Night after night", "No harps... nor gifts / No joy... nor worldly" - by reducing the range of different words or by creating patterns eases the difficulty of remembering the story. Compound adjectives might also work as mnemonics because instead of describing the process in separate sentences, we can reduce it to a phrase of two words; so describing the cliffs as "storm-beaten" is easier to remember than "the weather is harsh and erodes the cliff faces". It constructs an image in fewer words. These mnemonics are important because stories in Early English were not written down, and if they were to have impact in future audiences, they had to be told in such a way that they could be recalled from memory accurately.



113 Early Literature and measuring the world



Learning Objectives

Today we are learning how early literature used systems of knowledge to create meaning. By the end of the lesson, you will understand that:

- Early writers used computus to understand time and nature
- These ideas shaped how meaning was encoded in literature
- Literature can absorb ideas from science, maths, and religion

Core Knowledge:

Computus was a system used to calculate time, seasons, and natural cycles. Monks used computus to understand the world as ordered and meaningful. Literature absorbed computus ideas into its imagery and language. Natural imagery often encodes order, fate, and divine structure. Nature in early literature is measured, not random.

Vocabulary

- **Computus** – a system for calculating time and natural cycles
- **Cycle** – patterns that repeat (seasons, stars, time)
- **Order** – belief that the world follows a structure
- **Astronomy** – study of stars and planets
- **Almanacs** - an early book written by monks to plan for religious dates, planting and reaping, using the stars as date markers.

Sentence Stems

- “This imagery reflects computus because...”
- “Time and nature are shown as ordered through...”
- “The text encodes meaning using natural cycles...”

Now apply this to your current text:

*References to stars, fate, and natural cycles in Romeo and Juliet reflect **computus** thinking, where **astronomy** and time were believed to reveal divine order. Shakespeare inherits this sign system, encoding the lovers' **fate** as part of a larger, measured structure beyond human control. We can trace the encoding of stars to **fate**, right back to the **almanacs** written by monks who studied **astronomy** to work out what **dates** in future would be used to celebrate religious events, and this '**destiny**' is an inherited meanings encoded in Early English. Audiences continue to decode stars as meaning **fate** because authors adopt these encoded signs.*



L114 Who Decides What a Text Means?

Authorized and Unauthorized Readings



Learning Objectives

Today we are learning why magic and folklore appear in early literature. By the end of the lesson, you will understand that:

- Folklore and magic were meaningful belief systems
- These beliefs shaped how early texts created meaning
- Older beliefs continued beneath newer religions

Core Knowledge:

Early English literature includes folklore and magical beliefs. Christianity absorbed rather than erased pagan sign systems. Magic and charms encoded beliefs about power, protection, and fate. These meanings persist beneath later literature. Old beliefs stay alive in stories.

Vocabulary

- **Folklore** – traditional beliefs and stories passed down
- **Charm** – words or actions believed to have power
- **Magical power** – belief in supernatural influence
- **Pagan** – pre-Christian belief systems

Sentence Stems

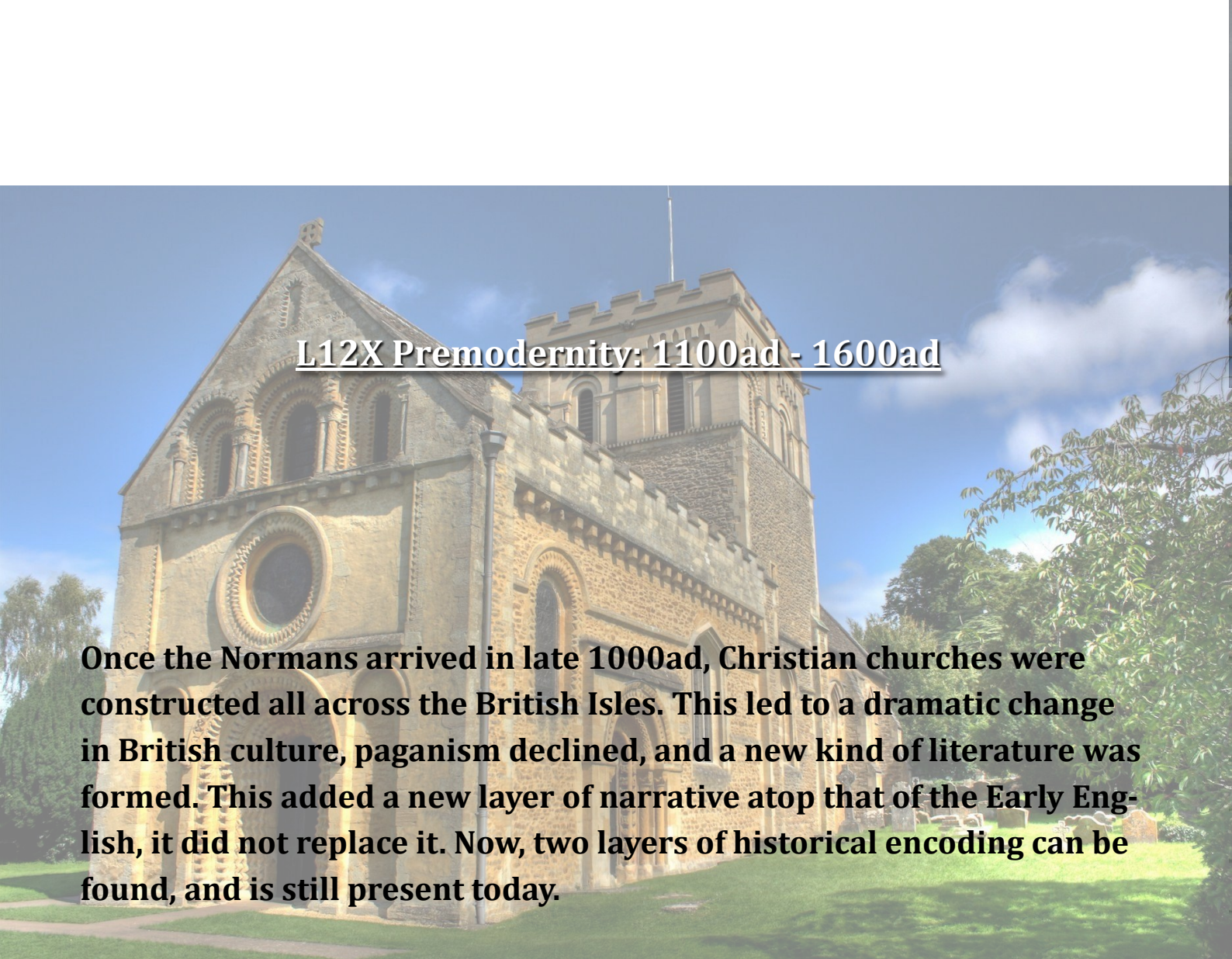
- “This reflects folklore beliefs about...”
- “The charm encodes belief in...”
- “Magical power represents earlier ideas about...”

Now apply this to your current text:

*The Wife's Lament contains a spoken curse — a real **magical** practice. Early English culture believed that words could enact harm, not just describe it. The speaker invokes a curse that mirrors pagan charms. It uses landscape as supernatural space—**Folklore** often treats the natural world as spiritually charged: “stone cliffs” “storm” “far-off land”. These echo **ritual** landscapes like “barrows”, “woods”, and “mounds”.*

*The poem preserves a **pagan** substratum beneath Christian England. Even though the manuscript is Christian, its worldview is older: we can interpret exile as doom, spoken curses as power, magical grief as fate-binding.*

*The speaker explores **folklore** and emotional suffering. The **curse** reads like an Early English **charm** reversed — not healing, but harming.*



L12X Premodernity: 1100ad - 1600ad

Once the Normans arrived in late 1000ad, Christian churches were constructed all across the British Isles. This led to a dramatic change in British culture, paganism declined, and a new kind of literature was formed. This added a new layer of narrative atop that of the Early English, it did not replace it. Now, two layers of historical encoding can be found, and is still present today.



121 How Did Premodern Readers Understand the World?



Learning Objectives

Today we are learning how Premodern literature created meaning through belief. By the end of the lesson, you will understand that:

- Premodern texts assume Christian belief is the foundation for understanding
- Stories often teach or reflect religious truths
- Premodern readers viewed the world through faith, order, and divine authority

Core Knowledge:

Premodern cultures believed that faith leads to understanding. Saint Augustine's doctrine was "I believe so that I may understand." Christian doctrine provided the sign system for interpreting the world. Literature reflected this worldview through allegory, hierarchy, and divine order. Belief authorised meaning — not personal experience or independent reasoning.

"In the Premodern world, belief came first, explanations came second."

Vocabulary

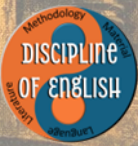
- **Premodern** – before scientific or modern thinking
- **Doctrine** – official religious teaching
- **Allegory** – a story where characters/events represent spiritual or moral truths
- **Divine authority** – power believed to come from God
- **Faith** – religious belief or trust

Sentence Stems

- "This text reflects the Premodern belief that..."
- "Understanding is authorised by faith because..."
- "This moment functions as an allegory for..."

Now apply this to your current text:

*Inferno begins is part of the system which encodes signs like 'darkness, paths, savagery, death, truth' as having **Christian** meaning. Darkness becomes encoded with ideas of ignorance to **Christianity**, and temptation. Paths are encoded to mean the journey we take toward **Christianity**. Savagery is encoded as life without Christ. **Truth** is encoded only as that told by Christianity. It is impossible to use these terms today without them also carrying these literary meanings. The Christianization of signs is part of the **substrata** of meaning that was established in Premodernity by Dante, sermons and the Bible itself and **faith** was a way of understanding the world. Stories like Inferno are **allegories** for people thought we needed to live our life, and Inferno serves as a warning about straying from Christianity.*



122 How Did Print Become the Authority for Culture



Learning Objectives:

Today we are learning how print became the main authority for culture during the Reformation from 1517-1648.

- Print allowed ideas to spread further and faster
- The Church, Crown, and Stationers' Company controlled printed texts
- Print shaped what people believed, valued, and understood

Core Knowledge:

Print became the authority for culture during the Reformation. The Church, Crown, and Stationers' Company controlled what could be printed. Literature became a tool in battles over religious and political ideas. Control of print meant control of belief and knowledge.

Vocabulary

- **Reformation** – period when Christianity split into Protestant and Catholic
- **Authority** – power to decide what is true or acceptable
- **Censorship** – controlling or banning printed ideas
- **Doctrine** – official religious teaching
- **Stationers' Company** – organisation controlling printing and publishing in London

Sentence Stems

- Printed texts become a powerful for authority to...
- Literature is now strongly associated with Protestantism or Catholicism, and this text...
- The ideas of this text are undergoing censorship...

Now apply this to your current text:

*Macbeth reflects the **Reformation** era, when printed texts were **controlled** by the Crown and Church. Shakespeare's company held a royal patent, meaning their work was approved by the King - literature including plays had to support the **doctrine** of divine right of kings and the faith held by the Monarch. It was Crown and Church which mostly held **authority** over literature. The play encodes the message that rebelling against the king leads to chaos and damnation because print was now a tool for protecting state authority. A text that promoted revolution would have been **censored**, so connecting kings to 'nobleness' is a sure way of ensuring publication.*



123 Why Do Stories Focus on Knights, Honour, and Moral Tests



Today we are learning how Premodern literature created meaning through romance and chivalry.

- Knights in medieval stories represent moral and spiritual ideals
- Romance texts test virtue, loyalty, and honour
- Chivalric action expresses Christianised values, not just adventure

Core Knowledge:

Romance replaces heroic violence with moral testing. Chivalric action expresses Christian values of honour, loyalty, mercy, and virtue. Knights are idealised figures whose actions encode moral lessons. Stories use quests and trials to reveal a character's moral worth.

Vocabulary

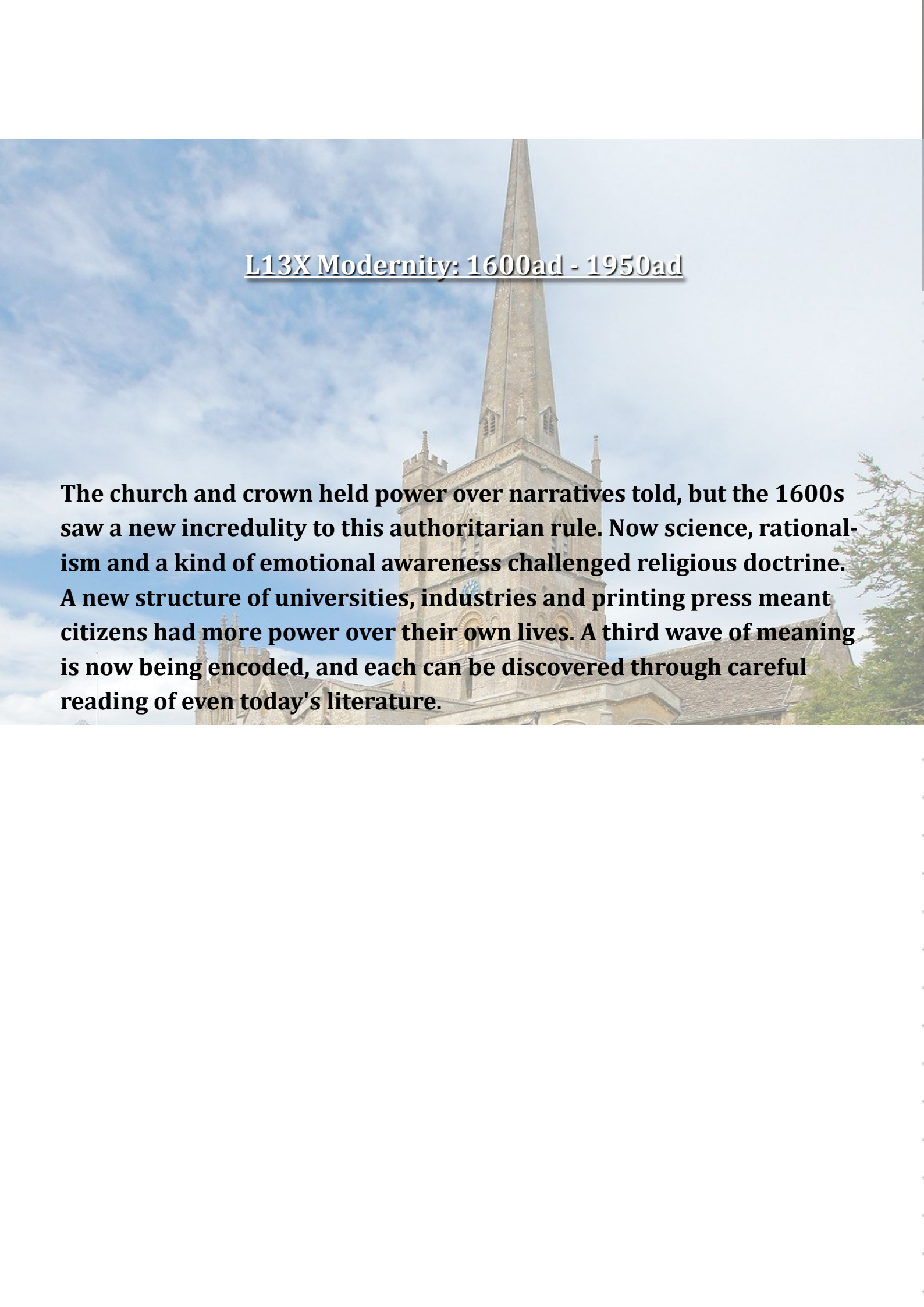
- **Romance** – a medieval story about quests, tests, and moral challenges
- **Chivalry** – the code of honour, virtue and Christian loyalty guiding knightly behaviour
- **Virtue** – moral goodness
- **Temptation** – a test of character
- **Quest** – a journey to prove moral worth

Sentence Stems

- "This moment reflects **chivalric values** of _____."
- "The story tests the character's **virtue** by..."
- "**Romance** uses quests to explore _____."

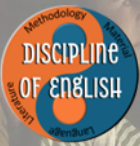
Now apply this to your current text:

*Gawain's journey is a **moral test**, not just an adventure. His honesty, humility, and loyalty are examined at every stage. **Romance** encodes the **Premodern** belief that a **knight's** value is measured through **virtue**, not victory which is a development of the early-English warrior character, who fought as a demonstration of bravery, strength and loyalty. The Green Knight's challenge reveals whether Gawain can uphold the Christian **chivalric** code under pressure.*



L13X Modernity: 1600ad - 1950ad

The church and crown held power over narratives told, but the 1600s saw a new incredulity to this authoritarian rule. Now science, rationalism and a kind of emotional awareness challenged religious doctrine. A new structure of universities, industries and printing press meant citizens had more power over their own lives. A third wave of meaning is now being encoded, and each can be discovered through careful reading of even today's literature.



131 How Did Modern Literature Begin to Trust Human Reason



Learning Objectives:

Today we are learning how Modern literature created meaning through reason and enquiry. By the end of the lesson, you will understand that:

- Modern texts explore human choice and responsibility
- Meaning is shaped by scientific and rational thinking
- Literature begins to question inherited beliefs and authority

Core Knowledge:

Modern texts, Modernity or Modernism refers to a period of time roughly starting in the 1600s until the 1900s. In Literature, it does not refer to 'today'. Modernity values reason, observation, and enquiry as sources of truth. Natural philosophy encourages the study of the world through evidence. Humans are viewed as having free will and responsibility. Literature explores human potential, ambition, and consequence.

Vocabulary

- **Modernity** – a period focused on reason and enquiry
- **Natural philosophy** – early scientific thinking about the natural world
- **Scientific enquiry** – testing ideas through observation
- **Free will** – the ability to make choices
- **Human potential** – what humans are capable of achieving
- **Skepticism** - distrust, disbelief in accepted narratives

Sentence Stems

- “This reflects **Modern ideas** about reason and enquiry because...”
- “The text explores **free will** by showing...”
- “Human potential is presented as both powerful and dangerous...”

Now apply this to your current text:

This extract reflects Modern thinking because Fogg's confidence comes from reason and calculation, rather than chance or belief. When Fogg says "we must calculate", he is showing the scientific enquiry which was in conflict with the faith systems of religion. While the other men doubt the journey is possible and agree that "no man could master such distance", Fogg trusts the new scientific systems of his Modernity— timetables, railways, steamships, and the ability to measure the world accurately. His wager shows how Modernist literature treats the world as something that can be understood and mastered through enquiry, not inherited tradition. The meaning of the scene is produced by the clash between skepticism and rational progress, proving that Fogg believes human potential expands when guided by rationality.



132 How Did Humans Become the Measure of Meaning



Learning Objectives:

Today we are learning how Enlightenment thinking changed the way meaning was created in literature. By the end of the lesson, you will understand that:

- Enlightenment writers trusted reason and evidence
- Humans were seen as capable of understanding the world
- Literature began to explore responsibility, progress, and freedom

Core Knowledge:

The Enlightenment elevates **reason, experiment, and open enquiry** above inherited authority, a shift crystallised by the founding of the **Royal Society in 1660**. Its motto, *nullius in verba* ("take nobody's word for it"), captures a new cultural confidence: human beings can investigate the world directly, test claims, and improve society through evidence rather than tradition. This scientific ethos reshapes literature too, encouraging writers to probe questions of freedom, responsibility, and social progress with the same commitment to observation, debate, and rational critique.

Vocabulary

- **Enlightenment** – a period that values reason and knowledge
- **Humanism** – belief in human value and potential
- **Reason** – thinking logically
- **Progress** – belief that society can improve
- **Responsibility** – being accountable for choices

Sentence Stems

- "This reflects **Enlightenment thinking** because..."
- "The text treats humans as capable of..."
- "Reason and responsibility are shown through..."

Now apply this to your current text:

This extract reflects Enlightenment ideas because Swift presents a society where reason is treated as the foundation of moral understanding, rather than tradition or inherited authority. The Houyhnhnm society has rules; "their grand maxim is, to cultivate reason, and to be wholly governed by it," showing that rational thought is viewed as the basis for justice and virtue. Meaning is created through this emphasis on judgement: the Houyhnhnms "derive justice, friendship, benevolence, and every moral duty" from reason alone, suggesting that truth emerges through enquiry and reflection, and no longer on religious doctrine.

The Houyhnhnm seem to be an enlightened species because they place responsibility for defining moral ideals on their own rational thinking. This is a mark of Modernity, the period in which the church was now in conflict with other stories about where virtue comes from.



133 Why Did Writers Turn Inwards



Learning Objectives:

Today we are learning how Romantic writers used emotion and self-awareness to create meaning.

By the end of the lesson, you will understand that:

- Romantic writers valued feeling and inner experience
- Emotion and reason work together in Modern literature
- Nature and memory help characters understand themselves

Core Knowledge:

Romantic writers believe feeling helps us understand the world. Sensibility values emotional awareness as a source of understanding. Romantic writers focus on inner life, memory, and self-reflection. Nature is presented as a moral and emotional guide. Emotion and reason are mutually defining, not opposites.

Vocabulary

- **Sensibility** – awareness of emotion and feeling
- **Romanticism** – a movement focused on emotion, nature, and selfhood
- **Self-awareness** – understanding one's own thoughts and feelings
- **Imagination** – creative inner vision
- **Nature** – the natural world as moral or emotional guide

Sentence Stems

- "This reflects Romantic sensibility because..."
- "The character's self-awareness develops through..."
- "Nature functions as a guide by..."

Now apply this to your current text:

This extract demonstrates Romantic sensibility because Jane uses her inner emotional life to understand her place in the world. When she insists that "human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity", in as a modality (ought to, should, must, could) she reveals that powerful feelings and restless imagination provide genuine insight into her identity. By reflecting on her desire for "action," Jane recognises that emotion is not a weakness but a source of knowledge, which matches Modern literature's shift toward self-awareness and inner experience. Her reflections challenge the social expectation that women must remain passive, showing how Romantic writing uses feeling, longing, and introspection to produce meaning.



L134 Why Did the Novel Emerge in Modernity



Learning Objectives:

Today we are learning why the novel was created in the Modern era:

- The novel reflects Modern ideas about individuality and society
- Prose allows writers to explore experience and realism
- The novel is designed to observe life, not teach fixed truths

Core Knowledge:

The novel places lower and middle classes, their experiences and their lives as an untapped story. A new form of literature emerges and takes the Latinate term 'Novel', literally meaning new. It is not to be used today meaning brand new, and must convey the themes associated with 'novels'. The novel emerges to represent individual experience. Novels use prose (everyday, vernacular, verbal grammar) to explore everyday life and social reality. The novel reflects Modern values of observation, realism, and enquiry. Meaning develops through character experience over time.

Vocabulary

- **Novel** – a long prose narrative focused on individual experience
- **Prose** – ordinary written language (not verse)
- **Realism** – representing everyday life accurately
- **Empirical observation** – understanding through watching and experience
- **Individual** – a single person with a unique inner life

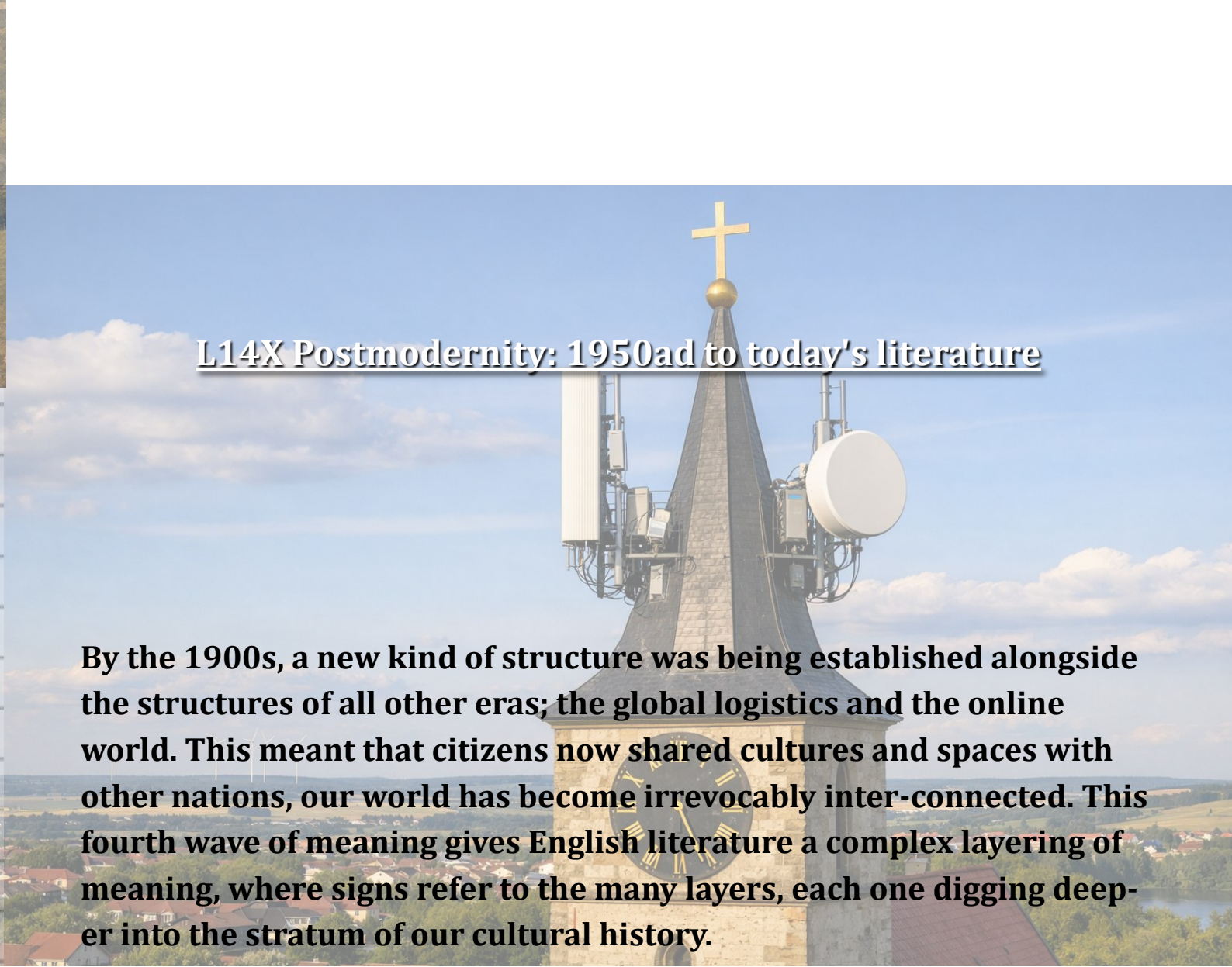
Sentence Stems

- "The novel form allows the writer to..."
- "Prose helps represent realistic experience by..."
- "This reflects Modern realism because..."

Now apply this to your current text:

*This scene demonstrates why **Of Mice and Men** must be a **Modern novel**, because the **prose** form allows Steinbeck to represent the everyday experiences of ordinary workers with close attention to emotion, speech rhythms, and social reality. George's explanation of their life as migrant workers uses realistic detail, showing insecure work, loneliness, and economic pressure — concerns typical of Modern literature's shift toward observation rather than moral instruction.*

*The novel's form lets readers follow George's **internal** frustration, responsibility, and moral conflict over Lennie, something earlier genres such as epic or romance would not prioritise. By dwelling on their routine, their dream, and their vulnerability, the scene exemplifies how the novel is designed to explore **individual experience** over time, giving narrative importance to people who were previously excluded from literature. This is exactly the function of the **Modern novel**: to document real social life in accessible prose, revealing meaning through **lived experience** rather than inherited truths.*



L14X Postmodernity: 1950ad to today's literature

By the 1900s, a new kind of structure was being established alongside the structures of all other eras; the global logistics and the online world. This meant that citizens now shared cultures and spaces with other nations, our world has become irrevocably inter-connected. This fourth wave of meaning gives English literature a complex layering of meaning, where signs refer to the many layers, each one digging deeper into the stratum of our cultural history.



L107 Why Do Texts Contain Many Meanings at Once? Literature as a Reflection of Its Era Learning Objectives



By the end of the lesson, you will understand that:

- Literary meaning is built from layers of older meanings
- Different eras contribute different ideas to texts
- These layers make modern texts rich and complex

Core Knowledge:

Texts often contain many meanings at the same time because they are built from layers of ideas that come from different historical periods. New ways of thinking do not erase old ones; instead, they are added on top, like layers of rock beneath the ground. These layers are called **strata**. Words, images, and symbols carry older meanings from earlier eras alongside newer ones, which is why a single moment in a text can reflect different beliefs, values, or worldviews at once. Understanding literature means recognising that meanings are gathered over time, not replaced, and that richer texts carry traces of the past within them.

"Texts build upon history, they don't rewrite it." "Texts build upon history, they don't rewrite it."

Vocabulary

Sentence Stems

- | | |
|--|--|
| • Early English – up to roughly 1100; Pagan, warrior, feudal (loyalty to a local king) | • "At the time, this sign would have meant..." |
| • Premodernity – 1100ad - 1600ad; the rise of Christianity, Romance, chivalry | • "Historically, readers were trained to decode..." |
| • Modernity - 1600ad - 1950ad; the rise of rationality, enlightenment, science, industry and the middle classes | • "This sign has layers of meaning attributed in different eras..." |
| • Postmodernity - 1950ad - onwards; globalisation, digital spaces and consumerism | • "This sign couldn't mean ____ to the author because it is too early in British culture for..." |
| • These eras act as a strata / layer of meaning within signs. | |

Now apply this to your current text:

*For Katniss, fire becomes a powerful and much layered symbol. The Collins inherits **early English encoding** in which fire is part of a journey or transition. For Katniss, she is on a transition from district serf to saviour. Collins inherits the **premodern encoding** in which fire is a **symbol** for damnation, and Katniss is being sent into a place of torture and punishment - the games themselves are a parallel for this place of no return. But Fire can also be redemption, and she is able to return from the games as a savior. Collins also needs the **Modernist encoding**, where fire is industrial. For Collins, each district is an industrial hand that feeds the Capitol. And finally fire is a **postmodern symbol** in which her dress is no longer real flame but a simulation designed to entertain an audience. The symbol of fire is then deeply **layered** with many kinds of **meaning**, each **encoded** through a **cultural history**.*