Reading Literature Actively

We will be doing a lot of reading this semester that you need to be prepared not only to discuss in class but also to write about. To help you with this process I will often give you discussion questions to think about during your reading, but I want you to develop the ability to ask your own questions and make your own observations! Here are some tips that I think will help you develop the habits of an *active* reader.

Define - Even people who study literature for years continually come across words they don't know. Look up the words you don't know and jot it down. An author's words are chosen with a reason; understanding the words will help you grasp the novel/story better.

Underline/highlight - When something catches your attention take note. You may not exactly know why at the moment, but you may want it later in class discussion/paper writing.

Annotate - This means take notes. Write down your interpretation of a quote/paragraph. What do you find intriguing/important? What do you think the line says about the character/plot/theme? Is there a reference or reminder to another text/film/artwork?

Some questions to ask yourself while reading:

- From whose point of view is this story? How does it influence my perception of the events?
- How does this help the plot move forward?
- How does this describe the character? What does it encourage me to think? Is this a correct perception?
- What themes/symbols do I see? In what ways do they help the story? Do they expand the narrative? Do they narrow it? What kind of assumptions do they carry?
- What is the story leading me to think? How does it do this? What in the text makes me think this?
- What underlying assumptions does this story have? Are they logical?
- How does this connect with my own life? How does it connect with different aspects of society? How does it connect with humanity in general?

These are broad questions to ask, but also ask yourself specific questions about the story (i.e. who/what people are running from, why they are running, where are they running, why is this important…).