

TIPS FOR READING LITERATURE

Reading is something most of us practice daily; we read newspapers, magazine, novels and textbooks. However, reading a newspaper differs from reading literature. For one thing, the purpose for reading each one is different, and, therefore, the method must also vary. In CEGEP, reading literature is usually required for your English courses. Although you may feel that reading is the simple task of picking up your book and going through it from cover to cover, there are certain hints that will make reading easier, more understandable, and, in the long run, less time-consuming and more enjoyable. The following are a few points that may help make your next reading assignment easier to complete.

Read carefully.

This is no time for speed reading or skimming! A careful reading may seem slower, but you will ultimately save more time than if you have to reread everything. Begin reading the novel or short story as soon as it is assigned and read slowly and with careful attention to detail!

Read the introduction.

Many introductions contain valuable insights into the author's life and his writing, both of which can enrich your understanding and appreciation of the work. It will often provide background knowledge on the novel.

Go to all your classes, and bring the literature with you.

If you skip classes or forget the book or story when you do go to class, you'll miss out. Listen for when the teacher refers to key passages in the work and mark those passages so that you can find and review them for tests and essays.

Talk about it.

Even if you don't like talking in class, you should try to talk about literature with classmates or friends. Discussing literature means you're thinking about it, which is a vital step towards understanding it.

Interact with the story.

Ask yourself what you would do if you were in the same position as a character in the text. Try to put yourself in his/her place, and question the character's thoughts, actions and motivations.

Identify and understand the conflict.

What is the main problem facing one or more characters in the text? How is this problem revealed? Is it overcome? If so, how? If not, why not? Ask questions such as: Why does this occur? What is the author's purpose in this chapter?

Mark up the text and take notes.

Make the work your own! Underline or highlight important passages, and use scrap paper or those sticky yellow "flags" to mark their place for quick reference. Jot down

notes and questions in the margins, and write more lengthy notes to add to your class notes.

Identify and understand the theme.

What is the main idea of the story or novel? What is the author's message? Is there a lesson that she is trying to teach, like Harper Lee's lesson about tolerance in *To Kill a Mockingbird*? How is this lesson taught? Through which character(s)?

Be persistent and positive--or intelligently critical.

Many works of literature start out slowly, and may seem dull or confusing, but stick with them and you may be pleasantly surprised. If you are not, ask yourself why. There's nothing wrong with disliking elements of a work, but you must try to come up with specific, intelligent criticisms. Maybe you find the author's writing style too unemotional, or the plot unbelievable or dragging. These are good reasons for disliking a work. "It sucks" is not a good reason.

Research

Do a little research on the author and the times, without getting involved in a detailed critique of the text itself.

Set goals

Note how the book is divided, and make it your goal to read one section in one reading. Set a goal as to when the assignment should be completed.

Practice makes perfect.

Get out of the habit of thinking that reading is only work that you do for school. The more you read literature, in and out of school, the easier and more enjoyable it will become! Read the other stories in that anthology you bought for your English class, ask friends for book recommendations, and get reading!