Strategies for Reading Critically

❶ Pre-Reading

Preparation. You will need a pencil to underline, make notes, jot questions, and otherwise mark up your reading material; a dictionary to look up unfamiliar words; and a notebook for your reading journal.

Personal Expectations. Have you heard something about the text or its author? Has a classmate or friend told you something about it? Have you seen a film or TV show related to it?

Context. What does the title lead you to expect? What is its genre (story, play, essay, poem)?

❷ Reading

What doesn't make sense? Note any word you don't understand, any choice by the author that you are uncertain about.

What is unexpected? Note striking or puzzling images, descriptions, words, and phrases.

What forms a pattern? Note words, images, settings, and events that appear more than once, or seem to be related.

How are you reacting to it? Be aware of when you find your mind wandering, when you find yourself getting exasperated, when you find yourself suddenly interested in a way you weren't a minute before, when you find what you are reading utterly baffling.

❸ Processing

Look up everything. Answer factual questions or problems of comprehension that arose during your reading and were not resolved by further reading. Read any annotations and notes provided for the selection.

Process your initial reactions into reflection on your reading. What is the text doing at a particular moment to meet, change, or disrupt your expectations?

Reread. Look for questions to discuss in class and further examples of patterns and issues you have observed.

Keep a reading journal. Jot down your thoughts and reactions about what you have just read. Make lists of patterns you have observed and problems you can't resolve. Generate questions for class discussion.