Reminders: Writing About Literature

1. When we write about literature, we use the present tense whenever possible. This may sometimes get tricky, but your goal is to remember that we write about literature in the present tense because literature is “alive,” happening in the present moment of our reading/study.

NOTE: When we are quoting a character who is speaking about something that happened in the past, for example, we keep the past tense of the original, but our introductory phrase remains in the present.

EX—When Alice Jane enters the building on the first day of school, she says to her friend Janice, “I loved this place last year. I never dreamed that I would actually be walking through the doors, though, as a student, since my mom told me that a move to California was inevitable” (23).

1. We use page numbers for our quotes and paraphrases—if you give a piece of information that comes from a specific page in the text (you can go to a page and point out the information, in other words), then you should use a page number. It does not matter whether you use a direct quote (word for words with quotation marks) or a paraphrase (information from the text but put into your own words and own sentence structure)—in either case, a page number is warranted. Not using a page number is considered plagiarism, so we will practice, from the beginning of this year, the use of page numbers in our writing.
2. Never leave a good quote hanging—you cannot simply plop a full sentence quote from the text into your writing. We always use what we call an attributive tag/signal phrase. This can be as simple as “He says,” “Jake notes,” “Alice argues,” etc. or longer (see the example above).

VERY WRONG: In Anthem, Equality learns to love the freedom that comes from hanging out in the tunnel. “I loved going to be alone in the tunnel. I learned a lot”

(can you tell me why this is very wrong?)

VERY RIGHT: In *Anthem*, Equality learns to love the freedom that comes from hanging out in the tunnel. After his third night sneaking away from the theatre, he says, “I loved going to be alone in the tunnel. I learned a lot” (24).

1. Reminder—a summary is going to cover the main events of the chapter. It is not a paragraph that is an argument, like most writing about literature. A summary is simply a recapping of the events in the text. A summary, therefore, should be one of the easier pieces to write in any literature class! In your chapter summary, be sure to include the major plot points as well as any of the details from that chapter that you feel are most important to the development of the characters or the plot. You will share your summaries with the class.

FOR LATER—Rand Background Writing

1. Don’t forget to indent your paragraph, to revise, and to edit! Always check your topic sentence—if I only read your topic sentence, would I know EXACTLY what you are trying to argue in your paragraph? Will I get the entire picture of your paragraph, rather than just a part of it? Revise your topic sentence to encompass your entire paragraph.
2. Remember that when you are analyzing literature and writing about it, you are making an argument. That said, your topic sentence will also be a statement that is debatable, not a statement of fact.

Ex.

VERY WRONG: Equality is a character who breaks the laws in his society, meets The Golden One, and lives in the forest. (why is this wrong?)

RIGHT: Equality’s decision to break the rules of his society is spurred on by his love for The Golden One as well as his love for learning.