

## Annotating Literature

Consider this...

“Reading is a form of intellectual work. And intellectual work requires willingness to persevere through difficulties. But perhaps even more important, intellectual work requires understanding what such work entails.”

From an adaptation of *How to Read a Paragraph: The Art of Close Reading* by Richard Paul and Linda Elder. Visit [www.criticalthinking.org](http://www.criticalthinking.org) for more of this informative and inspiring article.

Why Do We Annotate?

Annotation Guide

Close reading “means reading to uncover layers of meaning that lead to deep comprehension” (Nancy Boyles, Educational Leadership). Annotating is a sharp tool to dissect these layers.

Close reading and annotating can be thought of as having a conversation with the text...

- Talk back to the text
- Ask questions
- Comment on characters’ actions
- Express agreement/disagreement
- Connect ideas in the text to other ideas in the text
- Track the development of a theme

Some students complain that annotating slows down reading. And they are right. It does. The objective is to read more actively, **with heightened awareness**. If annotating as you read annoys you, read a chapter, then go back and annotate. Re-reading a text is actually preferable. In a number of ways, meaningful annotating leads to a more rich experience in and out of the classroom.

Where Do We Annotate?

Annotation is a personal activity; therefore, each reader must develop a system that works for her. However, try the following:

- Inside front cover of book: character list with room for notes about general character summary, character development, key scenes for character
- Inside back cover of book: Themes, allusions, images, motifs, key scenes, plot line – include page numbers

- Bottom and side margins of pages: notes, questions, remarks
- Top margin of pages: plot notes – quick summaries of what has happened (helps for quickly locating events when discussing)

How Do We Annotate?

**Suggested** system for notes/markings:

- Use a color code system: separate colors for different ideas such as new vocabulary (blue), symbolism (yellow), conflicts (red).
- Use abbreviations.
- Underline sparingly – always include commentary/words to explain underlined portions. Remember, if you ONLY underline the max grade you can receive is a D.
- Boxes around character names and descriptive phrases for character  
Brackets around key speeches, dialogue, descriptions that are too long for underlining.
- Use one color ink for markings on first read through and second color ink for later reading/re-reading.
- As chapters end, revisit front and back covers of book to add to notes and to add page numbers.
- On last page of chapter, summarize major events/character developments.

What Do We Annotate?

Elements and devices to look for and respond to:

- Plot developments – use abbreviations for plot terms
- Point of view – mark any/all shifts in POV
- Effect of diction (word choice) and syntax (word order)
- Repetitions, patterns in writing style
- Irony
- Contrasts, juxtapositions, contradictions
- Allusions
- Motifs or clusters of ideas/images
- Tone (author's attitude) and mood (reader's feeling)
- Imagery
- Themes (messages about life)
- Setting/historical period/setting changes
- Symbols
- Figures of speech (metaphors, similes, personification, etc.)

## Closing Thoughts and Reminders:

Effective annotation is economical and consistent. Develop a system, refine it, and consistently use it. If you are annotating simply for the sake of annotating, then you are doing it wrong. **Finally, write in the book only if you own the book. Otherwise, use post its.**

- Use any white space available in the book, if you own the book!
- Write between the lines. This book is your property. Make it your own!
- Use consistent abbreviations and symbols.
- Underline and highlight sparingly – if everything is underlined and highlighted, then nothing stands out.
- Create your own code and use it consistently.
- Use sticky notes only if all white space has been exhausted or if you are using a school copy of the book.

**If you can generate one or two open-ended, thought provoking, short answer/essay discussion questions per chapter, then you have succeeded in truly interacting with the literature. Challenge yourself to do so and PRESENT THOSE QUESTIONS TO THE CLASS DURING DISCUSSION.**

Go forth with an open mind and pen in hand! Happy annotating!

Adapted from the following source: T. Walls, AP Instructor – Norman, OK