How to Annotate a Fictional Text

What is Annotating?

Annotating a text as it is read is KEY in the process of not only ensuring comprehension of the material, but also in interpreting the meaning of the work for close analysis.

Annotating is the process of:
- ❖ Carefully reading a fiction or non-fiction creative work (poetry, a short passage, an article or an entire text)
- ❖ Highlighting (with a highlighter or underlining with a pen) words or phrases that call your attention to literary or rhetorical clues. (Students will learn how to get more proficient at recognizing these clues!)
- ❖ Making notations (questions, comments, insights) on small post-it-notes or in the margins of student owned texts/and/or keeping an annotation log in Cornell format

What Annotating is NOT!

- ❖ Making notes on a separate piece of paper. That is note-taking, and serves a different purpose. Annotating is the process of jotting down a reader's questions, comments and insights directly on or at the text AS ONE READS. To read the text and then go back to annotate later, causes the student to miss the many first impressions and thoughts and the questions one gets when first reading the work. Remember – literature is literature because of the imbedded meaning and was meant to be digested slowly.
- ❖ Highlighting. It is highlighting. The notation a reader makes in a margin or on a post-it-note next to the text is the annotation.
- ❖ Summation: Notations are not merely summing up or rephrasing what is written. To help avoid this, think before making every notation: "I think that . . . ." or "I wonder why (or "if")"

How to best Annotate:
The best way to annotate is to be able to write directly on the text itself. (Forget what your parents told you in kindergarten about coloring in your books).
1. Purchase the text so that you can mark it up with your annotations, OR
2. Make copies of the passage(s) to be closely analyzed.
   If you cannot write directly on the text to be analyzed, then make notations on post-it-notes as an alternative choice.
   1. You can cut the sticky notes into small strips
   2. Place the sticky note under the word or phrase to be annotated OR
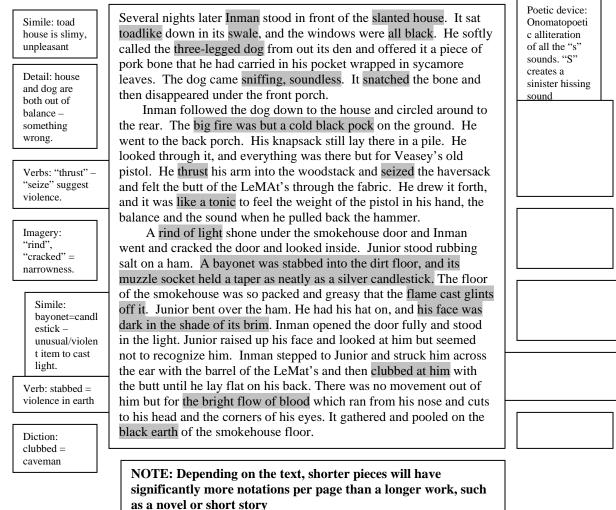   3. Use sticky notes that have the little pointing arrows and point them to the parts of the text to be annotated.

What do I Annotate?

Annotating takes lots of practice. The more you do it, the better you will get at discerning the literary clues a writer uses (called style) to convey a deeper meaning that goes beyond just understanding the plot. Types of notations to make are:
1. Style (writing tools) such as figurative language, imagery, diction, syntax, poetic devices
2. Predictions (What does the reader think will happen?)
3. Character analysis and traits
4. Recurring motifs, images, themes
5. Connections to other works/themes (allusions)
6. Commentary (Reader's opinion of events/characters)
7. Rhetorical devises a writer will use to influence the audience/reader

SAMPLE

Simile: toad house is slimy, unpleasant

Detail: house and dog are both out of balance – something wrong.

Verbs: "thrust" – "seize" suggest violence.

Imagery: "rind", "cracked" = narrowness.

Simile: bayonet=candlestick – unusual/violent item to cast light.

Verb: stabbed = violence in earth

Diction: clubbed = caveman

Several nights later Inman stood in front of the slanted house. It sat toadlike down in its swale, and the windows were all black. He softly called the three-legged dog from out its den and offered it a piece of pork bone that he had carried in his pocket wrapped in sycamore leaves. The dog came sniffing, soundless. It snatched the bone and then disappeared under the front porch.

   Inman followed the dog down to the house and circled around to the rear. The big fire was but a cold black pock on the ground. He went to the back porch. His knapsack still lay there in a pile. He looked through it, and everything was there but for Veasey's old pistol. He thrust his arm into the woodstack and seized the haversack and felt the butt of the LeMAt's through the fabric. He drew it forth, and it was like a tonic to feel the weight of the pistol in his hand, the balance and the sound when he pulled back the hammer.

    A rind of light shone under the smokehouse door and Inman went and cracked the door and looked inside. Junior stood rubbing salt on a ham. A bayonet was stabbed into the dirt floor, and its muzzle socket held a taper as neatly as a silver candlestick. The floor of the smokehouse was so packed and greasy that the flame cast glints off it. Junior bent over the ham. He had his hat on, and his face was dark in the shade of its brim. Inman opened the door fully and stood in the light. Junior raised up his face and looked at him but seemed not to recognize him. Inman stepped to Junior and struck him across the ear with the barrel of the LeMat's and then clubbed at him with the butt until he lay flat on his back. There was no movement out of him but for the bright flow of blood which ran from his nose and cuts to his head and the corners of his eyes. It gathered and pooled on the black earth of the smokehouse floor.

Poetic device: Onomatopoetic alliteration of all the "s" sounds. "S" creates a sinister hissing sound

NOTE: Depending on the text, shorter pieces will have significantly more notations per page than a longer work, such as a novel or short story

CLOSE READING STRATEGIES

1. Use **DIDLS** for literary analysis:
      D iction – the connotation of the word choice
      I mages - vivid appeals to understanding through the senses
      D etails - facts that are included or those that are omitted
      L anguage- the overall use of language, such as formal, clinical, jargon
      S entence structure – how does the structure affect the reader's attitude?

2. Use **SIFT** for literary analysis:
      S ymbol – examine and identify the title and the text for symbolism
      I mages - identify images and sensory details
      F igures of Speech – Analyze use of figurative language and other literary devices
      T one or theme – Discuss how all devices reveal tone and theme.

3. Use **SOAPSTone** for non-fiction literary analusis:
      S peaker – Identify the speaker and make assumptions about this person

      O ccasion – What may have prompted the author to write this piece?

      A udience – Does the speaker use language that is specific for a unique audience?

      P urpose – In what way does the author convey the message? What's the emotional state
                of the speaker? Why did he/she write this piece?
      S ubject – What is the topic of this piece? How do you know this?

      Tone – What is the author's attitude toward the subject?

4. Use TWIST for literary analysis:
      <u>**T**</u> **one**
      <u>**W**</u> **ord Choice**
      <u>**I**</u> **magery and detail**
      <u>**S**</u> **tyle**
      <u>**T**</u> **heme**

5. Rhetorical Devices: Ethos, Logos, Pathos, loaded words, emotional appeals, etc.

Making Annotations . . .

       To increase understanding of and participation with the literature you will read this year, you will be annotating the core and supplemental novels for the course. Annotating means that you will be making notes in the margins (or on sticky notes), highlighting key points, bracketing selected passages, marking areas that you question or are unsure of, etc.

Annotating DOES take additional time when you read, but ultimately assists with understanding of the text, as it facilitates discussion and writing in response to literature. It helps the reader easily find passages to be discussed in class or to be used for concrete details for writing.. Annotating helps a student remember sections that he or she has had questions about and will help him/her substantiate his/her points during class discussions. Your teacher will be checking student annotation three times per novel and will give a grade each time there is a check. Annotation checks will be worth 30 points.

Students should be annotating AS THEY READ, not just going back and making marks and notes AFTER reading a chapter or selection. Remember the objective here is to practice this skill and to assist you in analyzing the novel.

What do I annotate?
Following are "things" to look for and highlight/comment while reading.
➢ Character descriptions, especially as each character is introduced. Use direct and indirect evidence of characterization.
➢ Your own inferences about characters, scenes or events
➢ Important plot points: Summarize BRIEFLY in the margin events you think are important. This is difficult at first, but gets easier as your read and become more familiar with the plot.
➢ Underline unfamiliar vocabulary words for later clarification.
➢ Use of literary devices – simile; metaphor; personification; sarcasm; parallelism; repetition; imagery; etc. that help you "see" the scene or image the author is trying to describe.
➢ Complications to the plot
➢ Thematic elements – when it becomes clear what the author is "saying" or "commenting" upon.
➢ Predictions you may have about the story – what might happen next?
➢ Questions you might want to ask later. Sometimes a ? is all you need as a reminder in the margin.
➢ Elements of humor or tragedy. A happy face or a sad face and some words to help remember a particular section can be sufficient here.
➢ Any thing that seems "to jump off the page" at you! Exclamation marks and a few words work well for this.
➢ Your personal observations or reactions to what you have just read.
➢ Interesting diction or word choice.
➢ Evidence of the author's tone – attitude toward the subject matter.
➢ Your emotional reaction to something read (mood).

NOTE: You will not necessarily have annotations on every page. Some will be full of notes; others will have none or just a small comment. Don't obsess on annotating; use it as a tool. DO NOT use highlighters to underline on flimsy pages. Use a pencil or blue or black ballpoint pen. Watch out for red ink; it can bleed!