

Close Reading and Annotation

During this semester we will focus on numerous short stories. This literature can be considered literary art because it transcends simple storytelling and requires analysis transcending simple literal interpretation. Therefore, you will have to be alert and focused while you read. You must read these texts closely; therefore, you will not want to put off your reading until the last minute. Because some are short pieces, you may want to read them more than once. In order to prepare for Junior and Senior English as well as college and AP courses, you must habitually annotate your texts.

- Pre-read the text; develop an understanding of the meaning of the text.
- As you read, write your first impressions in the margins and/or on a separate sheet of paper. Include your dislikes and likes, any questions that arise, points that you find difficult to understand and the reasons why, as well as any revelations or reflections.
- Look for patterns and repetitions (motifs), and recurring elements of the text including images, phrases, and situations. Ask yourself why the author may have used these repetitions. Do they affect you as the reader? Do you derive meaning from them?
- Identify any passages that strike you as highly significant and explain why. How does the passage contribute to the overall meaning of the literature? How does the passage contribute to the development of a character or concept?
- Think about how elements of this text can relate to other texts that you have read.
- Read the text in context – consider the time period in which it was written, the literary period (Romantic/Realist/Modern), and the social and political atmosphere. How does the author reveal these contextual elements in the literature? Does the author reveal a particular position on an issue? How does the author accomplish this?

Before annotating, pre-read the text to discover the themes, points, language and rhetorical patterns the author uses in developing meaning in the literature.

Annotating

Annotating is essential for close and critical reading of texts in preparation for writing assignments, analyses, research, and test/exam responses. Because I have requested that you purchase many of your texts this semester, you have the opportunity to mark your texts. Establishing a structured method of annotating will assist you in college and the business world, situations where close reading contributes to success. Furthermore, annotating helps you dissect difficult texts and discern meaning from them. Many students have practiced a rather free form of annotation and highlighting, making their texts look pretty, but with little utility when it comes to understanding the meaning. We tend to get lost in the muck or forget why we marked something. Here are some common methods of annotating:

- Circle phrases you find pithy, represent repetitive themes or images (motifs), and/or reveal figurative language
- Circle words you need to define in the margin

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- Underline sentences that stand out, develop an argument, or make a point
- Number related points
- Bracket important sections of text
- Connect important ideas, words or phrases with arrows

In the margins:

- Define the unfamiliar terms or words that you circled
- Summarize and number each paragraph
- Note any significant patterns or motifs
- Identify any outstanding language usage or writing strategies
- Identify points or arguments

Don't simply mark a passage without stating why in the margins (unless it's obvious). Never rely on your memory because when referring back to your marks, you may not recall the context in which you first encountered the marked passage, so it becomes meaningless unless you reread.