Text Annotation

**Provide the Scaffolding (Give them something to hook onto.)**

*The Common Core State Standards require that we focus on text-based instruction.* *Students should have rich and rigorous conversations which are dependent on a common text. Teachers should insist that classroom experiences stay deeply connected to the text on the page and that students develop habits for making evidentiary arguments both in conversation, as well as in writing to assess comprehension of a text. Thoughtful annotation may be one way to help bridge the gap between our current practice and this new focus.*

A scaffolding skill that you can teach to struggling readers and great readers alike is the **annotation of text**. This means, quite simply, that the reader “marks up” sections of text and making notes as you interact with the text. Annotation helps build three key **reading skills**. When annotating a text, the reader:

* + Formulates questions in response to what he is reading
  + Analyzes and interprets elements of the text (e.g. argument, reasoning, evidence)
  + Draws conclusions and makes inferences based on explicit and implicit meaning

**Model & Guide…Model & Guide**

In order for this to be effective, it is essential that you model with your students how to annotate a text.   
  
1. **READ IT ALOUD FIRST**: Students need to know that they don’t start highlighting until after they’ve first read through the text.

2. **MODEL A THINK-ALOUD:** You can then annotate it yourself by talking your way through WHY you choose certain items to mark up. As you do this, you can also ask the students to pick items for annotation and have them explain why they selected them.

3. **CREATE AN ANNOTATION GUIDE:** Determine what you want students to get out of the documents, and then make sure that the annotation guide requires them to find this type of information. Provide students with symbols or codes to use in their own annotation. **Underline the claim in a passage.** The rest is supporting information and examples. Identify the topic sentence to find it easier.

* **Use symbols/codes** –question marks to indicate disagreement, exclamation marks to note agreement or to flag a strong statement, triangles to indicate a change in thinking, or a star for the topic sentence
* **Write the passage topic in the margin as a reminder** – Just a word or two.
* **Write questions in the margin** – When you don’t understand something or when you don’t understand the author’s thought process on a particular topic, write the question in the margin as a reminder to settle the question.
* **Circle new and unfamiliar words** – Look them up as soon as possible.
* **Add your or other author’s perspectives in the margins** – Other authors have surely written on the same subject. What do they say? Do they agree with this author? If not, what do they say. Add these ideas in the margins.
* **Draw arrows to related ideas** – Or unrelated ideas…
* **Summarize** – Add your own summary after the last paragraph. That simple exercise will crystalize your thinking on the topic. If you can’t write it, you don’t understand it.

**After Students Engage With the Text, Engage Them in Discussion of It**

Taking notes on reading is typically an individual quest. It still can be, but if you are trying to teach the skill of annotation, using it only for reading on homework assignments will not suffice. Make sure that all students are held accountable for their annotations. But remember that the accountability should also encourage further engagement with the text. Students will engage with the text while annotating; make sure that you engage with them (or allow to engage with one another) after. Accountability for annotation should always be positive. Some ideas might include:

* **Best Question Contest** – Encourage questions in text by making a list of everyone’s question in the front of the class. Use this as a tool to provide answers and make sure the whole class is on the same page. Reward students with thoughtful questions.
* **The Huddle** – Place a small amount of text on a large piece of paper (or overhead or smart board) and enlist a small group to come together with their own annotations and make a “super annotated text.” The group will discuss what the most important annotations are and the best way to complete them to help others understand the document. Have the group present or allow other students to visit their work.
* **First Word/Last Word:** In small groups, take turns speaking about a text with the following steps.

1. The person will read a short section that they annotated, but they will not comment on the section or explain why they annotated it the way they did.
2. Then, in a clockwise fashion everyone in the group will be given time to respond and share their thoughts on this particular section of the text.
3. Finally, the author of the card gets the LAST WORD by reading his/her reaction and explaining the reason for their annotation.

**What Not To Do**

* **Don’t use a highlighter** – Quality marking isn’t done with a fat-tipped highlighter. You can’t write, which is an important part of marking the text, with a large marker. Get yourself some fine point colored pens to do the job.
* **Don’t mark large volumes of text** – You want important points to stand out. Although we all know that everything can’t be important, we often highlight all of the text on the page. You want to find the 20% of the text that is important and mark that.
* **Don’t mark the obvious** – Don’t waste time marking up things that are already in your knowledge-base or skill set. If you already know it, you don’t need to mark it.