Think of annotations as “showing your work” while you read just as you sometimes show your work in a math problem. You are showing what you are thinking while you read and analyze— and thinking is a word-based activity, not just a nebulous puff of energy. If you can’t articulate your thoughts, then you have to question if you know what you’re thinking. Thinking is how you connect to the text. This, of course, requires ACTIVE participation with the text, engaging your mind while you read, not skimming the page. Listening to your iPhone or the TV can split your focus so that you don’t have as much of a connection with the text. Marking important sections can also be helpful in locating them quickly in discussions.

What the reader gets from annotating is a deeper initial reading and an understanding of the text that lasts. You can deliberately engage the author in conversation and questions, maybe stopping to argue, pay a compliment, or clarify an important issue—much like having a teacher or storyteller with you in the room. If and when you come back to the book, that initial interchange is recorded for you, making an excellent and entirely personal study tool.

**Interpretive Notes and Symbols to be used are:**

• Underline or highlight key words, phrases, or sentences that are important to understanding the work.

• Write questions or comments in the margins—your thoughts or “conversation” with the text.

• Bracket important ideas or passages.

• Use Vertical lines at the margin: to emphasize a statement already underlined or bracketed

• Connect ideas with lines or arrows.

• Use numbers in the margin: to indicate the sequence of points the author makes in developing a single argument.

• Use a star, asterisk, or other doo-dad at the margin (use a consistent symbol): to be used sparingly, to emphasize the ten or twenty most important statements in the book.

• Use ??? for sections or ideas you don’t understand.

• Circle words you don’t know. Define them in the margins.

• A check mark means “I understand”.

• Use !!! when you come across something new, interesting, or surprising.

• And other literary devices (see below).

**LITERARY DEVICES**

Some of the things you may want to mark as you notice them are:

• Use an S for Symbols: A symbol is a literal thing that also stands for something else, like a flag, or a cross, or fire. Symbols help to discover new layers of meaning.

• Use an I for Imagery: Imagery includes words that appeal to one or more of the five senses. Close attention to imagery is important in understanding an author’s message and attitude toward a subject.

• Use an F for Figurative Language: Figurative language includes things like similes, metaphors, and personification. Figurative language often reveals deeper layers of meaning.

• Use a T for Tone: Tone is the overall mood of a piece of literature. Tone can carry as much meaning to the story as the plot does.

• Use a Th – Theme: In literature, a theme is a broad idea in a story, or a message or lesson conveyed by a work. This message is usually about life, society or human nature. Themes explore timeless and universal ideas. Most themes are implied rather than explicitly stated.

• Plot elements (setting, mood, conflict, etc.)

• Diction (effective or unusual word choice)

**Don't annotate other people's property, which is almost always selfish, often destructive, rude, and possibly illegal. For a book that doesn't belong to you, use adhesive notes for your comments, removing them before you return the text.**