

Suggestions on How to Annotate Texts

Questions to ask yourself:

- What events in the story are important **plot** developments?
- How are the events a vehicle for the expression of **theme**, revelation of **character**, etc.?
- How does the **setting** relate to the presentation of character, plot, etc.?
- What **conflicts** occur among (or within) the characters, how do they develop over the course of the story, and how are they resolved?
- What is the **form** of the story—what **genre** does it belong to, and what can that tell you about its style, meaning, and messages?
- How does the story make you *feel*, and why? (connection to **tone**, **mood**, **atmosphere**, **theme**, etc.)
- What points (**themes**, messages) is the author trying to express?
- How does the **point of view** affect your perception of the story?
- What things in the story have a **symbolic** meaning?
- What thoughts do you have about the characters in the story—what do their words and actions (and the narrator’s descriptions) reveal about them?
- What changes do the characters go through?
- What plan or meaning can you see in the way the author chose to structure the story?
- What **subtext** can you infer from the narration—i.e., what seems to be going on “beneath the surface” of the story that influences or determines the characters’ words, actions, and interactions? (What is suggested, but not directly stated, about their desires or conflicts or about the author’s tone or message? Is there anything strange that doesn’t seem to make sense if taken at face value?)
- What predictions might you make about what will happen later in the story?
- What important questions do you have that you would like to discuss in class?

Elements to look for/analyze:

Plot:

- important developments
- **foreshadowing**
- vehicle for other story elements—see question above
- major divisions: **rising action**, **climax**, **falling action**, etc.

Conflict: usually forms the basis of the plot

- person vs. self
- person vs. person
- person vs. society
- person vs. nature

Characters:

- personality, values, desires, goals, fears, problems, conflicts
- development, evolution (growth) or devolution (deterioration)
- relationships with other characters
- narrator’s/author’s portrayal of characters—What agenda(s) do they have?

Narration:

- **point of view**
- **tense** in which the story is told
- **diction:** word choice (style/tone and connotations of words)
- **syntax:** the phrasing or sentence structure
- sentence length, flow from sentence to sentence: choppy, quick, repetitive, long, slow, poetic?
- **tone:** the narrator's (or author's) attitude toward people, events, issues—dominant emotion
- **mood:** the emotions of the characters, especially as revealed through their interactions
- **atmosphere:** the feeling created by the description of the scene
- use of figurative language: **metaphor**, **simile**, **personification**, etc.
- distinction between the author and the narrator

Imagery and Symbolism:

- objects that seem to have a special significance or connection to plot or theme or that appear frequently
- **imagery** that helps convey **theme**, **atmosphere**, etc.

Theme:

- key ideas, repeated ideas
- lessons the story seems to teach