

Strategy 3

Text Annotation

- Time:
40 minutes
- Grouping
Sequence:
Pairs, whole
class

We'll bet that when you encounter a piece of "high-stakes text"—a document you really need to understand well—you drag out a pen or highlighter and "mark it up" with underlines, marginal notes, symbols, or even doodles. Are we right? Well, you're not that unusual—it turns out that annotating text is one of the most common comprehension-enhancing strategies used by proficient readers.

But our students often think that annotation simply means highlighting almost every sentence in a text, so that the whole thing becomes a wall of yellow. This misconception is so widespread that even the Harvard University library feels it must put incoming students on notice: "First of all, throw away the highlighter in favor of a pen or pencil. Highlighting can actually distract you from the business of learning and dilute your comprehension. In actual fact, it can lure you into a dangerous passivity" (2005).

For kids to annotate in a way that empowers later discussion, they must do two things: mark only the most important sections, and then stop to write down their thinking *in words*.

When students annotate as they read, it keeps them focused and engaged with the text. It makes comprehension a little more conscious and intentional. This heightened awareness becomes especially useful when the text gets more difficult, or when students need to remember information for later discussion and application. Since all content areas have their information stored mostly in print, this strategy is a winner across the curriculum. The next three lessons, Text Coding, Sketching Through the Text, and Two-Column Notes, show different ways for kids to stop, think, and react—to capture their responses while they read.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Copy of article for each student, text suitable for modeling via projector.

Steps and Teaching Language

STEP 1 Prepare to demonstrate Get a short piece of text that you can project and annotate “live” in front of the class. This text might be another article from this book or something short and provocative that you’d enjoy reading aloud. Aim for a text chunk less than a hundred words long, and then blow up the font so kids can easily read along when it is projected onto a whiteboard or from a transparency. This small sample also makes the demonstration appropriately brief.

STEP 2 Model annotation Now just read the article aloud, stopping to underline the really important parts. At each underline, jot quick notes describing your thinking—question, connection, image—and record that thinking right in the margin of the projected text. As you jot, share your thinking aloud: *This part reminds me of . . .* or *Wow, I never knew that . . .* or *I wonder where the author got these facts . . .* (For a full-length lesson on this kind of reading, see Strategy 8, Think Aloud.)

STEP 3 Give instructions for student reading and annotation

As you read this article, I want you to do what I’ve just demonstrated: First, underline information that is important, surprising, interesting, or thought provoking.

Then, before continuing to read, stop and jot down a sentence or two that explains why you chose that bit to underline. The goal is to explain your thoughts, opinions, or questions. Try to imagine that you are having a conversation with the text inside your head. Your notes are your side of the conversation.

STEP 4 Monitor reading Circulate as kids work. Annotating can feel unnatural at first. Some students will simply read, others will only underline, and some will just underline and say they want to go back and record their thoughts after they finish. This may be a genuine learning style issue, but for now, encourage kids to follow the given instructions. *Stopping to think is a really key strategy of effective readers. Just play along with me, OK?*

If you notice some students finishing sooner than others, you can say: If you are finished, go back to the article, reread your annotations, and try to add enough details so that you could just glance at your underlining and notes to easily remember the article without having to completely reread it.

STEP 5 Pairs discuss the article

Get with your partner and have a quick discussion of this article. Compare what you’ve annotated and your thoughts connected to those underlines. Also, be sure to discuss and answer any questions you posed.

STEP 6 Share with the whole class Invite volunteer pairs to read aloud and discuss the annotations that produced particularly interesting conversation.

used in Text Sets 2, 4, 9, 10

Tips and Variations

- **COLLECT KIDS' WORK** It may take practice with a few text pieces before students' annotations become more detailed. Though it is not always necessary to grade their work, collecting annotated articles can be helpful for assessing how students are mastering this skill and what kind of thinking they are doing. Kids' recorded thoughts might indicate a need for you to further model your own thinking, continuing to annotate in front of them. Or their misconceptions might lead you to a subsequent lesson for refining their thinking on the topic.
- **BUT I'M USING A TEXTBOOK!** Don't bypass this powerful activity because your kids are reading a textbook or library book that they're not allowed to mark up. Xerox a key page from a textbook, just so kids can practice annotating it. How's that for strange? Then bring out the smallest size Post-it notes and have kids carry on annotating! Alternatively, have kids make two-column notes (Strategy 6).

Example of text annotation
(shown on an earlier version
of this article)

If dress code doesn't suit teens, school district will—Parents say the inmate jumpsuit is too extreme for attire offense

By ELIZABETH WHITE Associated Press

Aug. 1, 2008, 10:35PM (Appeared in Houston Chronicle)

GONZALES — Violating Gonzales High School's dress code is not a crime, but some of the offenders are about to start looking a lot like convicts.

Soon after classes begin Aug. 25, violators of the district's beefed-up dress code must don navy blue coveralls unless they get another set of clothes from home — or serve in-school suspension. The outfits aren't just styled like prison jumpsuits — they're actually made by Texas inmates.

Can we where stuff that they can't?

School really wants to make kids a joke

"We're a conservative community, and we're just trying to make our students more reflective of that," said Larry Wehde, Gonzales Independent School District deputy superintendent.

The new policy in Gonzales, about 70 miles east of San Antonio, has drawn plenty of criticism — along with some speculation that all the district will accomplish is to set off a new fashion trend.

IT WOULD BE FUNNY IF 100'S OF KIDS broke code and they ran out of jumpsuits!

Some parents and students are crying foul. "They're not little prisoners," said Mary Helen Douglas, who has a 17-year-old son starting his senior year.

The 2,650-student district has ordered 82 coveralls, which are most often sold to county jails, state mental institutions and juvenile prisons. School districts have bought lunch trays and similar items from inmate labor, but no other school district has ordered the jumpsuits in the last year, said Michelle Lyons, spokeswoman for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice.

THIS IDEA IS CREEPY. Why doesn't school care about real problems?

The jumpsuits aren't the only option for dress-code violators from fifth through 12th grade. School board President Glenn Menking said parents can still bring a change of clothes, or they may request that the student go to in-school suspension instead.

Would your parents make you wear a jumpsuit?

HOUSTON CHRONICLE

If dress code doesn't suit teens, school district will

*Parents say the inmate jumpsuit is
too extreme for attire offense*

By ELIZABETH WHITE
The Associated Press, Aug. 1, 2008

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