

Marking a book/text

In order to get the most out of your reading, you need to read actively -- that is, you need to keep track of your reactions to the text. You want to be aware of which passages strike you strongly, then begin to understand WHY. Which moments raise questions for you? Which are connected thematically? Which draw your attention to interesting aspects of the writer's style?

Marking your book will slow down your reading speed just a bit, but not as much as you might fear. Marking will help you appreciate more of what you read, as well as remember it more fully -- so it is well worth the extra time you will give. It is, however, possible to mark too much in a text, just as it's possible to mark too little. If you underline or highlight too much, later you will not be able to remember why you marked all this material; so, it's wise to mark sparingly. Here are some suggestions:

- *Circle or box characters' names* when they first appear, or reappear after a long absence in the story.
- *Jot a word or phrase at the top of the page* to remind you of an important plot event or moment of character change.
- *Underline key words or images* that you realize the author is repeating, and using to create a pattern in the text, possibly.
- *Make connections.* If you see a pattern of references emerging, or hear echoes throughout the text, go back to find the earlier reference, and jot down the other page references on each page so that you can follow the pattern. Do the same with contradictions, contrasts. Literary forms are not one way streets; back up, review, make connections ACROSS the text as you move forward. Read 360 degrees.
- *Use a star or asterisk or vertical lines* in the margin to mark a passage that strikes you strongly -- that articulates a powerful insight, or is beautifully written, or that you want to discuss in class.
- *Use a question mark* in the margin to mark a passage that is complex or confusing.
- *Use the final page of a chapter* (usually there's empty space) to jot down a few words or phrases about the key events in that chapter (whether plot events, character development, or development of theme).
- Read with a *dictionary* within arm's reach.
- If you run out of space in the margin of your book, and you'd like to continue a response -- *use your journal*. Be sure to make reference to your journal entry in the margin (i.e. "see journal").

Your own inspired and thorough understanding of the text depends on reading actively, but our discussions do, too. Practice the suggestions above and the table will be a more dynamic, more fruitful, and more challenging place.