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## The Power of Annotation

### **I. Rationale:**

While I was in high school, I never truly could understand what the point in annotating was. I honestly remember that I would dread having to annotate my books. Poems and short stories were no issue, but something about the longer texts made me resent annotating. Perhaps it could be because my teachers never gave me a proper reason to annotate, I was just told to do it. Now being in my last year of undergrad, I love to annotate the books I read. Simply by placing a small tab on the page or commenting on what I have just read or seeing how this may connect to the broader scheme of the story. I love to annotate because then I am able to go back and look at the notes and see where my mind was at the time. And it's really fascinating to see because I am coming from a mindset where the book has been finished. I did not see the point in annotating when I was in high school and now that I am not being forced to do it, I see it now. Funny how it took me to not be assigned to do it, in order to really understand why it is actually such a wonderful concept. I think annotating is actually quite important, it is able to keep track of my thoughts as I am reading and really helps with critical thinking.

I want my students to be able to do the same, where it does not feel forced. When picking my centerpiece, that was a little bit difficult. As I was picking I wanted a text that was a good way to introduce annotating texts. Where it didn't feel like it could be dragging. Therefore I have decided to choose a book that contains short stories, yet have the overall theme of the book. That

way students can start off with connections in small segments and not have it be thrown at all at once. In the novel *All Out: The No Longer Secret Stories of Queer Teens Throughout the Ages* seventeen YA authors, who are on the queer spectrum, have come together to tell the story of teens in historical fiction that are queer. This is almost like some sort of queer storybook This will allow students to be able to read stories that do not feel so long. Furthermore, these queer teens are of different ethnicities and time periods. Therefore it provides inclusivity to the students and it is an interesting read.

## **II. Introduction:**

I will first introduce the unit by explaining to my students what annotating is and how it can be beneficial when you are reading. I also want to emphasize that there is no proper way to annotate and annotating is really just for the students. Therefore any way that they want to mark the text up, they are free to do so. I will then introduce the C.A.T.C.H method for annotating to my students. Which stands for Circle, Acknowledge, Capture, and Highlight. After this I will introduce them to the first text that they will annotate, which is called "Marginalia" by Billy Collins. The teacher I have been observing chose this poem for students when introducing annotation. I will play an audio recording of the poem at first, therefore students do not have to be sick of my voice and they can have a different voice to listen to. I want students to initially just listen to the poem at first and then in their table groups I want them to take turns reading out loud to one another. After they have read, I want students to work on C.A.T.C.H together with the text. This would mean going back through the text and circling any words that stick out to them, words that they may not know. Then Acknowledging what is confusing to them and asking the right questions to get answers. Then Talking to the text, making comments on what they are

reading, any comments. Capturing what the main idea is and Highlighting the details that support what the main idea is. I want them to be discussing this with one another as they work through it, two heads are better than one. Then after the activity is done, we will discuss as a full class, talk about any things that they saw in the text that they want to highlight.

For homework I want students to pick their own piece of text, could be a poem, short story, song lyrics. And utilizing the concepts, I would like them to apply it to this text and annotate for the first time on their own. That way they are able to get some more practice in, before the main text.

Prior to getting into the text, I will talk about the book that we will be focusing on. I want to talk about what it means to be queer and why representation in novels is so important. I will ask students to write on their own and talk about a time where they saw or read something that made them feel included. They can share aloud if they would like.

### **III. Through the Unit: Focusing on the main text- *All Out***

As a class, we will read one short story together and then they will read one at home. The good thing about short stories is the fact that the stories are short. Therefore there is not a lot of material that needs to be worked through. As we are reading the short stories, I want students to be marking the text. Taking the concepts that were shown prior to the unit and applying them to these short stories. After we have read the short story, students will discuss amongst their groups and then share aloud to the class. Using each segment of C.A.T.C.H, students will share a specific part under that segment. That way each part will have something from the story that the student has taken note of. At home I would like them to do the same thing and we will discuss at the start of each class what they took note of from the text.

As students are reading, I want them to also take note of the queer experience and other aspects of the text.

- What are characters experiencing that may be difficult?
- What are characters experiencing that is helpful to them?
- What is some historical context that is familiar to you? (since this book is also historical fiction)

#### **IV. Concluding the Unit**

Now that the book is done, I want students to pick one of their favorite stories that stuck out to them.

##### First Option

Giving students the opportunity to be artistically creative, I would like them to make an art piece of some sort that represents the short story they have chosen. This can be accomplished in any kind of artistic media: painting, drawing, video, etc. I would also like them to write a page describing their piece of art and why they chose to do the story they did. However, to connect this back to annotating, I would also like them to pick a passage and annotate it. That way I can see what kind of skills have been learned and applied.

##### Second Option

For the next option it would be to write a 3-5 page comparative essay on the short stories of their choosing. They can choose however many short stories they would like, but I want them to compare and contrast one another. Since each of these stories are written by different authors, talk about how their specific writing style conveys the queer experience. What are some things that are similar and different? I also would like them to pick a passage of their choosing from any of the short stories that they are writing about and annotate that.

## **V. Companion Novel**

*Unbroken: 13 Stories Starring Disabled Teens* (by Marieke Nijkamp)

To go along with the realm of short stories. This book is a YA novel about 13 fictional short stories that explore the experience of disabilities through disabled characters. The people that have written these stories are disabled themselves. Each of the stories are of different genres and it gives a glimpse into the lives of people with disabilities. This is also a good book of representation and students could annotate the stories as well.

1. This will be mostly read individually, now that students have gained knowledge on how to annotate short stories
2. In class we will focus on some stories that I feel are important
3. Students will then pick one of their choosing and write a narrative essay where they feel like they have been represented in any way shape or form

## **VI. Beyond the Unit**

“Nothing Gold Can Stay” (by Robert Frost)

I think poetry is a fantastic piece to annotate, especially given how there is so much symbolism and literary devices that can be pointed out. “Nothing Gold Can Stay” is a great starter into annotating poetry, since the poem is so full of symbolism. This poem is about nature and how beautiful it is, however things that are beautiful will not remain the same forever. It will decay and slowly die. Although morbid, it still is a great poem. I would teach this during class, during a poetry unit, therefore students will know what literary devices to look for. This is a great text to mark up.

*The Catcher in the Rye* (J.D Salinger)

A very popular YA novel, that is about a 16 year old boy named Holden Caulfield. He has been expelled from his preparatory school and he is confused as to why he was expelled. He tries to find the truth out and the readers follow him through that. In high school, this was the first book I would enjoy reading and annotating. This will always be read as a class, have students annotate hints that Caulfield is where he is as he is telling his story.

*The Great Gatsby* (Francis Scott Fitzgerald)

This book is full of symbolism and is a great book to annotate. This would also be taught during class. There are a lot of great things in the book that can be marked up by students. *Great Gatsby* follows a man that goes by the name Jay Gatsby. Gatsby is a self-made millionaire, who has been pursuing a young woman named Daisy. Therefore he throws parties at his giant mansion, in hopes of running into her. However, it begins to unveil itself that Gatsby is not being his honest self.

Works Cited

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