

## About Annotation

Almost all good readers literally interact with the texts they read by making notes in the margins. Academics have even been known to track down the personal libraries of famous writers just to see their *marginalia*, i.e. the notes that they scribbled in the margins of the books they read. If you have written nothing in the margins of a text, you might as well not have read it.

On resistance: Students sometimes tell me that they prefer not to write in their books because they want to resell them. My first response is, don't! Hold onto them and you may decide to read them again some day. If you can't resist getting \$10 for a \$50 text, then read with an erasable pencil (hi-lighting is useless anyway) or keep post-it notes handy and write on them. Yes, I'm serious about this! The only serious objection I can see to marking up a text is that doing so takes time. One cannot comment thoughtfully in the margins while speed-reading! But then, your English professor knows that you would never just skim the important texts assigned in this class.

What to note: the type of comments you make in the margin of your text should reflect your own thought processes as you read. There are no "right" comments. Here are some questions you might keep in mind as you develop the habit of reading with pencil in hand.

- 1. What's interesting, puzzling, annoying, or beautiful in this text?**
- 2. What words, ideas, or "moves" are repeated so frequently as to seem important?**
- 3. What would I ask the author if he/she suddenly entered the room?**
- 4. How would I talk back to the author if this were actually a dialogue?**
- 5. What would I ask the teacher if he/she were in the room with me?**
- 6. What words should I really look up in the dictionary?**
- 7. What historical, biographical, or other fact might be helpful to investigate?**
- 8. What other text (or place within this text) is alluded to by this passage?**
- 9. What occurs as a possible essay topic related to this text?**
- 10. What are we likely to discuss when we take up this text in class?**