

MOVE TO THE MUSIC

Strategy: Thinking Notes

(Marking the Text and Metacognitive Markers)

What?

Thinking notes are when students highlight, underline and/or annotate text for specific purposes as they read. Students mark up the text or write in the margins, using symbols, cues or even color, to show what they're thinking in relation to the text. Depending on how the task is structured, these "notes" can indicate any number of connections including agreement, objection or confusion.

When?

During reading

Why?

The use of thinking notes develops students' metacognitive skills. Metacognition has been defined as the knowledge and control a person has over one's thinking and learning activities (Baker and Brown, 1984; Brown, Bransford, Ferrara and Campione, 1983; Flavell, 1978; Jacobs and Paris, 1987). Metacognitive strategies position readers as active learners, constantly monitoring and questioning their own thinking and that of the authors.

During reading, thinking notes set a purpose for students' reading and give them equal access to engage with text. To answer text-dependent questions and integrate evidence from the text into their writing, students must first experience success in processing what they're reading. By allowing multiple entry points for students to engage with content, meaning or structure, thinking notes are a scaffolding strategy that helps build toward comprehension and deeper analysis of complex texts. This is an especially effective technique for English language learners (ELLs), as it heightens awareness.

After reading, students are able to refer back to their tracked responses and use those responses for talking and writing about the text. Thinking notes also serve as a great teaching tool by providing cues as to what parts of the text resonated with students and what parts perplexed or challenged them. When students share the text they marked and why, the teacher gains ideas for discussion as well as insight about where students may need more support.

How?

There are many ways this strategy can be implemented. Ideally, students have their own consumable copy of the text that they can write on (sticky notes can be used when this is not possible, or a clear overhead transparency can be placed over the text and marked on with wet-erase markers). A system of symbols or cues must be established before reading. Highlighting or underlining is a part of this strategy, but it is important to have students go beyond merely identifying something as important. The goal, instead, is to have them mark the text in a more specific way that shows why it is important. For instance, ! = I like this or I agree, ? = I wonder about this, ?? = I don't understand this. The visual marks are especially important for ELLs.

This strategy works well with independent reading as well as shared reading. Because close and critical reading often requires multiple reads and rereads, thinking notes are most appropriate during initial or early reads, after which discussion and writing can take place and draw upon the "notes."

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MULTI-GRADES HANDOUT

Connection to anti-bias education

Thinking notes are an inclusion-building strategy because they invite students to engage with the author and text in a nonthreatening and accessible way. The task can be framed to solicit analysis and critical thinking without setting up the barriers that formal writing and even speaking evokes for some students. By marking up the text, students are saying “I was here and this is what I think or feel about what I’m reading.” This is a wonderfully affirming way to begin a literacy experience. Most important, however, are the many ways thinking notes can be used as a critical literacy strategy to focus readers on social-justice and anti-bias questions.

Source: Baker, Linda, and Ann L. Brown. “Metacognitive Skills and Reading.” University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (1980).

These are some ideas for what readers can use to mark thinking notes as they read.

Symbol	What it means
+	I agree with this.
-	I disagree with this.
!	This surprises me.
hmm	This makes me wonder about...
?	This would make for a good discussion questions.
??	I don’t understand this; I’m confused; what does this mean?
TS, TT, TW	Text-to-self, text-to-text and text-to-world connections

These are some ideas for thinking notes that encourage deeper analysis of the text.

Symbol	What it means
A	The author is making an argument here.
0-5	I am rating how persuasive I find this argument on a scale of 0 to 5.
X	The author is contradicting himself or herself.
→	To connect different parts of the text and show parallels or contrast
POV-1, POV-2, etc	Multiple points of view in this text

These are some ideas for thinking notes that encourage a critical reading focused on identity, diversity, justice, and action.

Symbol	What it means
ME	The author is telling of his or her own lived experiences.
YOU	The author is telling of another person or group's experiences.
ST	This sounds like a stereotype.
+/, +/-	Themes related to sameness or difference
= OR ≠	The language/author is describing an equal or unequal power relationship.
GR	The language/author is making a claim or observation about gender.
\$	The language/author is making a claim or observation about class.
RC	The language/author is making a claim or observation about race.
US/THEM	The language/author is dividing people into in- and out-groups.
▲	The language/author is describing or advocating for social change.

Use the template on the next page to create your own thinking-notes guide for reading the social-justice songs that your students bring to class.

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Thinking Notes

Central Text (*What text am I reading?*): _____

Symbol or cue	I will use this symbol or cue in the margins of the text to show . . .