

## Critical Reading and Annotations

Critical reading starts at the level of the text. To become more critical of what you read, you need to take notes and mark the text to better understand it. This is called annotation.

Annotations help readers better understand a text by

- Making information clear
- Finding information quickly
- Understanding content and organization
- Tracing development of ideas in a text
- Creating links between different parts of a text

There are several techniques to effectively annotate a text.

First and foremost, read the entire text to get a feel of it. After that, do the following:

### Highlight / Underline:

- Do this for keywords and phrases.
- Try to avoid highlighting / underlining whole sentences.

### Paraphrase / Summarize:

- Paraphrase the most important points made in the text.
- Summarize the entire text to get a general overview of the material and the main ideas without the clutter of details.

### Prepare A Descriptive Outline:

- Outlines are vital to understanding the organization of the text: where ideas are introduced, developed, and emphasized.
- Descriptive outlines help readers understand where the author is
  - Introducing an idea
  - Adding an explanation
  - Giving examples
  - Summarizing an idea
  - Expanding / limiting an idea
  - Considering an opposing point of view (counterargument)
  - Dismissing an opposing point of view (refutation)
  - Stating a conclusion

### Add Comments / Responses:

- Write down your reaction to the text: how it connects to you on a personal level or how it connects to other texts you might have read.

Example: Annotated Text

Four Skinny Trees

repetition in this section

isolated don't fit in misunderstood

They are the only ones who understand me. I am the only one who understands them. Four skinny trees with skinny necks and pointy elbows like mine. Four who do not belong here but are here. Four raggedy excuses planted by the city. (From our room we can hear them, but Nenny just sleeps and doesn't appreciate these things.)? Why is Nenny mentioned here?

"Four" repeated 3x  
 The trees are  
 • skinny  
 • don't belong where they are  
 • raggedy excuses put there by someone

fierce angry determined

Their strength is secret. They send ferocious roots beneath the ground. They grow up and they grow down and grab the earth between their hairy toes and bite the sky with violent teeth and never quit their anger. This is how they keep.

Very visual!  
 First and last sentence are simple and direct.  
 Strong adjectives and verbs.

simile

Let one forget his reason for being, they'd all droop like tulips in a glass, each with their arms around the other. Keep, keep, keep, trees say when I sleep. They teach. Pow!

each keeps the others strong  
 repetition & rhyme

Here's the "so what" I can picture that wall!

When I am too sad and too skinny to keep keeping, when I am a tiny thing against so many bricks, then it is I look at trees. When there is nothing left to look at on this street. Four who grew to despise concrete. Four who reach and do not forget to reach. Four whose only reason is to be and be.

"Four" repeated 3x  
 The trees  
 • grow to despise concrete  
 • reach  
 • know their reason

Excerpt taken from *The House on Mango Street* (1983)

concrete = barriers, limits, all the things that box us in

The trees are a symbol to the author.