

ANNOTATION

HONORS WORKSHOP



ANNOTATING

Almost all good readers interact with the texts they read by making notes in the margins and marking the text up. Academics have even been known to track down the personal libraries of famous writers just to see the notes they've scribbled in the margins of the books they read.

The value of this habit is that it engages your mind. It encourages you to think critically, question ideas, explore possibilities, and make connections. The comments you make in the margin of your text should reflect your own thought processes as you read. There are no "right" comments – only those that help deepen your understanding and interaction with the text.

CATHEDRAL

RAYMOND CARVER

For this workshop, you'll be reading Raymond Carver's short story "Cathedral."

You can access the PDF [here](#).

Because you'll be writing, underlining, and highlighting, we recommend printing the story out so you can interact with it physically.

If you prefer using an eReader, find an app that allows you to annotate the text. Drawboard PDF is an excellent option that enables you to not only highlight text, but draw and write on the pages as well.

Before you advance further into the workshop, read "Cathedral" once through. Don't worry about marking anything yet – just focus on getting familiar with the story.



IDEAS TO FOCUS ON

Annotating a book might feel daunting at first. In this first part of the workshop, we'll share ideas about what to annotate and how to approach it as you read a text.

These suggestions are meant to guide you but aren't exhaustive or strict rules. The important thing is to find what methods work for you and create the most engaging experience with the text.

Here are some things you might consider annotating:

- Main ideas & key concepts
- Any topics and questions focused on in class
- Passages or sections that are confusing
- Themes and patterns throughout the book
- Points of tension – this can be tension between ideas in the book, tension within yourself, etc.
- Anything that evokes strong reactions
- Connections to other texts or media
- Literary devices that contribute to the meaning of the text, such as irony, symbolism, and metaphors
- The arc of the text. How do the ideas, characters, and themes develop from beginning to end?
- Historical or cultural references
- Personal reflections. What points do you agree with? Disagree? Are there alternate viewpoints you think would be beneficial?



IDEAS TO FOCUS ON: TENSION

Tension is something in particular that you'll want to focus on while reading and annotating. If you can learn to locate the tensions, you'll find places that allow you to generate your own ideas.

Sites of tension are places that reveal some kind of paradox, contradiction, or irony, places that confront you and make cognitive and affective demands. These are areas where contrasting ideas, concepts, beliefs, and forms collide, creating a dynamic friction. There is conflict, there is dissonance.

Because the tension is difficult to reconcile, you are engaged in a challenge – a push and pull, situations demanding a resolution that is often elusive.

Consider the tensions on this page in Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*. O'Brien heavily uses contradictory language within one scene, paragraph, or phrase to create tension. "War" is put into direct contrast with "beauty." Focusing on the literal image of war highlights, in refraction, the reader's emotional and moral perception of it. The two ideas conflict: "You hate it, yes, but your eyes do not." What questions arise in your mind when met with such a scene? Does such a parallel evoke a strong reaction from you? Why or why not?

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The truths are contradictory. It can be argued, for instance, that war is grotesque. But in truth war is also beauty. For all its horror, you can't help but gape at the awful majesty of combat. You stare out at tracer rounds unwinding through the dark like brilliant red ribbons. You crouch in ambush as a cool, impassive moon rises over the nighttime paddies. You admire the fluid symmetries of troops on the move, the harmonies of sound and shape and proportion, the great sheets of metal-fire streaming down from a gunship, the illumination rounds, the white phosphorus, the purply orange glow of napalm, the rocket's red glare. It's not pretty, exactly. It's astonishing. It fills the eye. It commands you. You hate it, yes, but your eyes do not. Like a killer forest fire, like cancer under a microscope, any battle or bombing raid or artillery barrage has the aesthetic purity of absolute moral indifference—a powerful, implacable beauty—and a true war story will tell the truth about this, though the truth is ugly.

To generalize about war is like generalizing about peace. Almost everything is true. Almost nothing is true. At its core, perhaps, war is just another name for death, and yet any soldier will tell you, if he tells the truth, that proximity to death brings with it a corresponding proximity to life. After a fire-fight, there is always the immense pleasure of aliveness. The trees are alive. The grass, the soil—everything. All around you things are purely living, and you among them, and the aliveness makes you tremble. You feel an intense, out-of-the-skin awareness of your living self—your truest self, the human being you want to be and then become by the force of wanting it. In the midst of evil you want to be a good man. You want decency. You want justice and courtesy and human concord, things you never knew you wanted. There is a

TENSION POINTS IN MORE THAN LITERATURE

While you'll do a copious amount of reading and writing during your college career, tensions aren't confined to literary texts.

Tensions are in all writing, in all art. You will find them in media, scientific papers, larger communities around you, and even the natural world. Look at, for example, this Edward Hopper painting and try to identify some of the tension points.

Points of tension create areas where your thoughts are crucial to the meaning of a text, artwork, or concept. These are spaces of new understanding, learning, and require critical thought and reflection.

Learning to locate tension is important, especially when it comes to completing assignments. Instead of being confronted with a blank screen, you'll have a starting point and ideas at the ready – angles to explore, questions that branch from the identified tensions. These can drive your writing forward.

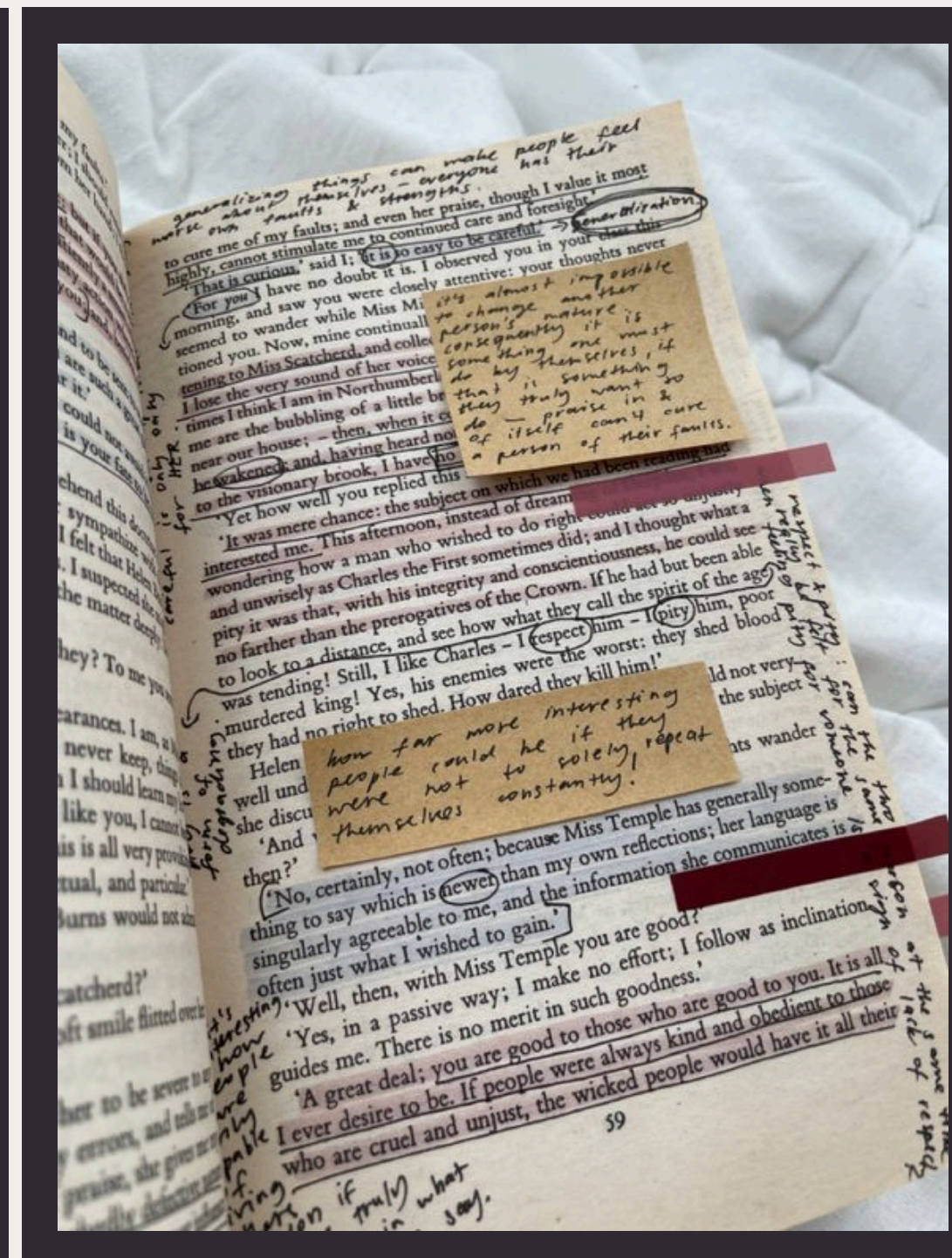
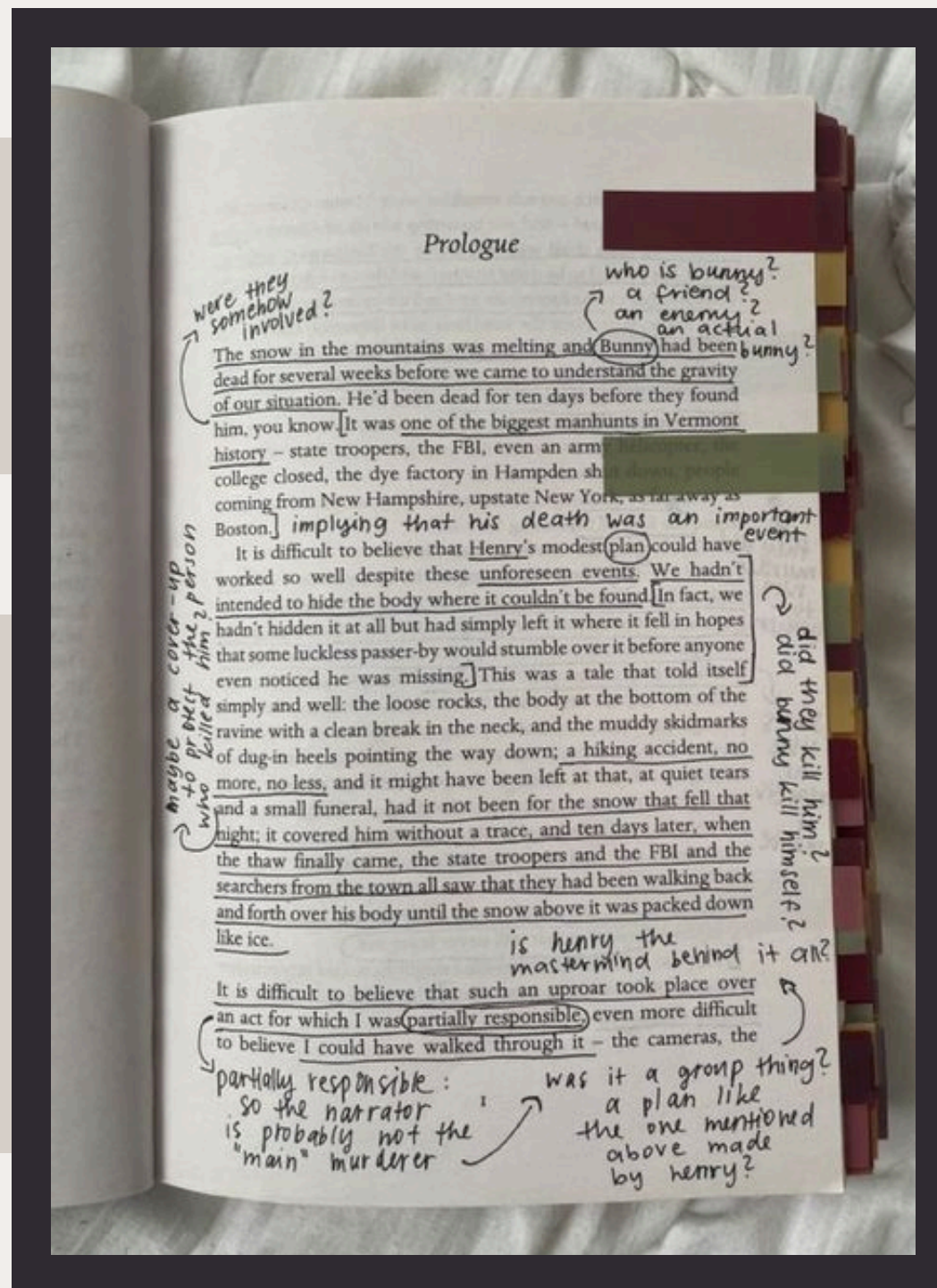


METHODS

You now have examples for the *what* of annotating. Here are various ideas of *how* you can annotate a book. Remember, these are methods you can experiment with, but find the ways that help you to best make note of the meaning in a text.

Use arrows and lines to connect different thoughts, quotes, and ideas together.

Write in the margins of the text, on sticky notes, or make notes in your notebook. This can include questions, reactions, points of tension, ideas, & more.



Define unfamiliar words in the margins, on sticky notes, or in your notebook.

Use different symbols (! ? ☺ ♥ ☼ ★) around passages and scenes that highlight your reaction or ideas.

Circle, underline, bracket, highlight, and box different words & passages.

METHODS: ANNOTATION GUIDE & HIGHLIGHTING

Consider using an annotation guide. Different colored sticky tabs or highlighters good tools to use to parse out many ideas within a book, making them easier to find and come back to later.

Selecting some ideas to focus on from the previous slide can serve as the subjects in your annotation guide, but it is most effective to consider your purpose for reading a text before creating the annotation guide. Are you reading the book for a class, for pleasure? What do you want to get out of your reading? Are there topics of discussion you will bring forward to a class, group, or essay after reading?

Create an annotation guide for "Cathedral." You've already read it once through, which may not always be the case for texts you create annotation guides for, but the familiarity can help guide your ideas.

Before we read the short story again, think of your purpose for reading it. You may only be reading it for this workshop, and that's okay. Or, you may have other ideas in mind. Either way, your annotation guide will help focus the notes you make while reading.



EXERCISE IN ANNOTATION



Now that you've learned about different ideas and annotation methods, read through "Cathedral" for a second time. Use your annotation guide to help you highlight different themes and ideas from the story. Focus on points of tension and scenes that spark different emotions within you.

After reading through "Cathedral" again and annotating it more fully, we want to now take those brief annotations and write them out in your notebook. The goal is to take your initial reactions, the beginning sparks, and turn them into more developed ideas.

When reflecting on your annotations and the short story, consider why you highlighted or underlined particular parts or phrases. Were you at all moved by the story? If so, in what ways? Can you pinpoint a reason that certain scenes pulled emotions out of you? If you didn't feel moved or affected, why not? While you were reading, did connections to other texts or pieces of media come to mind? Explore the tensions from the story more fully. What conflicting ideas, concepts, or characters are coming up against each other?

These are all guiding questions. Write about what stood out to you the most.

NOTEBOOK APPLICATION

INTO DISCUSSIONS AND ON

Now that you've read and annotated a piece of literature, you're well-equipped to talk to others about the ideas within it. Engaging in conversations and integrating various perspectives into your worldview is incredibly valuable. Learn from others, and allow them to learn from you. For strategies on discussions, check out the workshop on the Honors website.

You might also consider documenting your thoughts on a particular reading and your evolving approach to annotation in your Honors Portfolio. This can be a great way to track your growth throughout your undergraduate journey.

