

The Power of Annotating

A Strategy for Better Comprehension

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What is Annotating?

Annotating is when readers make notes and flag or highlight important details while they are reading.

- While reading, students mark their pages for one of the core reading comprehension strategies (as shown on the next four slides).
- These marks can be “teacher given” or “student created” and consist of symbols and small drawings to highlight important details.

Reading Comprehension Strategies (1 of 2)

1. Creating a visual (4.5g; 5.5b,l)

- Students use their five senses to create a mind picture of what is going on in the text. By visualizing what is happening in the text, students are more likely to notice and remember details.
 - Questions for students to think about are:
 - Why is the visual important to the passage?
 - How does the visual help you understand the passage?
 - ELEPHANT

2. Making a connection (3.5b; 4.5h,l; 5.5)

- Students should think about the BIG idea(s) presented in the text. This will help them figure out the theme of the story. By making connections with other texts and/or the outside world, students will more easily be able to figure out the overall theme of a text and why the author chose to write about that topic.
 - Questions for the students to think about while making connections are:
 - How does the main idea/theme connect to other texts you have read?
 - How does this story connect to you/things you've read/watched?
 - What is the author's message in the passage?

Reading Comprehension Strategies (2 of 2)

3. Questioning

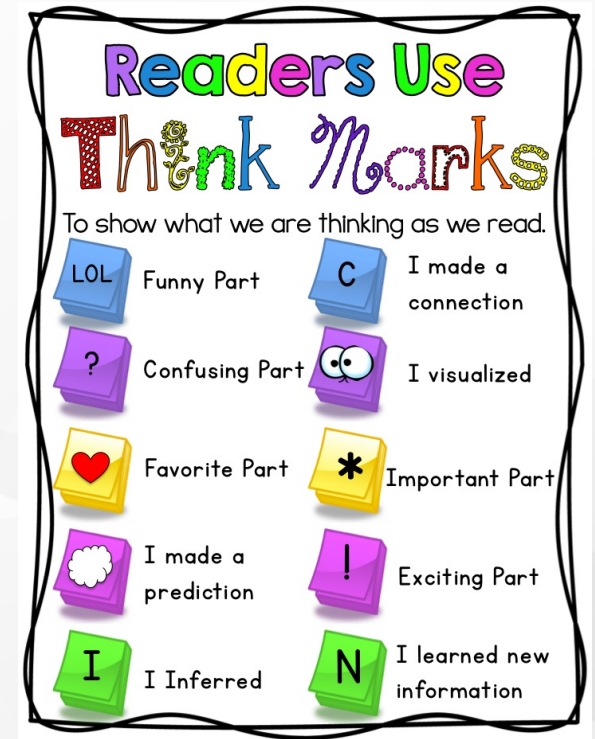
- Students need to remember that good readers are ALWAYS thinking and wondering. By actively reading, students will develop a better understanding of the text. Students should be aware of the difference between “right there” and “think and search” questions.
 - **Questions for students to think about while actively reading a text:**
 - Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?

4. Inferring (3.5c,h/3.6d,e; 4.5h/4.6e; 5.5j/5.6g)

- Students use their background knowledge (bk) and clues from the text (tc) to make an inference (something you know that the author does not come right out and tell you). Encouraging students to think about “why” a character did or said something, and “why” an author may have written the text, creates an environment where students are naturally making inferences.
 - **Questions for students to think about while making an inference:**
 - What new information were you able to figure out?
 - Why do you think the character did/said _____?

How To Get Started

- **MODEL/DISCUSS:**
 - I usually start off with a picture book (read aloud) where I model what this process looks like.
- **GUIDED PRACTICE:**
 - I offer these examples for students to use and get familiar with. It's a free download from Teachers Pay Teachers that's called Think Marks
 - We usually start this process together with an excerpt from a novel for practice.
 - If it is an excerpt, then I have them write directly on the page (you'll see this later on our History/Science notes), if it's a novel, we use post-it notes.
 - **DISCUSSION IS KEY**



Mark up the Text

- Number the paragraphs - if there's dialogue, then each line of text is a new paragraph
- Highlight headings and bold words (3.6c; 4.6a; 5.6a)
- Circle the descriptive words or important nouns that **pop** out at you (3.4; 4.4; 5.4)
- Summarize each paragraph in a few words/pictures (3.5e/3.6f; 4.5c/4.6d; 5.5a/5.6d)
- Chunk the paragraphs together by the ideas contained within them (Label the Main Idea) - put brackets around them (3.6g, 4.6c, 5.6c)
- Underline figurative language and important passages - text that might indicate foreshadowing or the author figuring something out (5.4d)

Independent Practice

- Over time, students will gravitate to annotations that fit their individual needs and personalities best.
- Differentiate amount of marks needed for students.
 - Tonight, while you read, give me 3 “Think Marks” from your chapter.
- Still offer “suggestions” that you want them to focus on for that passage.
 - Point of view - connections
 - Main Idea - important part
 - Figurative Language - F
 - Theme - TH

Practice

- Let's take a moment to practice what this looks like together.
 - Anita and I will demonstrate how this will look in your class. As I read the passage to her, she will underline/mark up things that are important to her.
- Anita, feel free to use my list of “Think Marks” or create your own to annotate this passage. However, I want you to focus on the following:
 - Internal Conflict: what is it?
 - Predict: What has happened? AND after the reading, what do you think will happen next?

“Lamb to the Slaughter” by Roald Dahl (1 of 2)

All right, she told herself. So I’ve killed him.

It was extraordinary, now, how clear her mind became all of a sudden. She began thinking very fast. As the wife of a detective, she knew quite well what the penalty would be. That was fine. It made no difference to her. In fact, it would be a relief. On the other hand, what about the child? What were the laws about murderers with unborn children? Did they kill both - mother and child? Or did they wait until the tenth month? What did they do?

Mary Maloney didn’t know. And she certainly wasn’t prepared to take a chance.

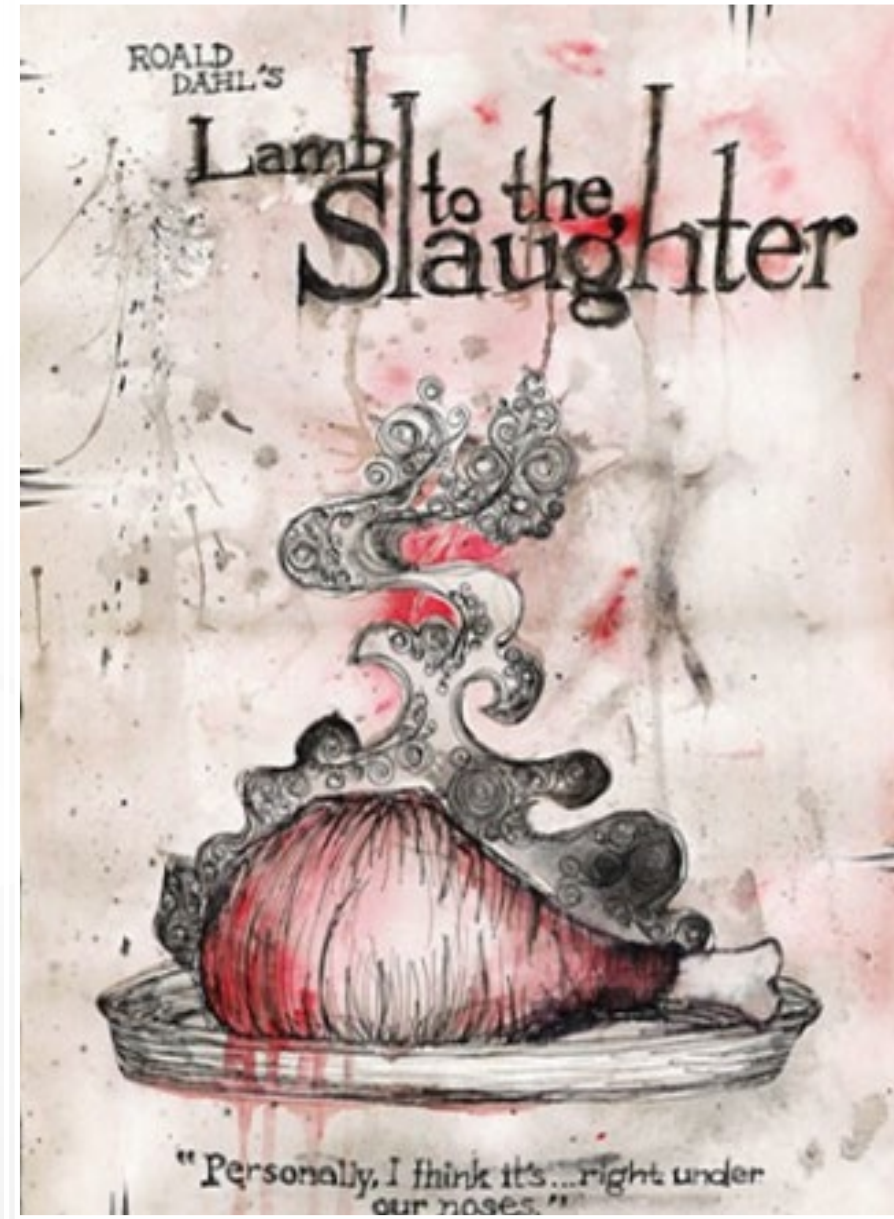
She carried the meat into the kitchen, placed it in a pan, turned the oven on high, and shoved it inside. Then she washed her hands and ran upstairs to the bedroom. She sat down before the mirror, tidied her hair, touched up her lips and face. She tried a smile. It came out rather peculiar. She tried again.

“Hullo Sam,” she said brightly, aloud.

The voice sounded peculiar too.

“I want some potatoes please, Sam. Yes, and I think a can of peas.”

That was better. Both the smile and the voice were coming out better now. She rehearsed it several times more. Then she ran downstairs, took her coat, went out the back door, down the garden, into the street.



“Lamb to the Slaughter” by Roald Dahl (2 of 2)

She is pregnant!

Who?

All right, she told herself. So I've killed him.

It was extraordinary, now, how clear her mind became all of a sudden. She began thinking very fast. As the wife of a detective, she knew quite well what the penalty would be. That was fine. It made no difference to her. In fact, it would be a relief. On the other hand, what about the child? What were the laws about murderers with unborn children? Did they kill both - mother and child? Or did they wait until the tenth month? What did they do?

At first, she doesn't care. Then she thinks about her baby!

Mary Maloney didn't know. And she certainly wasn't prepared to take a chance.

She carried the meat into the kitchen, placed it in a pan, turned the oven on high, and shoved it inside. Then she washed her hands and ran upstairs to the bedroom. She sat down before the mirror, tidied her hair, touched up her lips and face. She tried a smile. It came out rather peculiar. She tried again.

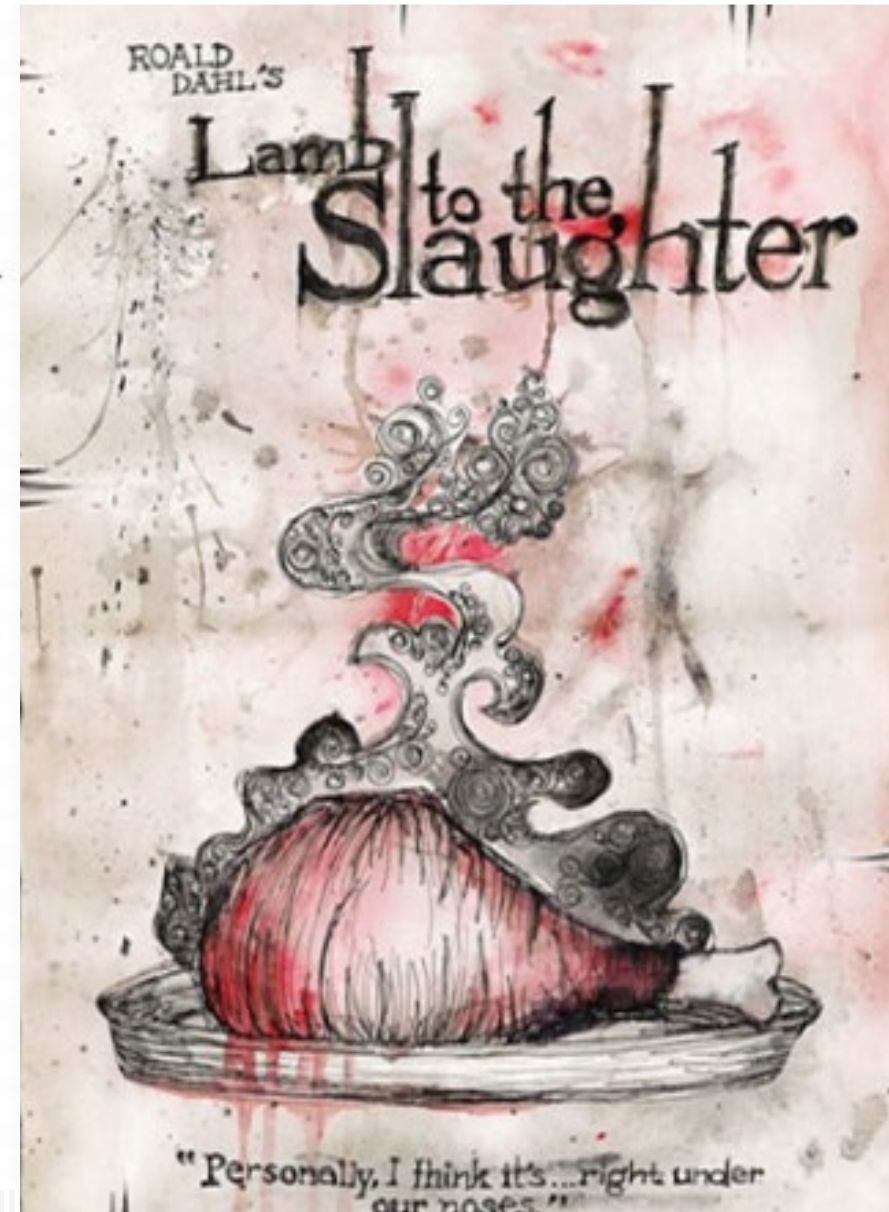
“Hullo Sam,” she said brightly, aloud.

Oh, she's practicing.

The voice sounded peculiar too.

“I want some potatoes please, Sam. Yes, and I think a can of peas.”

That was better. Both the smile and the voice were coming out better now. She rehearsed it several times more. Then she ran downstairs, took her coat, went out the back door, down the garden, into the street.



Integrating Annotations in Other Subject Areas

How to Use Annotations in Social Studies, Science, and Mathematics

Why Incorporate Cross-Curricular Annotation?

- Strengthens students' understanding of unfamiliar curriculum
- Helps students make connections with personal experiences and background knowledge
- Teaches students how to use the connections made during annotating to retrieve information
- Promotes the transfer of learned curriculum into long-term memory
- Strengthens the retrieval of information for assessments

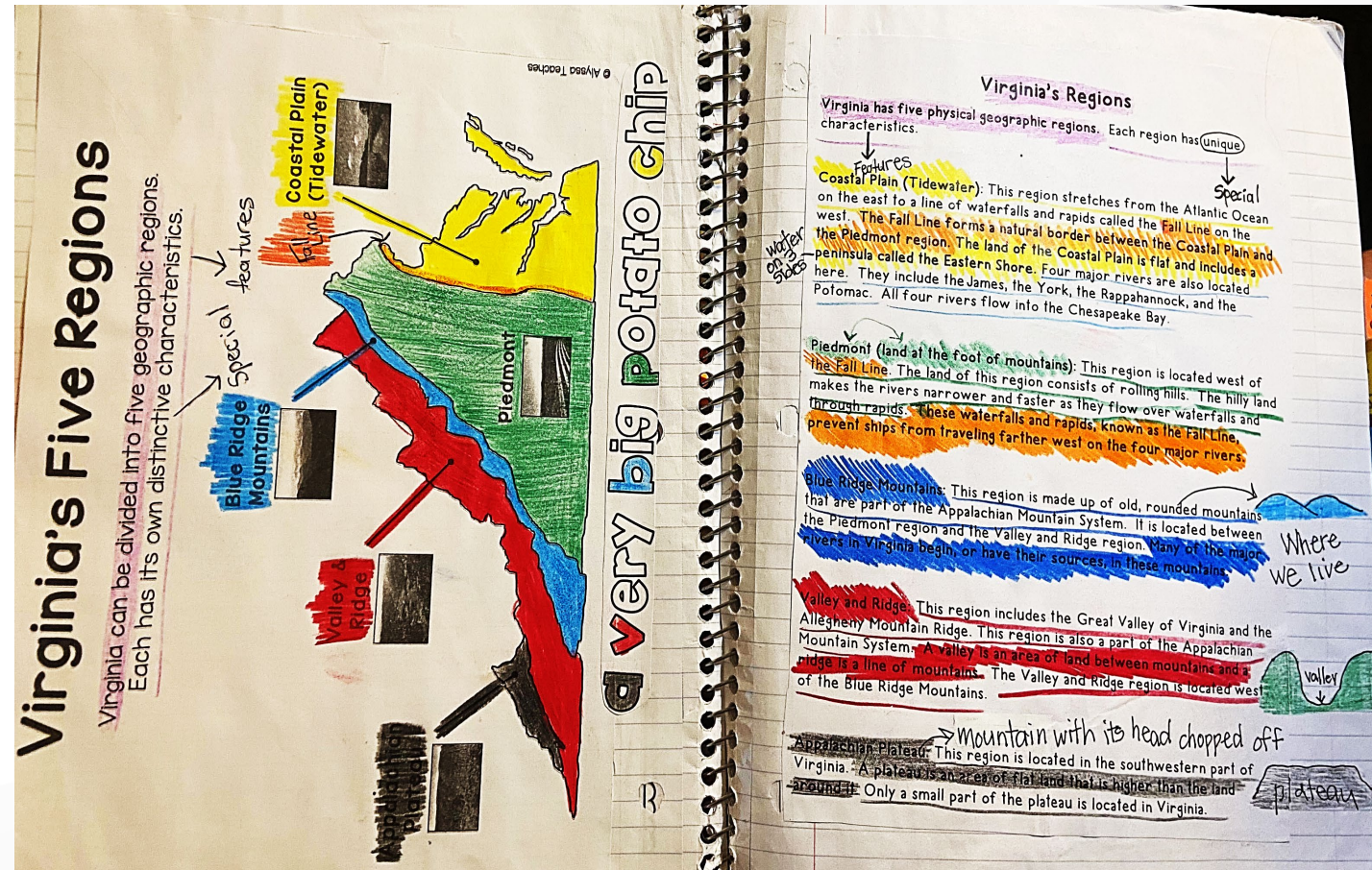
Focus

- To annotate in other subject areas, I usually focus on numbers One (creating a visual) and Two (making connections) of the Core Reading Comprehension Strategies.
- Students are presented with an abundance of material in grades 3-5 and need to be explicitly taught strategies for retrieving that information.
- I teach strategies such as:
 - Color cues - highlighting/shading
 - Illustrations - Teacher given/student created
 - Rewriting information in ways that are more familiar to students.

Annotating in Social Studies

SOLs: English 3.4, 3.6, 4.4, 4.6, 5.4, 5.6
VA Studies VS.2


- To introduce annotating in VA Studies at the beginning of the year, I teach the students to connect colors to the material.
 - We shade the key points about the Coastal Plain **yellow** because the sand and sun of the beach
 - We shade the key points about Blue Ridge Mountains **blue** because of their bluish appearance, etc.
- We add pictures and small notes to clarify vocabulary.
 - We drew a plateau, valley, and rounded Blue Ridge Mountains.
 - We added student-created definitions.



Annotating in Science

SOLs: English 3.4, 3.6, 4.4, 4.6, 5.4, 5.6
Science 5.6

- I teach the students to connect colors to the material.
 - We shade key points about temperature **red** to represent heat and warmth.
 - We shade key points about salinity **yellow** to remind students of the beach and the salty water of the ocean.
- We add pictures and small notes to clarify vocabulary.
 - We draw a thermometer with temperature
 - A saltshaker with salinity to help make those connections in students' memory when they see those vocabulary words again.


Temperature  thermometer

Temperature is a physical characteristic of the ocean that affects where marine organisms can live. The ocean has a wide range of temperatures from the almost 100°F (38°C) in the shallow coastal waters of the tropics to the freezing waters of the poles. *not deep*


Near the **Equator**, the waters of Earth's oceans can reach the temperature of a warm bath. Many forms of sea life live in the warmer ocean waters including living coral reefs, manatees, rays, clams, and horseshoe crabs.

In the polar region, many fish have a kind of natural **antifreeze** in their blood. Ocean mammals in the Arctic regions survive by relying on a thick layer of fatty blubber and fur to keep them warm. Ocean plants, such as **phytoplankton**, can also grow in these cold waters but only during the warmer summer months.

no freeze

Salinity  salt

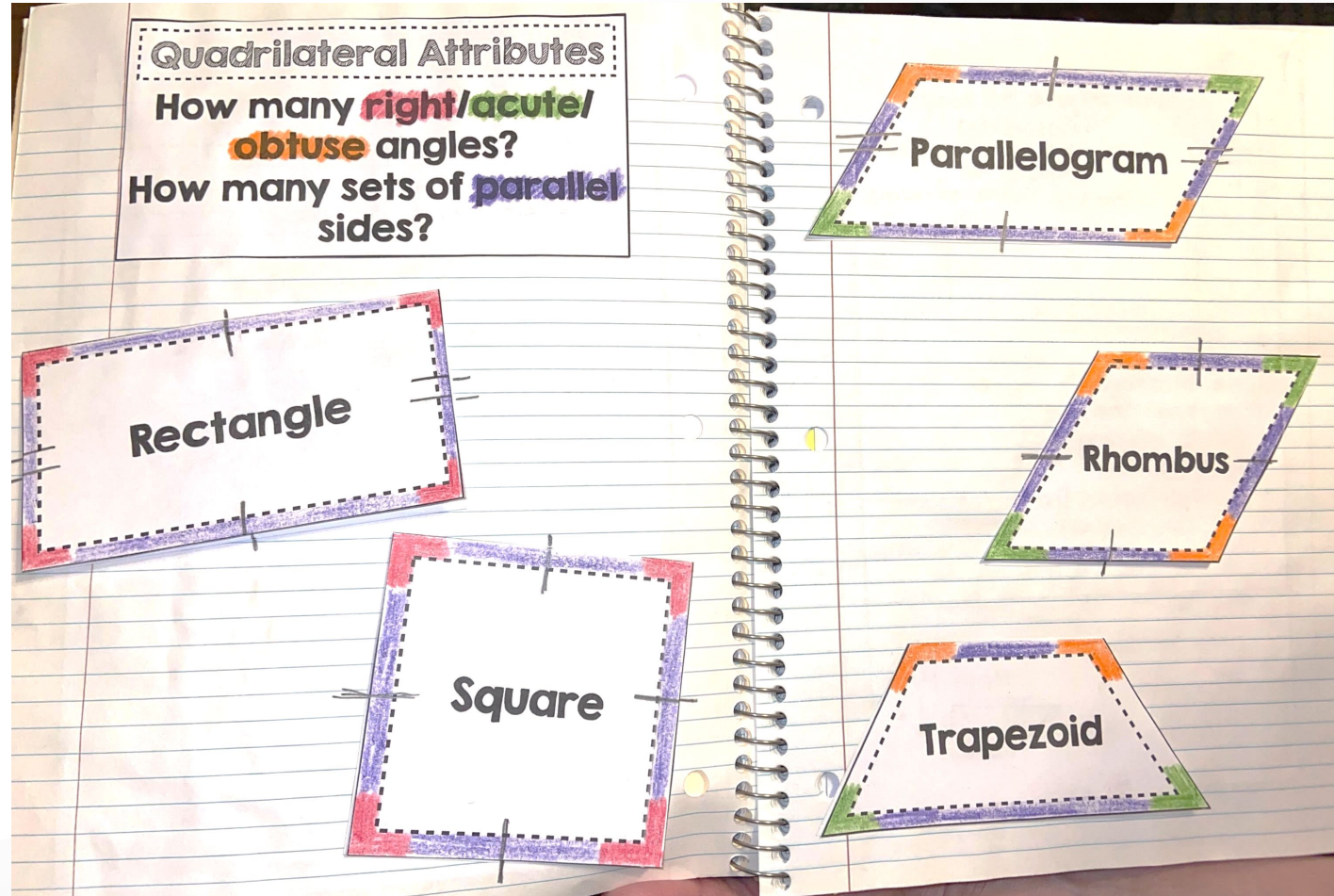
Salinity is another physical characteristic of the ocean that affects where marine organisms can live. **Salinity** is the amount of salt that is dissolved in ocean water. The salinity of the oceans varies during the year. Such factors as rainfall, evaporation, river run-off and ice formation cause the salinity of a body of water to change. While rainfall and river run-off **add** water and **lower** the salinity, evaporation and ice formation **remove** water and **increase** the salinity. *take away* *add*

Animals that live in salty water have developed ways to deal with their salty environment. Most marine creatures keep the salinity inside their bodies equal to the salinity of the surrounding water. If they are moved to waters of higher or lower salinity, they will eventually die. 

Annotating in Mathematics

SOLs: English 3.4, 3.6, 4.4, 4.6, 5.4, 5.6
Math 4.10, 5.12, 5.13

- I teach students to use colors to reinforce vocabulary and key concepts.
- When working on quadrilaterals, we colored illustrations to match specific vocabulary words. This way, when students think of those words, they think of everything that goes along with them as well because we consistently used the colors throughout our lessons.



So Why Annotate?

- It gives students **ownership** to their learning, reading, etc.
- It improves comprehension:
 - Note-taking activities have a positive impact on reading comprehension.
 - Annotating what you read is a good way to keep track of the thoughts **you** have while reading. Your notes give **you** something to refer to later, and it can be good practice for diving deeper into the literature, and ultimately increasing **your** critical and analytical thinking skills.

Challenges

- Annotation slows down reading, but **increases** comprehension.
 - Good readers don't believe it works or think it's necessary.
 - **Demonstrate what they don't remember by using a short, detailed quiz.**
- **Struggling readers won't do it**
 - Don't require students to read and annotate huge sections of text.
 - Differentiate the amount of text or the number of annotations for readers based on ability.

REMEMBER!

- **Annotation takes time**
 - This strategy takes SEVERAL weeks/months to first model, then guide, and eventually ask students to take on the task independently.
 - Most kids still struggle with this strategy independently after a whole year.
 - Offer “teacher given” marks for them to use when you want them to practice independently.
- **Annotation is not easy to teach**
 - Don’t expect this to be a quick learn for students
 - This strategy is best practiced when it can be built upon each grade level.
 - For example: start this strategy in 3rd with highlighting important details/vocabulary and build on that in 4th, so that by 5th grade, students have a stronger understanding and (after more guided practice), can annotate text on their own.

Works Cited

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Your Turn

Think about a student text you will assign in the next 30 days and how you can use and adopt annotating in your own classroom. Feel free to email us with any questions/concerns you may have when you look at your own textbooks, novels, or passages.

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