Annotating a text with sticky-notes

An annotation is a comment or observation. Below are 11 things readers look for when annotating a text, and what they do.

I. Vocabulary – Look up a word you don’t know and write the definition and part of speech (noun, verb, or adjective) on a sticky note. Put the sticky note on the same page below or above the line that features the word.

II. Character’s appearance – What does a character look like? How does a character dress? Physical descriptions often give the reader insight into a character’s personality. When the author provides this information, write it down and make a comment about what you think the character’s dress or appearance says about that character.

III. Character’s words – What does a character say? The vocabulary and language we choose to use says a lot about us. Write down a line of dialogue from a character. Then, in a few words, state what you think it says or shows about the character.

IV. Character’s thoughts – Characters don’t always say what’s on their mind. During those moments when the author gives you access to a character’s private thoughts, pay close attention to what he thinks. Write down ideas you think are important that show aspects of the character’s personality.

V. Character’s actions – Actions speak louder than words, right? Think about some of the decisions and choices a character makes. What are they? What do they show about what the character values? Make a note of important actions and decisions made by this character, and what they could suggest.

VI. Foreshadowing – Active readers make predictions about what will happen in a text. When an author provides hints or clues about how the plot
might unfold, make a note of that and take a guess as to what you think might happen. Don’t be afraid about being wrong in your predictions. As long as you can refer to the text, any inference is fair game.

VII. Themes – Themes are overarching messages and big ideas. They often contain a universal truth or concept that the author feels is important. Look for instances in the story where it appears the author is making a statement or observation about humanity or morality, then make a note of it.

VIII. Symbols and objects – Often, writers use symbolism in their works to get the reader focusing on a theme or idea. (The concept of the mockingbird from *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a great example of this.) Think about moments when the author references objects that mean something greater than themselves. Is the pearl from *The Pearl* just a piece of jewelry, or does it signify something greater? Write down objects that you find, and take a guess as to their deeper meanings.

IX. Figurative language – Authors often use figurative language to communicate an idea that goes beyond the literal or surface meaning. Figurative language can include similes, metaphors, hyperbole, and personification. Make a note of places where the author uses these literary devices. What do you think the author is trying to express?

X. Mood – Authors use descriptive words to convey the feeling or atmosphere of the story. How do you feel when reading the text? Is it suspenseful? Bleak? Uplifting? Playful? Write down words the author uses to convey the mood, and note how it makes you feel.

XI. Tone – The words an author uses can also show what he thinks about a topic or character. Does the author use words that demonstrate compassion, outrage, pessimism, or tolerance? Are there moments in the text where the author’s attitude about the subject or topic comes through? Write down these words, then make a statement about how you think the author feels.

* When asked to annotate a text, you may be assigned specific annotations, or you may be able to choose ones you feel are most relevant to the work you’re reading. Use sticky notes or pieces of paper to record your annotations. If you have questions, just ask Mr. B-G!*