

Annotating *Things Fall Apart*

Adapted from *How to Read a Book* (Mortimer Adler & Charles Van Doren) Original adaptation by a fellow AP ListServe subscriber

If you have the habit of asking a book questions as you read, you are a better reader than if you do not. But . . . merely asking questions is not enough. You have to try to answer them. And although that could be done, theoretically, in your mind only, it is easier to do it with a pencil in your hand. The pencil then becomes the sign of your alertness while you read.

Full ownership of a book only comes when you have made it a part of yourself, and the best way to make yourself a part of it -- which comes to the same thing -- is by writing in it. Since you will likely be borrowing the book,, you will be asked instead of marking in it to write your responses in a journal you will create for just that purpose. Why is marking a book [questioning and responding as you read] indispensable to reading it?

- **First, it keeps you awake -- not merely conscious, but wide awake.**
- **Second, reading, if it is active, is thinking, and thinking tends to express itself in words, spoken or written. The person who says he knows what he thinks but cannot express it usually does not know what he thinks.**
- **Third, writing your reactions down helps you to remember the thoughts of the author.**

For this and for these reasons among others, you will be asked to annotate *Things Fall Apart*. Your annotation notebook will be collected and graded at the end of each of the three Books [Parts} of *Things Fall Apart*

Note: Reading assignments should be read *and* annotated before class. It is perfectly okay to add to your markings (in fact I encourage you to do so) while we discuss in class or after you finish the book and are working on an essay, but the bulk of the job should be done in conjunction with your reading for class preparation.

Note: If you find annotating while you read to be annoying and awkward, do it after you read. Go back after a chapter or assignment and then mark it carefully. You should be reading assignments twice anyway, so this isn't any less efficient than marking as you read and then rereading the material.

As you will not be marking the book, unless you purchase your own, you will need to format each page of your notebook as if there is in fact text on it. A sheet of 8X 11 paper can hold two pages. For the sake of standardization of annotating for class and for grading purposes, your notes should follow this format:

***Inside Front Cover:* Character list with small space for character summary and for page references for key scenes, moments of character development, etc.**

***Inside Back Cover:* Themes, allusions, images, motifs, key scenes, plot line, epiphanies, etc. List and add page references and/or notes as you read.**

***Bottom and Side Page Margins:* Interpretive notes, questions, and/or remarks that refer to meaning of the page. Markings or notes to tie in with information on the inside back cover.**

***Top Margins:* Plot notes -- a quick few words or phrases which summarize what happens here (useful for quick location of passages in discussion and for writing assignments).**

Additional Markings:

***underlining:* done while or after reading to help locate passages for discussion, essays, or questions.**

***brackets:* done while or after reading to highlight key speeches, descriptions, etc. that are too long to underline easily.**

Marking and Notetaking tips (optional):

- ▷ **Use one color ink to do initial marking while reading; then go back with another color or colors to mark more thoroughly once you have finished a larger section, have had time to think about it and are able to see development of images, etc. more clearly.**
- ▷ **At chapter or section ends, stop to index page numbers on your front cover list of character information and traits as well as on your back cover list of themes, images, allusions, etc.**
- ▷ **Do underlining [noting of important parts of texts] as you read and side margin notes as you finish a page or two.**
- ▷ **Add to side margin notes during class discussion also.**

Grading:

Since everyone's notes will be similar in format, book grades will be based on thoroughness, clarity, neatness, and apparent effort ("apparent effort" because I will obviously not read all the notes on every page of everyone's book).

In addition, books may be collected in mid-reading, to see how the notetaking is going.