

Read, Notice, and Wonder

A Guide to Literary Response

Learning To Notice

When we read, we notice things. We may notice what the text tells us a character is wearing or thinking at a particular moment. We may notice how a writer repeats a certain phrase. We may notice that when a certain character says things, we don't think he or she is telling the truth. Sometimes we aren't very aware of what we are noticing. Often, we can't explain *why* we noticed something and missed something else.

The things we notice are important when we want to talk about what we have read with others. By sharing what we notice with others—and listening to what they tell us about what they have seen—our understandings of the literature develop and are clarified. But sometimes, especially if you have read a number of pages, remembering what you notice is difficult, especially if you don't want to make marks in your book.

As you read, keep a pad of sticky notes handy. Then, when you notice something interesting, put a note on the page next to the passage. You don't even have to slow down your reading by writing a comment—just placing the note is probably enough. Then, when you are ready to talk about your reading, your sticky notes will lead you to places where you have things to say.

Learning To Wonder

Even the very best readers have questions about what they read. There may be passages they don't understand, or information they aren't sure is true. Maybe their reading makes them wonder about something in their own lives. Learning to wonder is an important part of learning to be an effective reader.

As you read, you can use sticky notes to help you remember your questions. Write a question mark on a note and stick it next to a puzzling passage or a place where you don't understand what is going on. In your writer's notebook, ask questions. You might wonder about the setting of a story: What did people think and believe when this story took place? What was their moral code like then? (In the United States, as recently as the 18th century, it was considered scandalous for a woman to give a speech in public!) What tools did they have to help them solve the kinds of problems they were confronting? Or maybe you have questions about the characters and why they say and do what they do. Do you like or dislike this character? Can you tell why or why not? Is this character reliable? Can you trust what he or she says? Why or why not? How can you explain the choices a character is making?

Keeping track of your questions—either in a writer's notebook or on sticky notes—will help you focus on things you really want to know about when you come to discussion. And your questions will help the rest of the class understand more about the literature as well.