

Annotation: Every Reader's Superhero Reading Strategy

A Master's Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of

The Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science in Education, Reading

Sharon Kay Baumeister

\_\_\_\_\_  
Advisor's Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

University of Wisconsin, River Falls

2015

### **Abstract**

I teach Sophomore English at an all-girls' college preparatory school. Promoting and improving reading comprehension is a major curricular objective, and like many high school and college teachers, I teach, assign, and encourage my students to mark-up their texts as they read—to annotate, believing that, in doing so, students will read more actively, connect with textual ideas, retain information, and understand with greater depth. Do they? This research explored the efficacy of text annotation as a means to facilitate engagement, retention, and comprehension. My sophomores studied a variety of annotation models, learned how to annotate, completed a Reading Habits Survey, annotated narrative excerpts while reading Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*, and reflected on the annotation process. The literature review and collected data suggest that annotation is a useful strategy that fosters engagement and comprehension.

### **Introduction**

The ability to read is the structural bedrock of literacy, and it (reading) involves more than simply recognizing words. Reading is a construction of meaning—an on-going synthesis of new with old information built through active interaction—tracking, questioning, assimilating, connecting, pondering, and debating. Likewise, literacy—our capacity to employ knowledge intentionally to shape our social, economic, and political lives—transcends simply reading. Both are multifaceted endeavors that are, according to many educators and researchers, in decline, signaling potentially dire consequences for our communal future. Hirsh and Koehler (2011), for example, asserted a “quiet crisis,” noting that many students read only at a basic level, not the proficient level needed to navigate the complexity of high school level texts (p. 34). How should educators respond? Some educators have argued that reading instruction, like the reading process itself, must be equally multilayered to promote metacognitive understanding about reading processes and skills. Brown (2007) argued that instruction must empower students “to own and improve their reading processes” so that they understand “the complex ways they interact with text” because only then can they consciously adopt and adapt these processes (p. 75). Reading instruction must, therefore, not only consider *how* but also *why*. Students and teachers should discuss *how* cognitive processes promote making sense of texts and *why* reading is important in their personal and social lives. The literature review that follows considers the complexity of reading comprehension, the symbiotic reading-writing relationship, the ability of learning strategies to teach learners how to and how they learn, and the multiple benefits of annotation strategy, which suggest that annotation strategy may be one way to improve students’ reading abilities.

## Literature Review

### What is Reading Comprehension?

Definitions of reading comprehension vary but share two main tenets: reading comprehension involves both information acquisition and prior knowledge. As defined in *The Handbook of Reading Research* (2014), reading comprehension is the “interaction of new information with old information (p. 44), and according to the RAND Reading Study Group (2002), reading comprehension, is “the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language” (p. xvi), and comprehension, as defined by Grellet (1981), occurs when readers “efficiently extract information” from a text by “adapting their reading techniques to fit the text and purpose” (p. 7). On the other hand, Pardo (2004) characterized “comprehension as a process in which readers construct meaning by interacting with a text through a combination of prior knowledge and previous experience, information in the text, and the stance the reader takes in relationship to the text (p. 273). As defined, the act of comprehending a text is multifaceted. Readers bring to bear many skills and processes—extracting information, connecting new information with what is already known, and adapting “their techniques” to fit the text at hand—it is complex, active, and memory driven.

Utilizing multiple regions of the brain, reading comprehension involves cyclical, simultaneous, and dynamic processes. Grellet (1981), for example, illustrated the myriad cognitive actions that occur as a reader makes sense of a single sentence: *while* attending to her current sentence, she is *also* holding earlier sentences in short-term memory in order to link them with her current sentence *while* simultaneously searching prior knowledge for relevant ideas. *At the same time*, her working memory is processing the current sentence to integrate it with further parts of the text when she will, upon completion, create a mental representation of the text’s meaning. As Grellet’s

vignette crystallizes, the brain utilizes many automatic processes concurrently like decoding or accessing working memory, but reading also involves strategic choices. Grellet's reader may, for instance, strategically slow her reading at points, reread sections of text, or actively search stores of background knowledge. As Espin's research emphasized, the process of reading comprehension uses "skills, memory, attentional and cognitive factors" (as cited in Sabatini et al, 2012, p. 26)—interdependent processes, which influence coherence building. The work of Henderson and Bartlett (1932) established the primacy of both working and long-term memory to reading comprehension (as cited in Kamil et al, 2014, p. 47). Working memory (WM), where readers first attend to new ideas, "holds" information for about 20 to 30 seconds while long-term memory, the storehouse of prior knowledge, facilitates augmentation of new information, allowing readers to connect new with old information. As Kintsch contended, learning is a layering process: "one needs to know something to learn something new" (as cited in Sabatini et al, 2012, p. 26). Key words and concepts in a new text trigger the retrieval of prior knowledge, a process that may be advanced or impeded by readers' skills, attention, and cognitive processes. Kirby (2007) confirmed that strategic attention to new information will facilitate its movement to long-term memory, and it is well established that comprehension building is compromised when readers must use memory resources for skills such as letter recognition or decoding. In sum, meaning making is a symphonic process; many processes work in tandem to create a unified composition of understanding. Reading comprehension is an active cognitive process akin to problem solving, influenced by both automatic and strategic processes and deeply reliant on memory organization.

### **The Reading-Writing Connection**

It is an accepted truism that reading and writing are interdependent, both supporting comprehension building. Writers who read widely, write well. The *K-12 Reader* article "The Relationship Between Reading and Writing" argued that writing builds reading skills. Writing reinforces phonemic

awareness and phonics skills in young children and helps older students analyze the texts that they read. Reading, on the other hand, fosters writing skills—readers learn text structure and language and augment prior knowledge stores—observations and knowledge that transfer to writing. The strong learning link between reading and writing suggests that instruction should intentionally harness this symbiotic relationship to promote profound learning and thinking. In fact, Fulwiler and Young (1982) asserted that writing-to-learn activities foster critical thinking, helping students “to order and represent experience to [their] own understanding, . . . [providing them] with a unique way of knowing” (p. ix). Moreover, they insisted that writing-to-learn is a tool “for discovering, for shaping meaning, and for reaching understanding” (p. x). The question, then, is *how* can teachers strategically employ both reading and writing to help students learn? Bazerman (1980) contended that strategically utilizing the “mechanics and consequences” of the reading-writing connection will strengthen both reading and writing skills. He observed that particular types of writing helped students become more perceptive, active readers. Paraphrasing, he noted, builds precise understanding of language, and summarizing texts teaches the “nuts and bolts” of an idea. Bazerman’s research placed particular emphasis on reactive writing, which is fostered through activities such as text annotation, response journals, and informal reaction essays, for it is through *reacting* he argued that students gain a sense of their own ideas and identity against the reading, which is, according to Bazerman, the ultimate the goal—for students to join the conversation, to assimilate a reading well so that it will inform other readings and so on. Thus, in joining the conversation, students learn the importance of understanding.

### **Learning Strategies and Reading Comprehension**

Nordell (2009) asserted that the most important learning skill may, in fact, be understanding how to learn—knowing if a concept is understood, recognizing when comprehension has failed, and self-diagnosing gaps in understanding. Learning is an active and self-reflective process: academic success is rooted in self-motivation, self-assessment, and self-modification. Therefore, students must learn to think

critically about thinking and learning—metacognitive processes which learning strategies promote.

Teaching students learning strategies, “methodologies that help students to understand, control, and direct their cognitive processes,” may be the best way to help students learn (Liu p. 195). Liu (2006) noted the importance of learning strategies to enhance reading; he concluded that “[strategies] help readers actively react so that textual ideas permeate memory, allowing readers to re-inspect, recall, and connect ideas to achieve a qualitative learning outcome” (p. 195). Similarly, Nordell’s research (2009) echoed Liu’s assessment: it illustrated that teaching specific learning strategies improved students’ ability to understand, retain, and apply textual ideas, and moreover, their ability to self-assess and modify hindrances to learning. Nordell found that students who attended learning strategy workshops (students learned strategies such as previewing, note-taking, and annotating) “performed significantly better on subsequent exams than students who did not attend the learning workshops” (p. 40). Nordell and Liu’s research affirmed that learning strategies promote active learning and improve comprehension. However, as Liu noted, “mastery of learning strategies takes time and repeated direct and explicit instruction.” (p. 199).

### **The Benefits of Text Annotation**

Numerous teacher researchers— Browne (2007), Donohue & Feito (2008), Ngovo (1999), and Porter-O’Donnell, (2004)—have examined connections between text annotation strategy and students’ reading and writing abilities and chronicled a plethora of advantages; students have exhibited and reported sharpened retention, enhanced engagement, and better comprehension. Donohue & Feito (2008) have noted that “[most teachers] consider annotation [to be] an essential component of critical inquiry” (p. 296). And students, for their part, have described annotation as a useful and easy to apply strategy, reporting improved understanding of their reading processes. In sum, the research has indicated that text annotation is an effective strategy with few limitations: a conclusion, which is strongly supported through qualitative data. On the other hand, as a whole the quantitative data have implied a less stunning connection between annotation strategy and comprehension.

### **Annotation & Metacognition**

Beers (2009) and Porter-O'Donnell's (2004) work has proposed that annotation strategy fosters metacognitive self-awareness, promoting skillful, critical, and thoughtful reading. O'Donnell's classroom research heralded shifts in students' awareness and understanding of their thinking processes. Porter-O'Donnell's students studied annotation examples and annotated their own texts to learn the myriad ways readers interact with a text; she found that her students learned to think about their reading, to use writing to learn, and to interact with their texts. As O'Donnell's student Manny described, "creating the cluster [different ways readers respond to a text] helped me a lot . . . before making the cluster, I didn't even know there would be so many different ways to think about a story" (p. 86). Another student Lucy reported that she "thinks more about things" and asks "questions for answers that don't specifically reside in the text"; and lastly, student Daniel said that annotation "helped him to read more carefully and to distinguish between literal information and underlying, inferential analysis" (p. 86). While Beers's research confirmed a similar positive correlation between annotation and metacognition, she has also noted that independent readers grapple more adeptly with difficult texts: they "use strategies to recognize author purpose, match pronoun antecedents to navigate a maze of confusing characters, make connections to [their] own [lives], use context clues to help define unknown words, and question the text [to] figure out what's confusing them" (p. 42)—they are metacognitively mature. She has observed that less adept readers, on the other hand, lack intuitive metacognitive processes; they must be taught to "clarify, question, predict, summarize, and visualize" (p. 45). In *When Kids Can't Read: What Teachers Can Do*, Beers has advocated that educators provide direct instruction in reading strategies, noting that annotation strategy, particularly, complements the process and skill nature of reading.

### **Annotation & Comprehension**

Some research has affirmed promising connections between annotation strategy and improved comprehension. Ngovo (1999), for example, compared PORPE (predict, organize, rehearse, practice, evaluate) and annotation study strategies. He found that students who used annotation as a study and learning tool out-performed students who used the PORPE strategy on delayed multiple-choice tests (the tests were administered two weeks after reading and using the study strategy), suggesting that annotation aids comprehension and retention. However, Ngovo noted no significant difference in test scores between the groups on multiple-choice tests administered immediately after reading. As a side note, students who used PORPE, a five-step study process, expressed frustration with the strategy, describing PORPE's many steps as complex and cumbersome. In contrast, annotators found the three-step annotation strategy—read, mark, and study the text—easy to use; consequently, PORPE's complex process may have skewed results to favor annotation strategy. As well, Zywica and Gomez (2008) noted improvements in students' reading achievement scores after instruction in annotation strategy. Using Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) to measure changes in student comprehension, Gomez and Zywica saw increases in students' comprehension measures at the study's beginning, mid-point, and end, where students had received the most extensive instructional support with annotating. Gomez and Zywica pointed out two salient observations: one, instruction in annotation strategy must be gradual, taught directly, and reinforced with consistent practice. Second, students, as they became more practiced and skilled annotators, learned content with greater depth.

### **Annotation & Writing**

In addition to fostering metacognitive processes and comprehension, research has also shown that annotation positively affects students' writing and engagement. Porter-O' Donnell (2004) found that text annotation not only helped her students to think more consciously about

their reading processes, but it also helped her students write with greater depth. Moreover, her students reported improved connections with their reading and increased confidence in their writing when they annotated. Kate, for example, reported that she used “[her] annotations as a resource to uncover deep meanings” (p. 89), and Chelsea said annotations helped her to find supporting evidence for her ideas. Researcher and history teacher Monte-Sano (2008) also employed annotation to improve students’ writing and comprehension of historical documents. Her students annotated historical texts as a precursor to writing, a first step that promoted active reading. She noted that annotating allowed her students to “grasp content, practice writing, and learn to think historically” (p. 1047). Strode and Walters (1991) studied the effects of annotation training on students’ comprehension and summary writing skills. While their study found no significant link between comprehension and annotation, they reported that students trained in annotation strategy produced more succinct and efficient summaries than students who were not trained in annotation strategy. Liu (2006) also observed a clear correlation between effective, skillful annotating and writing quality. After reviewing student annotation samples and survey responses, Liu categorized his students’ annotations as ‘skillful’ or ‘verbatim’ (p. 203). Liu observed that skillful annotators employed a deep approach to annotation and produced “erudite essays marked by persuasive and non-repetitive support” (p. 203). Conversely, verbatim annotators produced weak essays marked by verbatim repetition of assigned materials [that lacked] analytical argument” (p. 204). While most of the research has sought to quantitatively measure the effects of annotation strategy on reading comprehension, teacher-researcher Brown (2007) has shunned this emphasis, asserting that the instructional beauty of annotation strategy lies in its ability to promote personal engagement with reading. The significance of annotation he has argued is that it helps students to “interact with text in a meaningful way, . . . [to] see the value of what they are reading,

and to form new ideas about who they are how they fit into the world in which they live”—ideas that speak to the very heart of comprehension (p. 73).

### **The Teaching Power of Annotation Strategy**

Studying students’ annotations has also yielded insights into students’ thought processes and skills. Goble (2010) analogized students’ annotation clusters to the paint palettes of artists: the annotators’ jottings about a text—their canvases—allow educators a glimpse of the mixings and arrangements of their thinking. Liu (2006) confirmed too that students’ annotated texts provide “a window through which a teacher may discern the thinking styles of learners and find effective ways to facilitate [their] critical thinking” (p. 194). And Donohue & Feito (2008) who initially begin researching to explore how students’ annotative practices affected intellectual engagement, saw their research shift: instead of exploring how annotation strategy improved their students’ intellectual engagement, they found themselves “delving deeply into reading theory to understand more fully how students’ annotative practices might illuminate their learning processes” (p. 300). As a result, they concluded that teachers should examine students’ annotations to learn about their reading skills. Donohue & Feito categorized their examination of students’ annotations as follows:

- Trackings represented readers’ efforts to register their reading by highlighting, underlining, questioning, paraphrasing, or commenting.
- Identification of gaps reflected students’ attempts to fill in textual gaps where the author has implicitly stated ideas.
- Individual repertoire represented annotations in which readers connected with textual ideas personally.
- Literary repertoire reflected the annotators’ literary skills—their experience with common literary motifs, theme, and figurative language.

In analyzing their students’ annotations, Donohue & Feito reported a correlation between annotation robustness and reading skill. For example, some students exhibited greater annotation and reading repertoires—they interpreted, predicted, and connected ‘gaps’ with greater frequency

and acumen. On the other hand, other students displayed less skill in their ability to make connections, predict possible outcomes, and fill textual ‘gaps’ with logical inferences, a dearth glimpsed through sparser annotations.

## **Conclusion**

The literature reiterated the well-established consensus that reading comprehension is complex—an interaction of automatic and strategic processes in which readers synthesize new with old information to expand their knowledge. Also, the literature emphasized the primacy of the reading-writing connection as noted by Fulwiler and Young (1982), writing about reading helps readers to “discover and shape” meaning, suggesting that text annotation, a writing-to-learn strategy, may be effective in facilitating comprehension (p. xii). Augmenting this idea further, the literature reviewing annotation strategy reflected positive connections between annotation strategy and metacognition, comprehension, writing, retention, and engagement. Research affirmed the active nature of text annotation—readers “talk with the text” as they read through questioning, commenting, connecting—interaction that helps students to understand and retain what they read, showing text annotation to be a promising learning strategy with few drawbacks. While some of the research did not show a direct correlation between annotation and improved comprehension, none of the research indicated annotation strategy to be ineffective. This present study aims to explore the benefits of text annotation outlined above, seeking to learn if and how annotation helps students to understand a text more deeply.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

Over a two-year period, four class sections of sophomore girls of varied reading and intellectual abilities participated in this study. All lessons, activities, and assessments took place

during the school day or as assigned homework during our study of *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens. Each class section met daily for 45-minute sessions. I chose to use my entire sophomore class, as opposed to a sampling of students, to get a broader sense of the effects of annotation strategy and students' perceptions.

### **Procedures**

Prior to beginning this study and reading *A Tale of Two Cities*, students in my English classes had previous experience with annotation strategy. Students encountered annotation strategy first with a variant—the double-entry journal and later during our study of poetry, where students used annotation to explore the ideas and language of poetry. Additionally, in preparing to deliver a soliloquy from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, students annotated their soliloquies for presentational elements such as pace, pauses, volume, tone, and emotional shifts. Instruction in each of these pre-study lessons followed a similar pattern: the teacher presented the concept, students were given handouts explaining the concept, which included former student examples; and lastly, students applied the strategy. This study used a variety of lessons, activities, and assessments to provide a review of annotation strategy, give students practice with the strategy, and assess its effects on students' learning and attitudes. Outlined below is a sequential overview of this study's lessons, activities, and assessments.

- Reading Habits Survey: students completed a reading and study habits survey (see Appendix A).
- First Annotation Lesson: in this lesson, students studied model annotations to re-familiarize with annotation strategy, to learn types of information professional annotations provide, and to consider the myriad ways they react to a text through annotation. Student groups created a list of their observations, which were later categorized and compiled into an Annotation User's Guide bookmark, a listing of possible ways to respond or react to a text (see Appendix B).
- Second Annotation Lesson (Guided Sticky Note Annotation Activity): in this in-class activity, student pairs closely read and annotated a section from chapter 5 "The Wine Shop." They annotated using sticky-notes, looking for specific elements of language (e.g., figurative

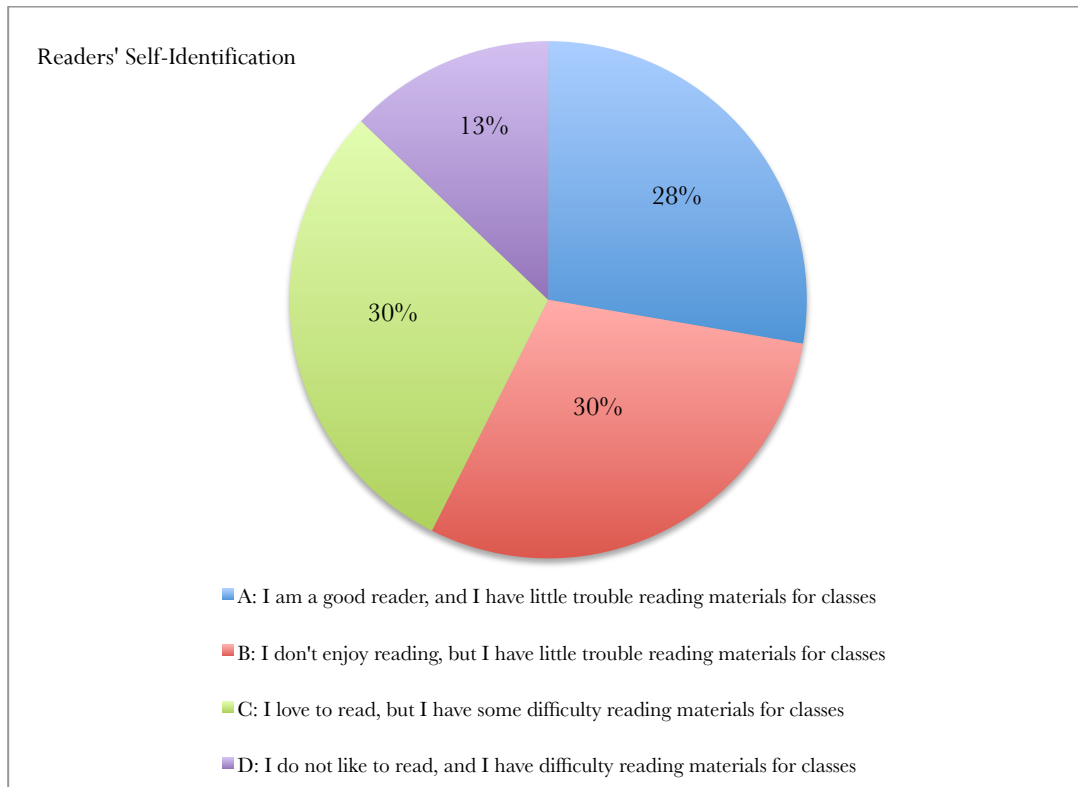
- language, symbolism, foreshadowing) to answer the overarching question: *how does Dickens want readers to feel about the peasants of St. Antoine and how does he employ language achieve this feeling?*
- Third Annotation Lesson (Guided Annotation #1): to prepare for an essay, students annotated excerpts from book 2, chapters 3 & 4 “A Sight” and “A Disappointment.” This annotation was guided in that students had been given the essay prompt prior to reading; their objective was to annotate with the prompt ideas in mind. Upon completion of the essay, students responded to two reflection questions.
  - Fourth Annotation Lesson (Guided Annotation #2): in this in-class activity, students annotated a key excerpt from Book 2, chapter 24, “The Lodestone Rock.” Prior to annotating, students had read the chapter and completed study guide questions to prepare for classroom discussion. Students were quizzed to test understanding of ideas pre and post-annotation (see Appendix C).
  - Fifth Annotation Lesson (Annotation #3): students annotated an entire chapter (book 3, chapter 10, “The Substance of the Shadow”) to prepare for class discussion. This chapter was chosen because of its complexity and importance to the novel. Students were instructed to read actively and mark up their texts in any way they felt would be helpful, using the annotation bookmark as a guide. The objectives of this annotation were to note the quality and accuracy of student responses in discussion and to later review students’ annotations to learn about their processes.
  - Sixth Annotation Lesson (Professional Annotation #4): as a culminating activity, students developed one of their previous annotations into a “published” professional annotation (see Appendix D).

## Discussion & Results

### Summary and Interpretation

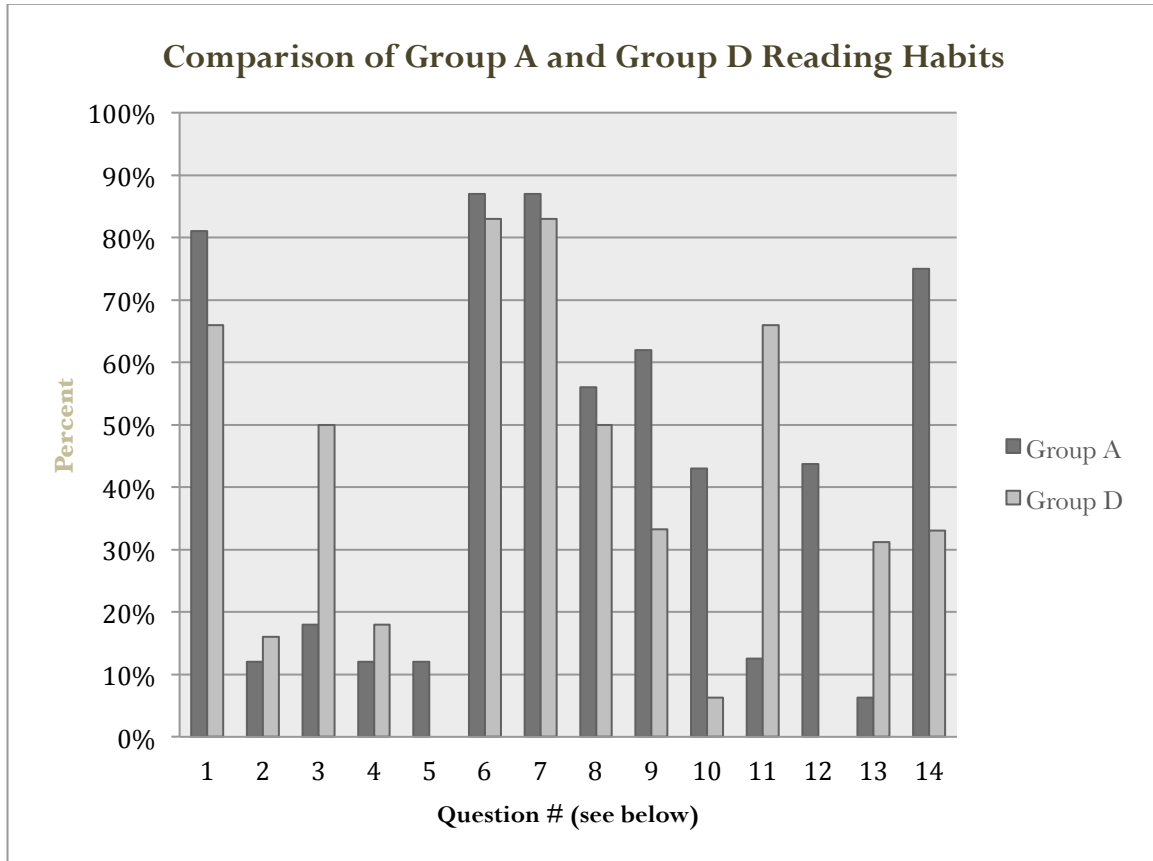
At the beginning of the study, students completed The Reading Habits Survey (see Appendix A), which asked them to self-assess their reading attitudes, describe their reading habits, and identify their reading and study strategies. Twenty-eight percent of students classified themselves as “good readers who liked to read and have little trouble with academic reading,” while 13% self-identified as “struggling readers who disliked reading” (see Figure 1).

Figure 1-Reading Habits Survey: Readers’ Self-categorizations



Examination of the survey data indicated a correlation between readers' self-identified attitudes and their study and reading strategies (see Figure 2). For example, students in group D, who identified as "struggling readers who disliked reading," engaged in counter-productive reading habits more often compared to their group A counterparts as indicated by their responses to question 4 ("I stop reading if the material is too difficult"), question 11 ("I skip parts that are confusing"), and question 13 ("I quickly skim chapter(s) to get the reading done"). Whereas, group A students, who self-identified as "good readers who liked to read," more frequently employed comprehension-building strategies such as re-reading sections of text and summarizing chunks of text than their group D counterparts.

Figure 2-Comparison Between Students’ Self-identifications and Reading-Study Strategies



**When I read a text for school, I often**

1. Re-read sections I don’t understand.
2. Ask myself questions about my reading.
3. Annotate the text or use post-it notes to help me remember the reading.
4. Stop reading if the material is too difficult.
5. Stop and summarize key ideas or passages.
6. Notice when I’m not paying attention.
7. Visualize (make mental pictures of what I’m reading)
8. Make predictions about what might happen next.
9. Make connections to other books or ideas or movies.
10. Stop at points and try to remember what I’ve just read.
11. Skip parts that are confusing.
12. Look up unfamiliar words that I can’t figure out from the context.
13. Quickly skim chapter(s) to get the reading done.
14. Always try to understand what I am reading.

The Reading Habits Survey was blindly administered to encourage honest responses, however, doing so created an unforeseen limitation, for it precluded the ability to correlate students’ self-identified reading and study skills with their essays, reflection responses, and annotation samples.

One of students’ first annotation assignments was a guided annotation in which students were given an essay prompt related to their reading; they were asked to annotate the chapter as they read, keeping in mind the essay prompt’s ideas. After annotating and writing the essay, students responded to two reflection questions:

- 1) *How did annotation help you to learn about the text?*
- 2) *What did you learn about yourself as a reader?*

See Table 1 for a sampling of students’ responses to these two questions. Overall, students’ responses suggested that annotation promoted active reading—students reported that they made connections with earlier parts of the text, asked questions, noticed elements of foreshadowing, slowed their reading pace, looked up unknown vocabulary words more often, and paid more attention to their reading processes. A key aspect to improved active reading seems to be the “forced slow down” that annotating while reading requires as O’Donnell (2004) recognized and noted—“annotation slows reading down, which allows students to discover and uncover ideas that would not have emerged otherwise” (85).

Table 1  
Students’ Reflection Responses

<i>“Forced me to ask questions”</i>
<i>“I was surprised at how helpful it [annotation] was. . . I was coming up with questions and ideas that had not occurred to me before. . .”</i>
<i>“It [annotation] keeps me alert”</i>
<i>“I learned that I do summarize chunks in my head as I read.”</i>
<i>“It helped, but it was worthless how it had to be a page!”</i>
<i>“Slowed down [my reading] rather than rushing through.”</i>
<i>“I processed the text more closely . . . and looked up words”</i>
<i>“I did not learn about my reading skills, but it [annotation] helped me to find textual evidence [for my writing].”</i>

In another in-class annotation activity, student pairs annotated a key excerpt from Book 2, chapter 24 “The Lodestone Rock, ” in which a pre and post-annotation quiz was administered to

measure the effects of annotation strategy. Prior to annotating, students had read the chapter, completed study guide questions, and were given a brief quiz to measure their understanding and retention of the reading (see Table 2). Students' quiz scores significantly improved after annotating (see Table 3); for example, 81% of students scored 60% or less on the pre-annotation quiz while 75% of students scored 80% or higher on the post-annotation quiz.

Table 2  
Pre-Annotation Quiz

Score	Frequency	Percent
0	6	16%
1	4	11%
2	9	24%
3	11	30%
4	2	5%
5	5	1%

Table 3  
Post-Annotation Quiz

Score	Frequency	Percent
0	0	0%
1	2	5%
2	4	11%
3	3	8%
4	11	30%
5	17	46%

In addition, students' post-annotation quiz responses were more accurate, detailed, and specific (see Table 4). While students' quiz scores increased post annotation, it is important to note that students had read the excerpt twice; their initial reading of the chapter was assigned as homework, and their second a guided excerpt done in-class; thus, an improved understanding of key ideas would be expected.

Table 4  
Students' Quiz Responses, Chapter 24 "The Lodestone Rock"

Quiz Question	Pre Annotation Response	Post Annotation Response
1. According to Gabelle's letter, why has he been imprisoned?	By Darnay's wish	Treason & loyalty to Darnay
2. After Darnay reads Gabelle's letter, he feels	That he has to do something about it	Guilty & feels that he needs to help Gabelle.
3. In the aftermath of his uncle's death, Darnay feels that he acted "imperfectly" with regard to his estate. Name one factor that Darnay attributes to his imperfect response.	He did not sell the house	He hurriedly wrapped up estate matters; he was not systematic.
4. As Darnay ponders Gabelle's situation, he thinks: "Yes, The Lodestone Rock was drawing him, and he must sail on, until he struck." To what does the "lodestone rock" refer?	The wealth of Paris	Gabelle's letter is drawing him to France—to the prison where Gabelle is kept.
5. How does Darnay imagine he will be received in France?	Well-received; bring reason to the revolution.	Well-received. He thinks they'll be grateful for how he treated the peasants and accept his help in guiding the revolution.

Lastly, I reviewed samples of students' annotations to learn what annotations can teach about our readers. Specifically, I wanted to explore how the annotations of adept readers differed from those of less adept readers. What might their annotations reveal about their processes? A total of eight annotations were critiqued: four adept readers and four less adept readers. I chose these readers based on experience with their reading abilities. Critiqued annotations revealed the annotations of more adept readers to be more detailed and robust (see Appendix C). These readers often summarized ideas, supplied implied background information, used textual details to support insights, tracked names and pronouns, connected characters or ideas with previous chapters, and defined words more often. On the other hand, the annotations of less adept readers tended to be less precise and express confusion more often. Furthermore, while less adept readers did indeed engage in some of the same processes as adept readers, they did so less consistently, less robustly, and with less specificity. For example, while less adept readers offered summaries of text, their summaries tended to be vague such as "He's really thinking about it" or "Contemplation" over a chunk of passage (see Appendix C). Additionally, the annotations of less adept readers consistently

asked more questions, circled (without defining) more words, and tended to make superficial comments.

This critique of students' annotations reinforced the observations of Donohue & Feito (2008) and Beers (2009) that more proficient readers apply reading strategies almost intuitively, possess vaster stores of literary know-how, and connect "gaps" more readily. These observations suggest that readers bring a similar skill level to annotating as they do to their reading; thus, good readers annotate with depth while struggling readers annotate with less vigor, serving to reinforce Beers (2009) mandate that struggling readers need direct instruction in a broad range of reading strategies.

### **Implications and Action Plan**

In conclusion, the review of the literature and data showed annotation to be a beneficial reading-to-learn strategy, one that I will continue to employ as a means to help students read with greater depth and retention. Aside from the formal data collected, several of my students (on their own without prompting) indicated that they found the annotation process beneficial to their understanding and tracking of ideas in novel. One student said, "I wish I could annotate the entire novel!" And another anecdote—every summer, my sophomores are assigned summer reading for which they are required to maintain a double-entry journal. During the first week of school, the students come together for what I call a 'Popcorn Discussion'—they get face-to-face and knee-to-knee to share their reactions to their reading. During this discussion, the girls are engaged: they laugh and share questions, serious insights, and similar rants about characters. Last fall, I asked each of my classes if they liked the journals or found them to be busy work. Overwhelmingly, my students agreed that the journals helped them to remember, connect with, and explore the novels; while they did have some suggestions about the mechanics of the assignment, eliminating the journals was not one of them. While this study attests that annotation is a learning strategy with many positive benefits, it also raises an important question: *If annotation and reading processes are*

*closely related (as this and other research has suggested), how then must annotation be taught to help less adept readers improve their comprehension? A corollary to this question is are some types of annotations more effective than others?* I think: “yes!” In past annotation assignments, I have encouraged students to mark-up their texts in any way they like, using the Annotation User’s Guide as a navigator; however, based on the research and the results of this study, I think a better approach might be to focus on promoting and developing specific annotation strategies such as summarizing, defining of words, and asking sharpened questions about textual ideas to build the cognitive problem solving skills of comprehension. While the “mark-up the text in any way you see fit” approach may work fine for skilled readers who are naturals at making meaning, it does not appear to be the best approach for dependent readers who do not readily intuit meaning making, who need directed, guided, and repetitive experiences to internalize comprehension processes. In closing, annotation strategy, as Brown wisely observed, empowers; it is a superhero strategy that offers both independent and dependent readers a way to consciously understand “the complex ways [to] interact with text” (p. 75), and it will continue to be a staple in my instructional repertoire but with more emphasis on comprehension building skills.

## References

- Albro, E., O'Reilly, T., & Sabatini, J. (Eds.). (2012). Psychological models of reading comprehension and their implications for assessment (pp. 21-38). In *Measuring up: advances in how we assess reading ability*. Retrieved from <http://books.google.com/books>
- Bazerman, C. (1980). A relationship between reading and writing: the conversational model. *College English*, 41, 656-661.
- Beers, K. (2009). Explicit instruction in comprehension. In *When kids can't read: What teachers can do* (pp. 40-60). New York: Scholastic.
- Brown, M. (2007). I'll have mine annotated, please: helping students make connections with texts. *English Journal*, 96 (4), 73-78.
- Brummitt-Yale, J. (n.d.). The relationship between reading and writing. Retrieved from <http://www.k12reader.com/the-relationship-between-reading-and-writing/>
- Donohue, P. & Feito, J.A. (2008). Minding the gap: annotation as preparation for discussion. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 7: 295, 295-307.
- Fulwiler, T., & Young, Art (Eds.). (1982). Introduction. In *Language connections: writing and reading across the curriculum* (pp. ix-xiii). Retrieved from [http://wac.colostate.edu/books/language\\_connections/](http://wac.colostate.edu/books/language_connections/)
- Gomez, K. & Zywicki, J. (2008). Annotating to support learning in the content areas: teaching and learning science. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 52 (2), 155-165.
- Goble, R. (2010). Reading with your pen: helping students interact with text. *Classroom Notes*, April, 6-11.

- Grellet, F. (1981). Reading and reading comprehension. In *Developing reading skills: a practical guide to reading comprehension exercises* (pp. 3-10). Retrieved from <http://books.google.com/books/>
- Hirsh, K. & Koehler, E. (2011). Resolving the quiet crisis: reading apprenticeships in middle and high schools. *School Library Monthly*, XXVII (4), 34-36.
- Kamil, M., Mosenthal, P., Pearson, D., & Barr, R (Eds.). (2014). Trends in reading research in the United States: changing intellectual currents over three decades. In *Handbook of Reading Research, Volume 3* (pp. 42-53). Retrieved from <https://books.google.com/books/>
- Kirby, J. (2007, September). Comprehension: Its nature and development. Retrieved from <http://www.literacyencyclopedia.ca/>
- Liu, Keming. (2006). Annotation as an index to critical writing. *Urban Education*, 2: 41, 192-207.
- Monte-Sano, C. (2008). Qualities of historical writing instruction: a comparative case study of two teachers' practices. *American Educational Research Journal*, 45 (4), 1045-1079.
- Ngovo, B. (1999). Study strategies for narrative texts: PORPE and annotation. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 23 (2), 24-28.
- Nordell, S. (2009). Learning how to learn: A model for teaching students learning strategies. *Boiscene*, 35 (1), 35-42.
- Pardo, L. (2004). What every teacher needs to know about comprehension. *The Reading Teacher*. 58 (3), 272-279.
- Porter-O'Donnell, C. (2004). Beyond the yellow highlighter: teaching annotation skills to improve reading comprehension. *English Journal*, 93, 82-89.
- RAND Reading Study Group. (2002). Reading for understanding: toward an R & D program in reading comprehension. Santa Monica, CA: Author.

Strode, S. & Walters, K. (1991). Two studies on the effects of annotation training on college students. Paper presented at the The College Reading Association Conference, Crystal City, VA.

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: READING HABITS SURVEY

### English 10 Reading Survey

1. Circle the description that best fits you:

- a. I am a good reader, I love to read, and I have little trouble reading materials for classes.
- b. I don't really enjoy reading, but I have little trouble reading materials for classes.
- c. I love to read, but I have some difficulty reading materials for classes.
- d. I do not like to read, and I have difficulty reading materials for classes.

Please circle only one.

	<b>D</b> =DISAGREE	<b>SD</b> =SLIGHTLY DISAGREE	<b>SA</b> =SLIGHTLY AGREE	<b>A</b> =AGREE
2. I read a lot.		SD D	A SA	
3. It takes me a long time to read a book.		SD D	A SA	
4. I hate reading.		SD D	A SA	
5. I have better things to do than read.		SD D	A SA	
6. I seldom read except when I have to for school.		SD D	A SA	
7. I remember most of what I read.		SD D	A SA	
8. When I read for school, I usually take notes.		SD D	A SA	
9. I would rather someone just tell me information so I won't have to read to get it.			SD D	A SA

10. I take notes using the following methods (check all that apply and write in any method not listed).

- Annotating (taking notes within the margins of a book)
- Using post-in notes
- Highlighting important information.
- Writing important information in a notebook.
- I never take notes when I read.

11. When I read a text for school, I often (check all that apply)

- Re-read sections I don't understand.
- Make predictions about what might happen next.
- Ask myself questions about my reading.
- Make connections to other books or ideas or movies.
- Annotate the text or use post-it notes to help me remember what I've read.
- Stop at points and try to remember what I've just read.
- Skip parts that are confusing.
- Stop reading if the material is too difficult.
- Look up unfamiliar words that I can't figure out from the context.
- Stop and summarize key ideas or passages.
- Quickly skim chapter(s) to get the reading done.
- Notice when I'm not paying attention.
- Always try to understand what I am reading.
- Visualize (make mental pictures of what I'm reading)

## APPENDIX B: ANNOTATION USER'S GUIDE BOOKMARK

**ANNOTATION BOOKMARK**  
*A Guide to Text Annotation*

---

*CONVERSE WITH THE TEXT*

---

- **Track**
  - Pronouns with arrows to note to whom pronoun refers
  - Themes or motifs
- **Ask questions (?)**
  - What is the author trying to say?
  - What can I infer?
  - What does this mean?
- **Make Comments on:**
  - Actions/development of character. How/why does he change?
  - Relationships (between characters, changes in)
  - What intrigues, impresses, amuses, shocks, puzzles, disturbs, repulses, aggravates, etc.
- **Make connections**
  - Between ideas, to other texts, to the world.
  - Between characters or previous chapters.
  - Between the title and action (meaning)

- Express agreement or disagreement.
- Interpret or analyze passages.
- Summarize key events.
- Make predictions.
- Explain chunks of text.
- Note revelations, confusions, or points you want to discuss.
- Define words or allusions

**Annotate the author's use language:**

- Effect of word choices (diction)
- Tone of speaker/author
- Significance/suggestions of allusions
- Point of view/effect reliability of narrator
- Repetition of words, phrases, or effect of sentence structure.
- Narrative pace, sequence of events, or mood
- Figurative language (irony, symbolism, personification, metaphor, simile, imagery, foreshadowing)
- Contrasts / contradictions / juxtapositions / shifts
- Setting / historical period

**ANNOTATION BOOKMARK**  
*A Guide to Text Annotation*

---

*CONVERSE WITH THE TEXT*

---

- **Track**
  - Pronouns with arrows to note to whom pronoun refers
  - Themes or motifs
- **Ask questions (?)**
  - What is the author trying to say?
  - What can I infer?
  - What does this mean?
- **Make Comments on:**
  - Actions/development of character. How/why does he change?
  - Relationships (between characters, changes in)
  - What intrigues, impresses, amuses, shocks, puzzles, disturbs, repulses, aggravates, etc.
- **Make connections**
  - Between ideas, to other texts, to the world.
  - Between characters or previous chapters.
  - Between the title and action (meaning)

- Express agreement or disagreement.
- Interpret or analyze passages.
- Summarize key events.
- Make predictions.
- Explain chunks of text.
- Note revelations, confusions, or points you want to discuss.
- Define words or allusions

**Annotate the author's use language:**

- Effect of word choices (diction)
- Tone of speaker/author
- Significance/suggestions of allusions
- Point of view/effect reliability of narrator
- Repetition of words, phrases, or effect of sentence structure.
- Narrative pace, sequence of events, or mood
- Figurative language (irony, symbolism, personification, metaphor, simile, imagery, foreshadowing)
- Contrasts / contradictions / juxtapositions / shifts
- Setting / historical period

APPENDIX C: STUDENTS' ANNOTATION SAMPLES

SAMPLE 1 (INDEPENDENT READER)

Darnay's Motivation

Chapter 24, "The Loadstone Rock"

After reading Gabelle's letter, Darnay decides to return to France. What motivates this decision? Closely read and annotate the passage below, using the questions as a guide. After you read and annotate, you will take the quiz you just took again, and we will discuss Darnay's dilemma. You will turn in your annotations at the end of class.

1. How would you characterize Darnay's reaction to Gabelle's letter?
2. Why does Darnay indicate that he never went back to France to settle his affairs?
3. Why is he drawn to France even though he knows the risks? Or, does he know the risks?
4. In this last paragraph, how does Darnay imagine his intentions with regard to his estate will be received in France?
5. What connections, if any, can you make to the idea of "resurrection" or "recalling to life"?

Prison of Abbaye, Paris<sup>1</sup>  
June 21, 1792.

'MONSIEUR HERETOFORE THE MARQUIS.

*'After having long been in danger of my life at the hands of the village, I have been seized, with great violence and indignity, and brought a long journey on foot to Paris. On the road I have suffered a great deal. Nor is that all; my house has been destroyed—razed to the ground. The crime for which I am imprisoned, Monsieur heretofore the Marquis, and for which I shall be summoned before the tribunal, and shall lose my life (without your so generous help), is, they tell me, treason against the majesty of the people, in that I have acted against them for an emigrant. It is in vain I represent that I have acted for them, and not against, according to your commands. It is in vain I represent that, before the sequestration of emigrant property, I had remitted the imposts they had ceased to pay; that I had collected no rent; that I had had recourse to no process. The only response is, that I have acted for an emigrant, and where is that emigrant? Ah! most gracious Monsieur heretofore the Marquis, where is that emigrant? I cry in my sleep where is he? I demand of Heaven, will he not come to deliver me? No answer. Ah Monsieur heretofore the Marquis, I send my desolate cry across the sea, hoping it may perhaps reach your ears through the great bank of Telson known at Paris! For the love of Heaven, of justice, of generosity, of the honour of your noble name, I supplicate you, Monsieur heretofore the Marquis, to succour and release me. My fault is, that I have been true to you. Oh Monsieur heretofore the Marquis, I pray you be you true to me! From this prison here of horror, whence I every hour tend nearer and nearer to destruction, I send you, Monsieur heretofore the Marquis, the assurance of my dolorous and unhappy service.*

*[Your afflicted, Gabelle.]*

*destruction* → indignity, and brought a long journey on foot to Paris. On the road I have suffered a great deal. Nor is that all; my house has been destroyed—razed to the ground. The crime for which I am imprisoned, Monsieur heretofore the Marquis, and for which I shall be summoned before the tribunal, and shall lose my life (without your so generous help), is, they tell me, treason against the majesty of the people, in that I have acted against them for an emigrant. It is in vain I represent that I have acted for them, and not against, according to your commands. It is in vain I represent that, before the sequestration of emigrant property, I had remitted the imposts they had ceased to pay; that I had collected no rent; that I had had recourse to no process. The only response is, that I have acted for an emigrant, and where is that emigrant? Ah! most gracious Monsieur heretofore the Marquis, where is that emigrant? I cry in my sleep where is he? I demand of Heaven, will he not come to deliver me? No answer. Ah Monsieur heretofore the Marquis, I send my desolate cry across the sea, hoping it may perhaps reach your ears through the great bank of Telson known at Paris! For the love of Heaven, of justice, of generosity, of the honour of your noble name, I supplicate you, Monsieur heretofore the Marquis, to succour and release me. My fault is, that I have been true to you. Oh Monsieur heretofore the Marquis, I pray you be you true to me! From this prison here of horror, whence I every hour tend nearer and nearer to destruction, I send you, Monsieur heretofore the Marquis, the assurance of my dolorous and unhappy service.

*how does he* → Telson known at Paris! For the love of Heaven, of justice, of generosity, of the honour of your noble name, I supplicate you, Monsieur heretofore the Marquis, to succour and release me. My fault is, that I have been true to you. Oh Monsieur heretofore the Marquis, I pray you be you true to me! From this prison here of horror, whence I every hour tend nearer and nearer to destruction, I send you, Monsieur heretofore the Marquis, the assurance of my dolorous and unhappy service.

*assist in times of hardship* → [Your afflicted, Gabelle.]

*seems to write Darnay* → [Your afflicted, Gabelle.]

*feel guilty* → [Your afflicted, Gabelle.]

*painful* → [Your afflicted, Gabelle.]

The latent uneasiness in Darnay's mind was roused to vigorous life by this letter. The peril of an old servant and a good one, whose only crime was fidelity to himself and his family, stared him so reproachfully in the face, that, as he walked to and fro in the Temple considering what to do, he almost hid his face from the passersby. He knew very well, that in his horror of the deed which had culminated the bad deeds and bad reputation of the old family house, in his resentful suspicions of his uncle, and in the aversion with which his conscience regarded the crumbling fabric that he was supposed to uphold, he had acted imperfectly. He knew very well, that in his love for Lucie, his renunciation of his social place, though by no means new to his own mind, had been hurried and incomplete. He knew that he ought to have systematically worked it out and supervised it, and that he had meant to do it, and that it had never been done.

*hidden (dormant)* → The latent uneasiness in Darnay's mind was roused to vigorous life by this letter. The peril of an old servant and a good one, whose only crime was fidelity to himself and his family, stared him so reproachfully in the face, that, as he walked to and fro in the Temple considering what to do, he almost hid his face from the passersby. He knew very well, that in his horror of the deed which had culminated the bad deeds and bad reputation of the old family house, in his resentful suspicions of his uncle, and in the aversion with which his conscience regarded the crumbling fabric that he was supposed to uphold, he had acted imperfectly. He knew very well, that in his love for Lucie, his renunciation of his social place, though by no means new to his own mind, had been hurried and incomplete. He knew that he ought to have systematically worked it out and supervised it, and that he had meant to do it, and that it had never been done.

*is this referring to Telson's?* → The latent uneasiness in Darnay's mind was roused to vigorous life by this letter. The peril of an old servant and a good one, whose only crime was fidelity to himself and his family, stared him so reproachfully in the face, that, as he walked to and fro in the Temple considering what to do, he almost hid his face from the passersby. He knew very well, that in his horror of the deed which had culminated the bad deeds and bad reputation of the old family house, in his resentful suspicions of his uncle, and in the aversion with which his conscience regarded the crumbling fabric that he was supposed to uphold, he had acted imperfectly. He knew very well, that in his love for Lucie, his renunciation of his social place, though by no means new to his own mind, had been hurried and incomplete. He knew that he ought to have systematically worked it out and supervised it, and that he had meant to do it, and that it had never been done.

*left unfinished affair out of resentment* → reputation of the old family house, in his resentful suspicions of his uncle, and in the aversion with which his conscience regarded the crumbling fabric that he was supposed to uphold, he had acted imperfectly. He knew very well, that in his love for Lucie, his renunciation of his social place, though by no means new to his own mind, had been hurried and incomplete. He knew that he ought to have systematically worked it out and supervised it, and that he had meant to do it, and that it had never been done.

*rejection* → mind, had been hurried and incomplete. He knew that he ought to have systematically worked it out and supervised it, and that he had meant to do it, and that it had never been done.

*know what he left loose end?* → mind, had been hurried and incomplete. He knew that he ought to have systematically worked it out and supervised it, and that he had meant to do it, and that it had never been done.

The happiness of his own chosen English home, the necessity of being always actively employed, the swift changes and troubles of the time which had followed on one another so fast, that the events of this week annihilated the immature plans of last week, and the events of the week following made all new again; he knew very well, that to the force of these circumstances he had yielded:—not without disquiet, but still without

*what's changed all of his plans?* → The happiness of his own chosen English home, the necessity of being always actively employed, the swift changes and troubles of the time which had followed on one another so fast, that the events of this week annihilated the immature plans of last week, and the events of the week following made all new again; he knew very well, that to the force of these circumstances he had yielded:—not without disquiet, but still without

*anxiety* → still without

<sup>1</sup> Prison of the Abbaye was a prison in Paris that held many aristocrats during the French Revolution.

SAMPLE 1 (DEPENDENT READER)

continuous and accumulating resistance. That he had watched the times for a time of action, and that they had shifted and struggled until the time had gone by, and the nobility were trooping from France by every highway and byway, and their property was in course of confiscation and destruction, and their very names were blotting out, was as well known to himself as it could be to any new authority in France that might impeach him for it.

Clear conscience

← But, he had oppressed no man, he had imprisoned no man; he was so far from having harshly exacted payment of his dues, that he had relinquished them of his own will, thrown himself on a world with no favour in it, won his own private place there, and earned his own bread. Monsieur Gabelle had held the impoverished and involved estate on written instructions, to spare the people, to give them what little there was to give—such fuel as the heavy creditors would let them have in the winter, and such produce as could be saved from the same grip in the summer—and no doubt he had put the fact in plea and proof, for his own safety, so that it could not but appear now.

This favoured the desperate resolution Charles Darnay had begun to make, that he would go to Paris.

home-land

Internal fight

Yes. Like the mariner in the old story<sup>2</sup>, the winds and streams had driven him within the influence of the Loadstone Rock, and it was drawing him to itself, and he must go. Everything that arose before his mind drifted him on, faster and faster, more and more steadily, to the terrible attraction. His latent uneasiness had been, that bad aims were being worked out in his own unhappy land by bad instruments, and that he who could not fail to know that he was better than they, was not there, trying to do something to stay bloodshed, and assert the claims of mercy and humanity. With this uneasiness half stifled, and half reproaching him, he had been brought to the pointed comparison of himself with the brave old gentleman in whom duty was so strong; upon that comparison (injurious to himself) had instantly followed the sneers of Monseigneur, which had stung him bitterly, and those of Stryver, which above all were coarse and galling, for old reasons. Upon those, had followed Gabelle's letter: the appeal of an innocent prisoner, in danger of death, to his justice, honour, and good name.

His resolution was made. He must go to Paris.

final landmark?

Yes. The Loadstone Rock was drawing him, and he must sail on, until he struck. He knew of no rock; he saw hardly any danger. The intention, with which he had done what he had done, even although he had left it incomplete, presented it before him in an aspect that would be gratefully acknowledged in France on his presenting himself to assert it. Then, that glorious vision of doing good, which is so often the sanguine mirage of so many good minds, arose before him, and he even saw himself in the illusion with some influence to guide this raging Revolution that was running so fearfully wild.

<sup>2</sup> In Coleridge's poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," the mariner detains a man and forces him to listen to his tale of woe; reference to the old mariner suggests a person or idea that is insistent and determined to hold one's attention.

APPENDIX D: STUDENT PROFESSIONAL ANNOTATION EXAMPLE

*A Tale of Two Cities Annotations*

As the ancient clerk deliberately folded and superscribed the note<sup>1</sup>, Mr. Cruncher, after surveying him in silence until he came to the blotting-paper stage<sup>2</sup>, remarked:

'I suppose they'll be trying forgeries this morning?'

'Treason!'

'That's quartering,' said Jerry. 'Barbarous!'<sup>3</sup>

'It is the law,' remarked the ancient clerk, turning his surprised spectacles upon him. 'It is the law.'<sup>4</sup>

'It's hard in the law to spile<sup>5</sup> a man, I think. It's hard enough to kill him, but it's wery hard to spile him, sir.'

'Not at all,' retained the ancient clerk. 'Speak well of the law. Take care of your chest and voice, my good friend, and leave the law to take care of itself. I give you that advice.'<sup>6</sup>

'It's the damp, sir, what settles on my chest and voice,' said Jerry. 'I leave you to judge what a damp way of earning a living mine is.'<sup>7</sup>

'Well, well,' said the old clerk; 'we all have our various ways of gaining a livelihood. Some of us have damp ways, and some of us have dry ways.'<sup>8</sup> Here is the letter. Go along.' (23 lines)

1- Dickens describes the clerk as "ancient" to compare him to the institution of which he is a part; the clerk as is inflexible with his set-in-stone mindset as is the court. The clerk is also rather pompous in his conspicuous authoritative approval of the note; the court is self-important and never questions its authority or right.

2- Blotting-paper is the special, thick paper used to dry excess ink when one is writing with a fountain pen.

3- Jerry's immediate, horrified reaction to the idea of quartering shows kindness for other human beings, whereas the hardened clerk shows no sympathy whatsoever. The irony in this is that the man who feels more compassion is the one who engages in illegal grave-robbing.

4- The clerk here seems shocked that anyone, especially someone as common as Jerry, would dare to question the authority of the court. He repeats, "It is the law," to support the idea of quartering as if the court must be right simply because of its influential authority.

5- As a verb, "to spile" generally means to drive a post or peg into the ground or through an object -- in this case, a man sentenced to death.

6- The clerk gives Jerry a warning not to take issue with authority, perhaps hinting with the phrase "take care of your chest and voice" that those who cause trouble with the court may find themselves in a sticky situation.

7- Jerry defiantly retorts to the clerk's warning saying that the court may judge his illegal activities. His use of the word "judge" almost mocks the court and the phrase "what a damp way of earning a living mine is" suggests that perhaps the clerk's job, while legal, is not so innocent as it seems.

8- The clerk refers to "damp" and "dry" ways of earning a living; he implies that Jerry's way is "damp" -- dark, dirty, and dishonest -- while his is "dry" -- clean and sincere. The irony here is that the reader sees Jerry as the more honest of the two, despite his being a grave robber, because the clerk participates in the harsh business which sends many people to violent punishments.