Mark Up That Text with Your Observations and Thoughts!

As you thoughtfully read and focus on key passages of the novel,

- identify important or striking features,
- notice patterns,
- predict meanings, and
- annotate, or “mark up”, the text to show your observations and thoughts

This kind of practice will help you read more closely and with greater thought and understanding! As you get more practice, you’ll develop your own system. Until then (that means for your summer reading and middle school classroom readings), use the following system. Mark features of the text with a:

🌟 or ⚫ for important events, decisions, or thoughts expressed by the author or a character
✨ to highlight confusing or puzzling ideas or events
✔ or ⬜ to identify a literary technique used by the author. Notice …

- important, striking, or enchanting words, phrases, and sentences
- sensory images
- figurative language, repetition, sounds, and unusual punctuation

In the margins, write brief comments. If the margins are narrow, you may want to use post-it notes. When writing comments, you might …

- Observe what is being said or done
- Define unfamiliar words
- Identify a theme being developed
- Paraphrase or summarize a difficult phrase, sentence or passage
- Describe the effect of an image, sound, or word
- Identify a literary technique
- Infer a character quality
- Ask a thoughtful question or predict an outcome

On the following pages are examples of text that I have annotated. Your observations and thoughts will be different than mine! Hopefully, the examples will help you see how useful and easy it is to mark up text as you observe and think while reading.

Ms. Brewer
Four Skinny Trees

They are the only ones who understand me. I am the only one who understands them. Four skinny trees with skinny necks and pointy elbows like mine. Four who do not belong here but are here. Four raggedy excuses planted by the city. From our room we can hear them, but Nenny just sleeps and doesn't appreciate these things.

Their strength is secret. They send ferocious roots beneath the ground. They grow up and they grow down and grab the earth between their hairy toes and bite the sky with violent teeth and never quit their anger. This is how they keep.

Let one forget his reason for being, they'd all droop like tulips in a glass, each with their arms around the other. Keep, keep, keep, trees say when I sleep. They teach.

When I am too sad and too skinny to keep keeping, when I am a tiny thing against so many bricks, then it is I look at trees. When there is nothing left to look at on this street. Four who grew to despise concrete. Four who reach and do not forget to reach. Four whose only reason is to be and be.

Excerpt taken from The House on Mango Street (1983)
Ralph heard the mockery and hated Jack. The sting of ashes in his eyes, tiredness, fear, enraged him.

"Go on then! We'll wait here."

There was silence.

"Why don't you go? Are you frightened?"

A stain in the darkness, a stain that was Jack, detached itself and began to draw away.

"All right. So long."

The stain vanished. Another took its place.

Ralph felt his knee against something hard and rocked a charred trunk that was edgy to the touch. He felt the sharp cinders that had been bash put against the back of his knee and knew that Roger had sat down. He felt with his hands and lowered himself beside Roger, while the trunk rocked among invisible ashes. Roger, uncommunicative by nature, said nothing. He offered no opinion on the beast nor told Ralph why he had chosen to come on this mad expedition. He simply sat and rocked the trunk gently. Ralph noticed a rapid and infuriating tapping noise and realized that Roger was banging his silly wooden stick against something.

So they sat, the rocking, tapping, impervious Roger and Ralph, humbly, round them the close sky was loaded with stars, save where the mountain punched up a hole of blackness.

There was a slithering noise high above them, the sound of someone taking giant and dangerous strides on rock or ash. Then Jack found them, and was shivering and croaking in a voice they could just recognize as his.

"I saw a thing on top."

They heard him blunder against the trunk which rocked violently. He lay silent for a moment, then muttered.

"Keep a good lookout. It may be following."

A shower of ash pattered round them. Jack sat up.

"I saw a thing bulge on the mountain."

"You only imagined it," said Ralph shakily, "because nothing would bulge. Not any sort of creature."

Roger spoke; they jumped, for they had forgotten him.

"A frog."

Jack giggled and shuddered.