

Collaborative Annotation: For Any Text and Any Class

Collaborative annotation is a literacy strategy that engages students in critical reading, critical thinking, writing and collaboration all in one activity. It has become one of my go-to strategies because it can be used with literary, informational or visual text, it can be used with any grade level and it is challenging in the effort it requires of students but accessible in the options it provides them.



Erin Schwane is a District 1 director for WCTE. She teaches at New Berlin West High School.

Here's how it works:

- 1** Identify passages from a text students have already read or from something new. Copy and paste the passages into the center of an otherwise blank piece of paper. You may want to number or letter the passages for later reference or include page numbers from the original text.
- 2** Divide students into groups and have each group sit in a circle. Group size should match the number of passages you've selected. Mixed ability groups work well for this activity, but similar ability groups also work. Have each member of the group select a writing utensil in a different color.
- 3** Distribute a passage to each person, making sure the group as a whole has all of the passages you've selected. Direct each student to write one's name on the top of the paper in front of him/her.
- 4** Either before the next step, or before step two, remind or instruct students about what it means to annotate. Annotations are margin notes and can include: reactions, questions, connections, predictions, definitions, summary, or clarifications. Make the list of annotation strategies visible for students so they can refer to it as they work.
- 5** Set a timer for an appropriate length of time and give the students these directions: Read and annotate the passage in front of you. Your challenge is to work for the entire time, adding as much as you can until the timer sounds. Although you are sitting in a group, you are annotating independently and silently. Your collaboration will occur through writing and after the first pass.
- 6** When the timer sounds, students should stop writing and pass their papers to the left. Then, the process is repeated, starting with a student adding one's name to the legend at the top of the page. After the first round, tell students that in addition to adding original annotations, they should address the annotations that are already on the page, such as answering a question or responding to someone's reaction. You may want to add time to the timer after each pass because there is more to read each round. The activity is concluded when all passages have gone around the circle.

Depending on your passages, students and schedule, this activity can take an entire class period. While it can stand alone as outlined above, here are some extension activities that make use of the richly annotated passages:

- After completing a full series of collaborative annotation, have the group answer a synthesis question based on the combined information from the passages. A question might be as simple as "What did we learn from all these readings?" or more specific such as "Based on these readings, what traits best describe Atticus Finch and why?"
- Re-group students such that all students within a group have the same passage. Then, have the group summarize its passage and identify the three or four most interesting annotations from among their papers. Go around the room having each group share its summary and selected annotations. I like to have the groups identify whose annotations they read (made clear through the color-coded legend at the top of each sheet), as a way of recognizing these students' work.
- Allow students to use the passages for another assignment based on the reading such as a graphic organizer, quiz or writing prompt.

Sample on next page

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Dominic
Kaitlin
Jack
Korlee
Riley

I don't like how Aunt Alexandra is stereotyping the Cunninghams

"The thing is, you can scrub Walter Cunningham till he shines, you can put him in shoes and a new suit, but he'll never be like Jem. Besides, there's a drinking streak in that family a mile wide, Finch women aren't interested in that sort of people."

"Aun-ty," said Jem, "she ain't nine yet."

"She may as well learn it now."

I think Aunt Alexandra expects too much out of Scout

Aunt Alexandra had spoken. I was reminded vividly of the last time she had put her foot down. I never knew why. It was when I was absorbed with plans to visit Calpurnia's house—I was curious, interested; I wanted to be her "company," to see how she lived, who her friends were. I might as well have wanted to see the other side of the moon. This time the tactics were different, but Aunt Alexandra's aim was the same. Perhaps this was why she had come to live with us—to help us choose our friends. I would hold her off as long as I could: "If they're good folks, then why can't I be nice to Walter?"

Walter will never be different no matter what.

I agree, Scout has 9 friends to be friends with anyone
I think they should get to choose their own friends, not have them chosen for them

"I didn't say not to be nice to him. You should be friendly and polite to him, you should be gracious to everybody, dear. But you don't have to invite him home."

"What if he was kin to us, Aunty?"

"The fact is that he is not kin to us, but if he were, my answer would be the same."

Aunt Alexandra is very prejudiced toward other social classes!

I think not sometimes she can be sympathetic to someone who she sees as lower than her like when she cried over Birt's death

"Aunty," Jem spoke up, "Atticus says you can choose your friends but you sho' can't choose your family, an' they're still kin to you no matter whether you acknowledge 'em or not, and it makes you look right silly when you don't."

Atticus has a different perspective on others than Aunt Alexandra

"That's your father all over again," said Aunt Alexandra, "and I still say that Jean Louise will not invite Walter Cunningham to this house. If he were her double first cousin once removed he would still not be received in this house unless he comes to see Atticus on business. Now that is that."

Aunt Alexandra is very judgemental!

She had said Indeed Not, but this time she would give her reasons: "But I want to play with Walter, Aunty, why can't I?"

Aunt Alexandra doesn't want Scout hanging out with Walter because of him and how he acts

She took off her glasses and stared at me. "I'll tell you why," she said. "Because—he—is—trash, that's why you can't play with him. I'll not have you around him, picking up his habits and learning Lord-knows-what. You're enough of a problem to your father as it is."

I don't think Scout is a problem to Atticus

Scout is not a problem to her father

I don't think it is about what Walter does, but it is about what his family has done

I think Aunt Alexandra doesn't want Scout playing with Walter cuz she knows more secrets about the Cunninghams

Text to self-I had a parent/guardian tell me not to be friends with someone because of their actions

what does Walter do that is so bad?

I don't think he does anything wrong I just think that Aunt Alexandra is stereotyping