Text Coding

Good readers often have ways of marking or coding text they want to remember. Maybe they use a yellow highlighter, underline or box words, or put marks in the margins to flag questions, exclamations, or wonderings as they read. Marking up the text may be the most simple, practical, and widespread tool that regular readers use. In school, however, students are often discouraged from making marks in their books. In fact, the more challenging the material, the less likely that kids will be allowed to use this effective tool for enhancing comprehension.

When books or other materials can be marked up, it's important for students to have a useful set of response codes. This is especially helpful with dense, content-loaded texts where every word matters, like poetry or fact-filled nonfiction books. A version of a text-marking system called the Interactive Notation System for Effective Reading and Thinking (INSERT) is the focus of this week’s literacy tip.

The students at Best Practice High School in Chicago made the modifications to the coding system below:

√ Confirms what you thought
X Contradicts what you thought
? Raises a question
?? Confuses you
* Seems important
! Is new or interesting

If a word

Gets repeated
Seems important
Is unknown

Box it: [Word]

Adapted from Harvey Daniels
Mini-Lessons for Literature Circles