

## Mental Toolkit Portfolio

At the end of this unit, you will be compiling a portfolio that shows your mental toolkit of cognitive strategies in action. It will contain:

- Self-Selected Annotation
- Class-wide Annotation
- Mental Toolkit Representation
- Conversation Journal
- Self-Assessment
- In-class Tasks

Your *self-selected annotation* will be a piece of fiction, a poem, or a piece of non-fiction that you've chosen to annotate. What does that mean? Well, you will pass in a copy – either printed or hand-written – that you've annotated with cognitive strategies. You will show me how you've used your mental toolkit to understand what's going on in it. Your piece should be at least 3-4 paragraphs long (and I mean serious paragraphs! Not a line of dialogue!) or, if it's a poem, it should be at least one page long. We'll be practicing annotation in class, so don't worry too much about that. Your piece should include at least eight examples of different cognitive strategies, and *must include analyzing author's craft and reflection or evaluation*.

Throughout this unit, you will be working in small groups and performing *in-class tasks* individually – practicing what you've already done in your small groups. I will always ask you to save your pieces for your portfolio, so be sure to keep them on hand so you can include them in your final project.

At the end of the unit, you will be asked to fill out a *self-assessment* and to give yourself a final grade. Because this unit is largely about encouraging you to start thinking about yourself as a reader and learner, honestly and carefully filling out your self-assessment – genuinely thinking about your strengths and weaknesses and how you plan to grow – is a very important part of the portfolio. You will receive a copy of this later in the unit.

## Creating Your Mental Toolkit

Throughout this unit, you will be developing and refining your own mental toolkit of reading strategies. While you may already be using some of them when you're reading, it's still useful to stop and think about how you're reading and how you're making sense out of what you're reading. Part of this unit involves creating a representation of your **mental toolkit**. This representation could be

- a sheet with sentence starters ("Tapping Prior Knowledge: This reminds me of...")
- a list of cognitive strategies with definitions
- pictures of tools, labelled with cognitive strategies
- a list of cognitive strategies with examples of when to use them
- a graphic organizer of types of strategies and when to use them in the reading process

Your mental toolkit could also be something not listed. It is entirely up to you to create your toolkit in the way that makes the most sense for you. You should aim to make something that you will be able to refer back to when you're working on your annotations at the end of the unit -- and, hopefully, whenever you're engaged in some serious and deep reading!

Your mental toolkit should meet the following criteria (the rest is up to you):

- fits on one page of 8x11.5" paper
- includes all cognitive strategies from the unit
  - tapping prior knowledge
  - asking questions
  - predicting
  - summarizing
  - forming interpretations
  - monitoring
  - clarifying
  - revising meaning
  - analyzing author's craft
  - reflecting
  - evaluating
- demonstrates that you understand what each cognitive strategy is and when to use it
- contains original work/examples (not just copied from handouts)

## Conversation Journal

A big part of this unit will be thinking about yourself as a reader -- figuring out how you make sense of stories, and how you might start using these cognitive strategies in the future. To that end, you will be making an entry in a conversation journal every week. A conversation journal is a journal in which you reflect on what you've learned that week, explore new ideas or connections to things you've read or learned about before, and just generally think through what we've talked about and your reactions.

Once you finish your journal entry, you will hand it in and I will respond with comments and questions. Part of your final project will be gathering up all of your journal entries and commenting back to me -- continuing the conversation.

Your journal will look something like this:

January 23rd, 2014
<p>This week we learned about summarizing and forming interpretations. I'd never thought about how they fit together: first you understand what is actually happening in a story and then you think about what's going on in a bigger sense. This reminds me of watching <i>The Matrix</i>. At first, I was just really caught up in figuring out what was happening - it was really confusing! And as soon as I finished watching it, I knew I had to watch it again to really <u>get</u> it. That's like summarizing (the facts) and interpreting (the big idea). They both need to go together to make stories make sense.</p>
<p>Good point! I remember having a similar reaction the first time I watched <i>The Matrix</i>. I think that, whenever you read or watch a complex story (especially one so focused on thoughts and ideas), it requires a balancing act: you need all of the information in order to get at the core of the idea, which is really the point. But if you're only collecting the bare facts, you're right: you'll need a second viewing/reading to really "get it." Do you think there's a connection between forming an interpretation and revising meaning/monitoring?</p>
<p>I think that interpreting a story takes place first. It's like your first guess. And then when you keep reading, you start looking to see if your first guess is true. That's monitoring - you're checking on to see if you've got it right, and if you find parts that don't fit in, you have to change your interpretation (revising meaning). I think that stories about ideas make you do more of this, because it's harder to find the big idea in a story than just to follow who people are or what they're doing.</p>