

Cornell Notes: Taking Notes on Literature

The following elements, when incorporated into your notes on literature, can greatly enhance your appreciation of the meaning of a work, the devices authors use to achieve meaning and the world which may have shaped the author's work. This kind of information, integrated with your own ideas about a work can serve as an excellent foundation for the study and writing about the work. When you read a novel, consider including the following items in your notes as applicable. Include name of author, title of work, and page number references for later review as needed.

Title of work	Speculate about the meaning of the title: why might the writer have chosen that particular title? Look for references to the title elsewhere in the work.
Publication date	What world events are associated with the time of publication? Is there a correlation between the time of publication and the work itself?
Author information	Note what you know about the author including biographical information, familiar themes in her/his work, specific intent for the work you are reading.
Setting	Speculate about the significance of the time and/or place in which the work is set.
Characters	List or summarize such things as the qualities, mannerisms, personalities and appearances that define each significant character; speculate on motivations of characters; note whether characterization appears to be direct or indirect (include passages as examples); keep track of changes in characters; speculate on the author's intent for characterizing as he/she does.
Point of View	Note who is telling the story; speculate about the reason for and/or effect of a particular point of view.
Plot	Note events that seem significant; identify rising action, climax, and resolution.
Conflict(s)	Identify the conflict(s) that are central to the work.
Theme	Work toward developing general ideas about the author's intended meaning and/or specific statements of the

	author's central ideas.
Symbols	Keep track of symbols that seem to represent larger ideas.
Images	Note images that appear significant or carefully crafted, or that stand out to you.
Repetitions	Keep track of such things as repeated words, images, ideas, names that may be important.
Allusions	Be alert for references to other literary works, cultural ideas, biblical or mythological figures.
Diction	Note specific words which seem significant or that are unfamiliar and need to be defined.
Quotes/Passages	Include portions of the text which seem important, interesting and/or confusing.

Cornell Notes: Reading a Novel
Student Sample

I am Smart Student
English IV Honors
June 13, 2009

Chapter 1 Cry, the Beloved Country

Where does the story take place?

How is the land contrasted in the first chapter?

Prediction: Why did the book start with this contrast?

Significant passage (page 34): "They are valleys of old men and old women, of mothers and children. The men are away, the young men and the girls are away. The soil cannot keep them any more."

South Africa

- Rich, matted grass and hills*
 - Wet*
 - Streams*
 - Well-tended*
 - Not too many cattle feeding*
 - Not too many fires*
 - Stand barefoot—safe*
 - "Ground is holy."*
 - Keep it; guard it—guards and protects men.*
- Vs.*
- Rich green hills break down in the valleys*
 - Red and bare*
 - Dry*
 - Too many cattle feeding*
 - Too many fires have burned*
 - Coarse and sharp. Wear shoes—not safe for bare feet*
 - Not kept or guarded—no longer keeps men.*

This book is going to contrast the lives of different people and different places. It will be about destruction.

This passage is important because it suggests something about the relationship between the land and the people. It shows how people have abandoned the land or have been driven from the land—how it can't sustain them anymore.

Summary

This first chapter is short and has a lot of description. It makes me want to draw a picture of it and to create a map to show the geography. No specific characters are introduced in Chapter one—very weird!