

DAY xx/xx/xx

Annotating & Interpreting Sonny's Blues

Complete the following steps with your group:

1. Assign each person in your group a highlighting color. Use a format similar to the one I've used below.
 - a. Name
 - b. Name
 - c. Name
 - d. Name
2. Read your assigned passage out loud **together** (1 person may volunteer to do this, or you can do it popcorn-style).
3. For about 5 min, read the passage again **independently**. As each person reads, they should highlight **TWO** elements that stand out to them (see [this handout](#) for ideas about what to highlight).
 - a. Since you can't overlap highlighting colors, try to choose unique elements from your other group members.
4. **Together**, go through the highlighted elements one-by-one to discuss why they're interesting.
 - a. **First**, the original highlighter will explain why they selected the item.
 - b. **Second**, at LEAST one other person in the group will respond by:
 - i. Suggesting another interpretation or idea
 - ii. Add context or elaborate on the original comment
 - iii. Connecting it to another element in the text
 - iv. Some other form of reaction that goes beyond "I disagree"
 - c. **Third**, once you've discussed the highlighted element, use the **comment** function to add an annotation to the passage, summarizing what you discussed (these do not need to be well-crafted or complete sentences—just get your thoughts down).



5. **Discuss** the following questions together. You do *not* need to record your responses, but if we have time at the end of class, you may be asked to share which aspect of your discussion resonated or was most productive for you.
- a. How do the observations and interpretations you made fit together (do they create a pattern? Do they contain contradictions?)?
 - b. How does this passage relate to the rest of the story?
 - c. What memory “tools” that we discussed last time does Baldwin use in this passage? What makes them effective?
 - d. What is Baldwin saying about the music he describes? Music in general?

Annotate the following passage from “Sonny’s Blues,” by James Baldwin.

It was strange, suddenly, to watch, though I had been seeing these meetings all my life. So, of course, had everybody else down there. Yet, they paused and watched and listened and I stood still at the window. "'Tis the old ship of Zion," they sang, and the sister with the tambourine kept a steady, jangling beat, "it has rescued many a thousand!" Not a soul under the sound of their voices was hearing this song for the first time, not one of them had been rescued. Nor had they seen much in the way of rescue work being done around them. Neither did they especially believe in the holiness of the three sisters and the brother, they knew too much about them, knew where they lived, and how. The woman with the tambourine, whose voice dominated the air, whose face was bright with joy, was divided by very little from the woman who stood watching her, a cigarette between her heavy, chapped lips, her hair a cuckoo's nest, her face scarred and swollen from many beatings, and her black eyes glittering like coal. Perhaps they both knew this, which was why, when, as rarely, they addressed each other, they addressed each other as Sister. As the singing filled the air the watching, listening faces underwent a change, the eyes focusing on something within; the music seemed to soothe a poison out of them; and time seemed, nearly, to fall away from the sullen, belligerent, battered faces, as though they were fleeing back to their first condition, while dreaming of their last. The barbecue cook half shook his head and smiled, and dropped his cigarette and disappeared into his joint. A man fumbled in his pockets for change and stood holding it in his hand impatiently, as though he had just remembered a pressing appointment further up the avenue. He looked furious. Then I saw Sonny, standing on the edge of the crowd. He was carrying a wide, flat notebook with a green cover, and it made him look, from where I was standing, almost like a schoolboy. The coppery sun brought out the copper in his skin,

he was very faintly smiling, standing very still. Then the singing stopped, the tambourine turned into a collection plate again. The furious man dropped in his coins and vanished, so did a couple of the women, and Sonny dropped some change in the plate, looking directly at the woman with a little smile. He started across the avenue, toward the house. He has a slow, loping walk, something like the way Harlem hipsters walk, only he's imposed on this his own half-beat. I had never really noticed it before.