The “Thinking Notes” technique was developed by the Southern Poverty Law Center’s “Teaching Tolerance” project and based on metacognitive studies by, notably, Linda Baker and Ann L. Brown.

**What?**

Thinking notes are text annotations (highlights, underlines or symbols made on the text or in the margins) that document student thinking during reading. Depending on how you structure the task, these notes can indicate agreement, objection, confusion or other relevant reactions to the text.

**When?**

During reading

**Why?**

Thinking notes help develop students’ meta-cognitive skills. Meta-cognition has been defined as self-knowledge of and control over one’s own thinking and learning activities. Students who monitor their thinking are more effective readers and learners.

Not only do thinking notes aid comprehension, they also illustrate that reading is a process with a purpose. Students must comprehend what they read before they can answer text-dependent questions and integrate textual evidence into their writing. Referring back to thinking notes also aids meta-cognition by prompting students to reflect on textual elements that challenged, troubled or stood out to them.

Thinking notes also offer clues about which parts of the text perplexed or resonated with your students. Take note of what students mark up and why; these observations can generate ideas for discussion and provide insight about supports students may need.
**How?**

Thinking notes can be used in a number of ways, incorporated into other strategies, and implemented during shared or independent reading. This approach always includes these steps:

Choose the central text. Provide students a copy of the text they can write on. (Sticky notes can substitute when this is not possible.) Establish a system of symbols or cues before reading. Students should go beyond merely highlighting and underlining. Thinking notes are evidence that students have interacted with the text. For example, a question mark can mean, “This would make a good discussion question.” ”MI" might stand for “main idea” and "TT" could mean “text-to-text connection.” See the sample symbols for more ideas. Make calculated decisions about how many symbols to use with a given text based on the text itself, your purpose for reading and your students’ abilities.

Instruct students to make thinking notes during a second read of the text. The second read may be done independently, as a whole class, in pairs or in other groupings. This is the time when students begin to think about the text more deeply and can use these thinking notes in subsequent class discussions and writing assignments.

Note: The first read-through of a text should be done aloud by the teacher or a skilled reader while other students follow along. Students should not be required to make notes or answer questions during this initial read-through. Listening to the text being read aloud ensures that all students have access to the text, improves fluency and allows students to focus on getting the gist of the text.
English language learners

Thinking notes and visual symbols heighten meta-cognitive awareness in English language learners. Model the practice on a Smart board or by placing a clear transparency over the text and marking thinking notes together as you read.

Connection to anti-bias education

Thinking notes invite students to engage with the author and text in a non-threatening and accessible way. The task solicits analysis and critical thinking without setting up the barriers that some students encounter when assigned formal writing and speaking tasks. Marking the text empowers students to say, “I was here and this is what I think or feel about what I’m reading.” Most important are the many ways thinking notes can focus the reader on social justice and anti-bias questions.

Reference:
https://www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources/teaching-strategies/close-and-critical-reading/thinking-notes