

DIALECTICAL JOURNALS

The term “Dialectic” means “the art or practice of arriving at the truth by using conversation involving question and answer.” Think of your dialectical journal as a series of conversations with the texts we read during this course. The process is meant to help you develop a better understanding of the texts we read. Use your journal to incorporate your personal responses to the text, your ideas about the themes we cover and our class discussions. You will find that it is a useful way to process what you’re reading, prepare yourself for group discussion, and gather textual evidence for your Literary Analysis assignments.

PROCEDURE:

- o As you read, choose passages that stand out to you and record them in the left-hand column the chart (*ALWAYS* include page numbers).
- o In the right column, write your response to the text (ideas/insights, questions, reflections, and comments on each passage) in at LEAST 5-10 sentences.
- o You must label your responses using the following codes:
 - o (Q) Question – ask about something in the passage that is unclear
 - o (C) Connect – make a connection to your life, the world, or another text
 - o (P) Predict – anticipate what will occur based on what’s in the passage
 - o (CL) Clarify – answer earlier questions or confirm/disaffirm a prediction
 - o (R) Reflect – think deeply about what the passage means in a broad sense – not just to the characters in the story/author of the article. What conclusions can you draw about the world, about human nature, or just the way things work?
 - o (E) Evaluate - make a judgment about what the author is trying to say

How do I decide what text to record in my journal?

Look for quotes that seem significant, powerful, thought provoking or puzzling. For example, you might record:

- Effective &/or creative use of stylistic or literary devices
- Passages that remind you of your own life or something you’ve seen before
- Structural shifts or turns in the plot
- A passage that makes you realize something you hadn’t seen before
- Examples of patterns: recurring images, ideas, colors, symbols or motifs.
- Passages with confusing language or unfamiliar vocabulary
- Events you find surprising or confusing
- Passages that illustrate a particular character or setting

How do I respond to each text entry?

You can respond to the text in a variety of ways. The most important thing to remember is that your observations should be specific and detailed. You can write as much as you want for each entry. As part of your response, you can analyze the style of the text—reflect on elements like symbols, imagery, metaphors, point of view. Some basic responses are to:

- Raise questions about the beliefs and values implied in the text
- Give your personal reactions to the passage
- Discuss the words, ideas, or actions of the author or character(s)
- Tell what it reminds you of from your own experiences, or write about what it makes you think or feel

- Agree or disagree with a character or the author

To make higher-level responses try the following:

- Analyze the text for use of literary devices (tone, structure, style, imagery)
- Make connections between different characters or events in the text
- Make connections to a different text (or film, song, etc...)
- Discuss the words, ideas, or actions of the author or character(s)
- Consider an event or description from the perspective of a different character
- Analyze a passage and its relationship to the story as a whole

What if I get stuck?

Write about what you like, what you dislike, what seems confusing, what seems unusual, what you think something means, what personal connections you make, what predictions you can pose. Possible sentence lead-ins might begin like:

- I really don't understand this because...
- I really dislike/like this idea because...
- I think the author is trying to say that...
- This passage reminds me of a time in my life when...
- If I were (name of character) at this point I would...
- This part doesn't make sense because...
- This character reminds me of (name of person) because...

When I am writing in my dialectical journal, is there a right and wrong answer?

No! A dialectical journal shows your own thoughts and ideas about the things we read in class. When you write in your journal, you should be as original and creative as you can be. The sky's the limit! Just make sure your responses are well thought out, grammatically correct, detailed, and that you DO NOT repeat codes within the same submission (i.e. you cannot "connect" to more than one chapter per submission).

MODEL:

Quote from Chapter 1	Response
<p>From <i>To Kill A Mockingbird</i></p> <p>"There was no hurry, for there was nowhere to go...nothing to see outside the boundaries of Maycomb County. But it was a time of vague optimism for some of the people: Maycomb Great County had recently been told that it had nothing to fear but fear itself." (21)</p>	<p>(R): Apparently, Maycomb is also a very slow, sleepy town that is pretty isolated from everything else. This seems to be especially true since they only have a "vague" notion of FDR's speech (an allusion to the Depression of the 1930's – must be the era in which the story takes place) and there is "nothing" outside of Maycomb County. I wonder why they see the world this way – maybe people don't travel because of the depression or because that's just not what people did. It is interesting to me that it seems so much like my hometown, except that people in Maycomb have "vague optimism." I feel as if people don't feel optimistic now. I certainly don't know what I am going to do after high school and college. During the Depression, about what did Americans generally have to feel optimistic? They just didn't know any better.</p>

Quote from Chapter 2	Response
<p>From <i>The Things They Carried</i></p> <p>“-they carried like freight trains; they carried it on their backs and shoulders and for all the ambiguities of Vietnam, all the mysteries and unknowns, there was at least the single abiding certainty that they would never be at a loss for things to carry.” (2)</p>	<p>(E): O’Brien chooses to end the first section of the novel with this sentence. He provides excellent visual details of what each soldier in Vietnam would carry for day-to-day fighting. He makes you feel the physical weight of what soldiers have to carry for simple survival. When you combine the emotional weight of loved ones at home, the fear of death, and the responsibility for the men you fight with, with this physical weight, you start to understand what soldiers in Vietnam dealt with every day. This quote sums up the confusion that the men felt about the reasons they were fighting the war, and how they clung to the only certainty – things they had to carry – in a confusing world where normal rules were suspended.</p>