

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 texts, 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 constructed response assignments (essays).

These journals will become your “proof of practice” or “ticket” to participate in our class discussions: it will provide evidence that you have read and thought about the work before entering the class discussion.

PROCEDURE:

- As you read, choose passages that stand out to you and record them in the **left-hand** column of a T-chart (**ALWAYS include page numbers**).
- In the right column, write your response to the text (ideas/insights, questions, reflections, analysis, and comments on each passage)
- Label your responses. The following is a list of **sample** codes:
 - **(CH)** Characterization – Analyze details or dialogue the author gives you to build his/her characters.
 - **(C)** Connect – Make a connection to your life, the world, or another text
 - **(P)** Predict – Anticipate what will occur based on what’s in the passage
 - **(L)** Literary Device – analyze the author’s craft using literary terminology (simile, metaphor, foreshadowing, irony, etc.)
 - **(R)** Reflect – Think deeply about what the passage means in a broad sense – not just to the characters in the story. What conclusions can you draw about the world, about human nature, or just the way things work?
 - **(T)** Theme - Determine the author’s overall message about some aspect of life through a close reading of a passage.
 - **(M)** Mood – Determine the mood (feeling) or tone (attitude) of a scene and explain how that might be important.

Sample Dialectical Journal entry: *Night* by Elie Wiesel

Passages from the text	Pg#	Commentary
<p>"I wanted to return to Sighet to describe to you my death so that you might ready yourselves while there is still time. Life? I no longer care to live. I am alone. But I wanted to come back to warn you. Only no one is listening to me..."</p>	7	<p>(C) This is when the harshness of what was taking place during the Holocaust first hit me in this book. Moishe the Beadle experienced so much terror taking place that he has lost his will to live. How could the Nazis do this to other humans? How could anyone put a fellow human being through this much pain? Moishe feels his only purpose now is to save others from his terrible fate. I can't even imagine what it would be like to have been through so much pain and suffering that I no longer cared if I lived or died.</p>
<p>"'There are eighty of you in the car,' the German officer added. 'If anyone goes missing, you will all be shot, like dogs.'"</p>	24	<p>(L, C) This is just disgusting to me. Humans are being treated like a herd of animals. The prisoners are being compared to dogs (simile)! I do not understand how you can have such disregard for life. The German officer would not even think twice about killing the entire lot of them. He would not care that he just ended eighty lives, some of which would have been children's. I wonder how the officer would have felt if suddenly, the gun had been turned on him.</p>
<p>"The SS seemed more preoccupied, more worried, than usual. To hang a child in front of thousands of onlookers was not a small matter...All eyes were on the child. He was pale, almost calm, but he was biting his lips as he stood in the shadow of the gallows."</p>	64	<p>(C) I cannot imagine what the <i>pipel</i> was thinking as he stood there on the gallows with a noose around his neck. I feel like he was scared since he was biting his lips, but if it were me, I would be crying, shaking, screaming. I also think it's interesting that the SS officer seemed to be worried about hanging a child. I'm sure he had killed several people before (that was part of his job), so why would he feel bad about this child?</p>

CHOOSING PASSAGES FROM THE TEXT:

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

- Effective &/or creative use of literary devices
- Passages that remind you of your own life or something you've seen before
- Turns in the plot/shifts in mood
- A passage that makes you realize something you hadn't seen before
- Examples of patterns: recurring images, ideas, colors, symbols
- Passages with confusing language or unfamiliar vocabulary
- Events you find surprising or confusing
- Passages that illustrate a particular character or setting
- If you find an extremely long passage that moves you, don't hesitate to use it, just employ ellipses (...) to shorten your writing load. You'll have the page number so that if you decide to share your entry, the class can easily find and read along.

RESPONDING TO THE TEXT:

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. You can use loose-leaf paper for your journals.

To Get Started: Beginner Responses

- 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
- Write about what it makes you think or feel
- Agree or disagree with a character or the author

Sample Sentence Starters for Beginners:

- 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 character reminds me of (name of person) because...

The Target: Higher Level Responses

- **Analyze the text for use of literary devices (tone, structure, style, imagery) and how they contribute to the Theme**
- **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**

Name _____ Period _____

Dialectical Journal for Night Chapter(s) _____

Passages from the text	Pg#	Commentary

