

Guidelines for the Dialectical Journal

Dialectic means “the art or practice of arriving at the truth by using conversation involving question and answer.” The “dialectic” was the method Socrates used to teach his students how to be actively engaged in the struggle to obtain meaning from an unfamiliar and challenging work. A dialectical journal is a written conversation with yourself about a piece of literature that encourages the habit of reflective questioning. You will use a double-entry form to examine details of a passage and synthesize your understanding of the text.

There is to be NO collaboration with other students. Any assistance from the Internet, movies, or secondary sources such as Sparknotes or Cliff Notes will be viewed as cheating. If you have questions about format, e-mail me!

Instructions:

- (1) Purchase a spiral bound notebook or composition book
- (2) Fold pages in half vertically or draw a vertical line down the middle of the page
- (3) Label the top of each column: left TEXT and right RESPONSE
- (4) In the TEXT column cite passages verbatim from the novel, including quotation marks and page numbers
 - a. Choose two passages from each chapter
 - b. When should you write passages down?
 - i. Details that seem important to you
 - ii. You have an epiphany
 - iii. You learn something significant about a character
 - iv. You recognize a pattern (overlapping images, repetitions of idea, details, etc.)
 - v. You agree or disagree with something a character says or does
 - vi. You find an interesting or potentially significant quotation
 - vii. You notice something important or relevant about the writer's style
 - viii. You notice effective use of literary devices
- (5) In the RESPONSE column reflect upon the passages
 - a. Raise questions about the beliefs and values implied in the text
 - b. Give your personal reactions to the passage, the characters, the situation
 - c. Discuss the words, ideas, or actions of the author or character
 - d. Tell what it reminds you of from your own experiences
 - e. Compare the text to other characters or novels
 - f. Write about what it makes you think or feel
 - g. Argue with or speak to the characters or author
 - h. Make connections to any themes that are revealed to you
 - i. Make connections among passages or sections of the work
 - j. Make predictions about characters' futures
 - k. DO NOT MERELY SUMMARIZE THE PLOT

- (6) Each RESPONSE must be at least 60 words (include word count at the end of each response)
- (7) Write down your thoughts, questions, insights, and ideas **while you read** or **immediately after reading a chapter** so the information is fresh
- (8) As you take notes, you should regularly reread the previous pages of notes and comments
- (9) First person is acceptable in the RESPONSE column.
- (10) Remember that quotations do not have to be dialogue!

Sample Journal:

Black Like Me by John Howard Griffin

TEXT	RESPONSE
"The completeness of this transformation appalled me. It was unlike anything I had imagined. I became two men, the observing one and the one who panicked, who felt negroid even into the depths of his entrails" (Griffin 11).	In many movies and books, people wake up and realize how old they truly are. I think that the people this happens to feel the same as Mr. Griffin does because he feels that he still a white man; but when he looks in the mirror, he notices that his skin color disagrees with his thoughts. Likewise, some people feel they are still young, but they are trapped in a body of a person who looks old to too different to be them. (85 words)

Grading:

A = Meaningful passages, plot, and quotation selections. Thoughtful interpretation and commentary about the text; avoids clichés. Includes comments about literary devices such as theme, narrative voice (POV), imagery, conflict, etc. and how each contributes to the meaning of the text. Makes insightful personal connections and asks thought-provoking questions. Coverage of text is complete and thorough. Journal is neat, organized and professional-looking; student has followed directions in creation of journal.

B = Less detailed, but good plot and quote selections. Some intelligent commentary; addresses some thematic connections. Includes some literary devices, but less on how they contribute to the meaning. Some personal connections; asks pertinent questions. Adequately addresses all parts of reading assignment. Journal is neat and readable; student has followed directions in the organization of journal.

C = Few good details from the text. Most of the commentary is vague, unsupported, or plot summary/paraphrase. Some listing of literary elements; virtually no discussion of meaning. Limited personal connection; asks few, or obvious questions. Addresses most of the reading assignment, but is not very long or thorough. Journal is relatively neat, but may be difficult to read. Student has not followed all directions for organization; loose-leaf; no columns; no pages numbers; etc.

D = Hardly any good details from the text. All notes are plot summary or paraphrase. Few literary elements, virtually no discussion on meaning. Limited personal connections, no good questions. Limited coverage of the text; way too short. Did not follow directions in organizing journal; difficult to follow or read. No pages numbers.

F = Did not complete or plagiarized

- (1) Points will be deducted on the TEXT side for failure to document accurately and completely according the model provided
- (2) Points will be deducted on the RESPONSE side for superficial and / or incomplete responses.