DIALECTICAL JOURNAL GUIDELINES

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 your book as you read it. This process is meant to help you develop a better understanding of the novel as we read. Use your journal to record 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 and to better understand the book’s content.

PROCEDURE:

* As you read, choose passages that stand out to you and record them in the left-hand column of the t-chart provided.
* In the right column, write your response to the text (ideas/insights, questions, reflections, and comments on each passage)
* After each comment you write, label your responses using the following codes:
  + (Q) Question – ask about something in the passage that is unclear
  + (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
  + (CL) Clarify – answer earlier questions or confirm/disaffirm a prediction
  + (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?
  + (E) Evaluate - make a judgment about the character(s), their actions, or what the author is trying to say
* Complete journal entries for at least two passages per chapter.
* On the next page you will see examples of higher level responses. At least half of your responses will be at this level.

Sample Dialectical Journal entry: *The Giver* by Lois Lowry

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Ch. & Pg #** | **Passages from the text** | **Comments, Questions, Analysis** |
| Ch. 1, p. 2 | “Then all of the citizens had been ordered to go into the nearest building and stay there. IMMEDIATELY, the rasping voice through the speakers had said. LEAVE YOUR BICYCLES WHERE THEY ARE.” | (E) It seems odd that everyone in the community would stop what they are doing and follow the advice of a voice on a loudspeaker. It is also strange that they have to go inside just because a jet flew overhead.  *(Note: you can have more than one type of response to a passage from the text. Simply label each type of response you have. Another response that could be included for this passage is:*  (C) This reminds me a little of the Great Oz in the Wizard of Oz who bellowed out commands and directions in the movie. People did what he said without considering where the voice was coming from and who was behind it.) |

CHOOSING PASSAGES FROM THE TEXT:

Look for quotes or passages that seem significant, powerful, thought provoking or puzzling. Passages that are Notice & Note signposts could be great passages to respond to in your journal as well.

For example, you might record:

* Effective &/or creative use of literary devices (simile, metaphor, personification, etc)
* Passages that remind you of your own life or something you’ve seen before
* 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 themes.
* Passages with confusing language or unfamiliar vocabulary
* Events you find surprising or confusing
* Passages that illustrate a particular character or setting.

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.

Basic 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:

* 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...



Higher Level Responses

* 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

Notice & Note Signposts

*Look for the following as you read to help find significant moments in a story understand the text better:*

**Contrast & Contradictions**

* When a character does something that contrasts with what you’d expect or contradicts his earlier acts or statements, STOP and ask, “Why is the character doing that?” The answer will help you make predictions and draw inferences about the plot and conflict.

**Words of the Wiser**

* When a character (probably older and wiser) takes the main character aside and offers serious advice, STOP and ask, “What’s the life lesson and how might it affect the character?” This lesson is probably the theme of the story.

**Aha Moment**

* When a character realizes, understands, or finally figures out something, STOP and ask yourself, “How might this change things?” If it is about a problem, it tells you something about the conflict; if it is a life lesson, it tells you something about the theme.

**Again and Again**

* When you notice a word, phrase, or situation mentioned over and over, STOP and ask yourself, “Why does this keep happening again and again?” The answer will tell you about the theme and conflict, or will foreshadow what might happen later in the story.

**Memory Moment**

* When the author interrupts the action to tell you about a memory, STOP and ask yourself, “Why might this memory be important?” The answer will tell you about the theme and conflict, or will foreshadow what might happen later in the story.

**Tough Questions**

* When a character asks himself a very difficult question, STOP and ask yourself, “What does this question make me wonder about?” The answer will tell you about the conflict, and help you think about what might happen later in the story.

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