Dialectical Journals

dialectical (die-uh-LEKT-i-kuhl), n.:  the art or practice of arriving at the truth through logical arguments.

journal (JUHR-nuul), n.:  a personal record of events, experiences, and reflections kept on a regular basis; a diary.

Dialectical journals are required for every student in Mrs. Holmes’ reading classes. Your dialectical journal will be part of your independent reading grade.

What is a dialectical journal?
A dialectical journal is another name for a double-entry journal or a reader-response journal. It’s a journal that records a dialogue, or conversation, between the ideas in the text (the words being read) and the ideas of the reader (the person who is doing the reading).

This is what you must do in your journal: keep a dialogue with yourself. In your journal, have a conversation with the text and with yourself. Write down your thoughts, questions, insights, and ideas while you read. The important part is that you, the reader, are reading something and then responding to it with your feelings and ideas.

Why is a dialectical journal important?
This journal will help you, as a reader, think critically about the text you are reading. By keeping a dialectical journal, you will think for yourself about a text and offer your own interpretations.

What type of notebook should I use? Can I use a notebook from another class?
Your journal must be either a composition notebook or a large spiral-bound notebook with perforated sheets. Loose-leaf paper and folders are not appropriate. You will use your journal for reading class and for reading class alone. You need to be able to turn in your journal and leave it with me without worrying about your science or math or social studies notes.

How do I keep a dialectical journal?
Your journal will use a two-entry form:

- Fold the page in half.
- Label the left column “Text.” As you read, use this column to write down parts of paragraphs from your books and articles that stand out to you. Write down quotes you like or notes from class that you think are interesting or important. (ALWAYS include page numbers in this section).
- Label the right column “Response.” Use this side to write down YOUR OWN thoughts, commentary, and questions about the stuff in the left column. Include your ideas and insights and any reflections you have.
- If you choose, you can 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

When do I use my dialectical journal?
Journaling is expected for ALL of your INDEPENDENT READING. Whether you’re reading short stories, poems, novels, or plays, you need to journal about your reading. Get in the habit of journaling every time you read, and use the same journal format, regardless of what you are reading.

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

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Language Arts

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...

How will Mrs. Holmes grade my dialectical journal?
You should write in your journal every time you read, but the minimum will be to write two journal entries per week. Journal entries must be at least five sentences long. I will grade journals in a variety of ways; I may spot check for 5 or 10 points, or I may collect to read and grade thoroughly for significantly more points. You can earn up to 50 points per week for your journals. If you're only writing two entries per week (the minimum), they're going to have to be pretty amazing, very thorough entries to qualify for the 50 points. I will be evaluating your journals on the quality of your response.

- Number of entries meets requirement
- Detailed, meaningful passages
- Page #s included with passages and recorded in chronological order. Title of the work being cited is included.
- Thoughtful, insightful interpretation, commentary and connections about the text. Avoids clichés.
- Coverage of text is complete and thorough. (Passages are selected from beginning to end).
- Variety of response types displays ability to think critically.
- Journal is neat, organized, and professional looking; student has followed directions in the organization.

Note: If evidence of copying (or sharing your entries with a friend) is found, then each party involved will receive a 0 on the entire assignment.

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! (Please note my responses are short due to space. You should plan to write more for each response.)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Response</th>
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| From *The Outsiders*  
“I had a long walk home and no company, but I usually lone it anyway, for no reason except that I like to watch movies undisturbed so I can get into them and live with them the actors” (pages 1-2) | (C): I know exactly how the narrator feels. I hate it when I can’t watch a movie undisturbed because I really get into movies when I watch them. It is easier to be and imagine yourself someone else when you are by yourself. Every time I watch a movie I am somehow inspired to be more than I am. |
| From *The Outsiders*  
“I’m not sure how you spell it, but its an abbreviation for the Socials, the jet set, the Westside rich kids. It’s like the term “greaser,” which is used to class all us boys on the East Side. We’re poorer than the Socs and the middle class. I reckon we’re wilder, too (2). | (R): It’s so hard to believe that people really do judge each other based on money and social status. Even though this book was set in the 1960’s, conflict like this still goes on even today. (This could also include a personal connection.) |