

## 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 in-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.

**Your dialectical journal entries must reflect your original observations and analysis. DO NOT rely on/borrow from secondary sources such as SparkNotes or Lit Charts, online searches, film, etc. for this component of your reading. Doing so is considered plagiarism; your submission(s) will be graded accordingly.**

### **PROCEDURE:**

- Use a marble composition book
- At the top of the page, identify the title of the work and the author
- Draw a vertical line down the center of the page
- Label the left column TEXT and the right column RESPONSE
- As you read, choose passages that stand out to you and record them in the left/TEXT column the chart (*ALWAYS include page numbers*).
- In the right column, write your RESPONSE to the text (ideas/insights, questions, reflections, and comments on each passage)
- You **must** code/identify your responses (*you may create additional codes for your journal*):
  - **(Q) Question** – ask about something in the passage that is unclear
  - **(C) Connect** – make a connection to your life, the world, or another text
  - **(PR) 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/author of the work. What conclusions can you draw about the world, about human nature, or just the way things work?
  - **(CH) Characterization** – analyze details or dialog the author gives you to build his/her characters.
  - **(PA) Pattern** – identify recurring images, ideas, colors, symbols, descriptions, details, etc.
  - **(L) Literary Device** – analyze the author's craft using literary terminology
  - **(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 or tone of a scene and explain how that might be important.
  - **(E) Evaluate** - make a judgment about what the author is trying to say
  - **(S) Style** – note something important or relevant about the author's style
  - **(O) Opinion** – you agree or disagree with what a character says or does

DO NOT MERELY SUMMARIZE THE PLOT OR RESTATE THE PASSAGE IN YOUR OWN WORDS.

**Unless otherwise specified, you must analyze a minimum of 10 passages from the beginning, middle, and end of each text you read. The TEXT entry should be at least 30 words; your RESPONSE to the text should be a minimum of 100 words.**

### **CHOOSING PASSAGES FROM THE TEXT:**

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

- Effective and/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
- 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.

#### **Basic Responses will...**

- 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
- reveal what it makes you think or feel
- agree or disagree with a character or the author

#### **Basic 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 (your goal!) will...**

- 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

**Sample Dialectical Journal Entry:**

***A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry**

TEXT	RESPONSE
<p>“Talking ‘bout life, Mama. You all always telling me to see life like it is. Well-I laid there on my back today . . . and I figured it out. Life just like it is. Who gets and who don’t get. Mama, you know it’s all divided up. Life is. Sure enough. Between the takers and the “taken.” (p. 95, Act 3)</p>	<p>(E) – In this passage, Hansberry brings to light Walter Lee’s realization that he is on the wrong side of life – he is one of the “taken.” Walter is portrayed throughout much of the play as a despairing man who sees no possibility of his dreams coming true and little hope for a successful future. While he is buoyed by Mama’s giving him \$3,500 to invest in his business, he is devastated when Willie Harris takes off with the entire \$6,500 Mama had entrusted to him. In these lines, Hansberry is showing the reality in Walter’s life and perhaps a sentiment echoed in the lives of other poor families: they feel they will never get ahead.</p>