

Dialectical Journal 411

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 Literary Analysis assignments.



PROCEDURE:

- As you read, choose passages that stand out to you and record them in the “Taking Notes” or left-hand column of the chart (ALWAYS include page numbers).
- In the “Making Notes” or right-hand column, write your response to the text (ideas/insights, questions, reflections, and comments on each passage)
- You must label your responses using the following codes:

Code	Description
C	Connect - make a connection to your life, the world, or another text OR make a connection between/among plot elements or language usage and meaning
Q	Question - ask about something in the passage that is unclear*
P	Predict - anticipate what will occur based on what’s in the passage
CL	Clarify - answer earlier questions or confirm/disaffirm a prediction
AI	Analyze and Interpret - explain how the “parts” of a text contribute to overall meaning
E	Evaluate - make a judgment about what the author is trying to say

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 stylistic or literary devices
- Passages that remind you of situations in other texts you have read or situations that have occurred in history or presently happening in the world
- 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

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**. Avoid generalizations and plot summary.

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

Higher Level Responses

- 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...) or real world historical or current events
- 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 Sentence Starters:

- (Character's name) actions/thoughts/words here reveal...
- The author uses (character name)'s actions/thoughts/words to...
- The details of the setting here are significant because...
- I really dislike/like this idea because...
- I think the author is trying to say that...
- This passage reminds me of...
- 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...
- The author's use of (literary device) is significant because...
- The author's use of language or sentence structure here is significant because...

Sample of dialectical entry:

Taking Notes	Making Notes
<p>“The house on Mango Street is ours, and we don’t have to pay rent to anybody, or share the yard with the people downstairs, or be careful not to make too much noise, and there isn’t a landlord banging on the ceiling with a broom” (Cisneros 3).</p>	<p>The structure of this sentence allows the reader to feel more powerfully Esperanza’s and her family’s relief in owning their home. She starts with a simple declaration that the house “is ours.” Then by following with a list of the negative aspects of renting that they no longer have to deal with, she is able to define for her audience what “ours” really means to the family.</p>
<p>“But my mother’s hair, my mother’s hair, like little rosettes, like little candy circles, all curly and pretty because she pinned it in pincurls all day, sweet to put your nose into when she is holding you, holding and you feel safe, is the warm smell of bread before you bake it, is the smell when she makes room for you on her side of the bed” (Cisneros 6).</p>	<p>The author’s use of simile and metaphor to describe her mother’s hair helps the reader understand the importance of the relationship between Esperanza and her mother. This extended description contrasts with Esperanza’s one sentence description of her father’s hair also signals the importance of the mother to Esperanza. The images of rosettes and candy and the “sweet” smell of bread bring feelings of happiness and warmth and safety. The figurative language allows Esperanza to connect with her audience.</p>