

## DIALECTICAL JOURNAL

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.

Journals should be typed, proof read, and edited. **Neatness in this journal is absolutely essential.** Your journal should be free of drawings and doodles, and must have good titles and clear demarcations. Please put your *name, the course, and date* at the top of each page.

### LEFT SIDE: PROCEDURE for CHOOSING PASSAGES FROM THE TEXT

\*As you read, Look for quotes that seem significant, powerful, thought provoking or puzzling. Please choose passages that stand out to you and record them in the left-hand column of a T-chart (*ALWAYS include page numbers*).

\*From the list below,

- 1) complete at least two quotes for each of the four List A topics (8 total) and
- 2) at least one quote for each topic (4 total) from List B.

**You should have a total of 15 entries when you are finished. I will be checking that you are on track on your journals during class. You should complete half of your journal entries by the first Lit Circle discussion**

#### Topic list A

- Style:** Effective &/or creative use of stylistic or literary devices (e.g. diction, syntax, figurative language)
- Connection:** Passages that remind you of your own life, something you’ve seen before, something you’ve read elsewhere (archetypal connections)
- Repetition:** Examples of patterns: recurring images, ideas, colors, symbols or motifs
- Embodiment:** Passages that illustrate a particular character or setting

#### Topic list B

- Plot:** Structural shifts or turns in the plot (for fiction);
- Epiphany:** A passage that makes you realize something you hadn’t seen before
- Learning Moment:** Passages with confusing language or unfamiliar vocabulary
- Surprises:** Events you find surprising or confusing

### RIGHT SIDE: RESPONDING TO THE TEXT

\*In the right column, write your response to the text (ideas/insights, questions, reflections, and comments on each passage)

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*. Your journal should be made up of 25% Basic Responses and 75% Higher Level Responses.

### 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

- Examine how the literary devices affect the character and/or story
- 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

### Sample Dialectical Journal entry: *Life of Pi* Author: Yann Martel

The following examples demonstrate the Higher Level Responses of the journal.

<p><b>Embodiment, narrator</b> “I am a person who believes in form, in the harmony of order...we must give things a meaningful shape...that’s one thing I hate about my nickname, the way that number runs on forever. It’s important in life to conclude things properly” (Martel 285).</p>	<p>Pi’s obsession with “form” and “the harmony of order” explains why religion appeals so strongly to him. He finds great importance in concluding things “properly”. Pi is essentially asking what kind of life would we be leading if, when it was over, we simply died and remained dead to rot for eternity? Pi hopes and believes that there is more. He believes what he is told about afterlives and moral judgment because he is afraid of his life ending in a pointless and almost anticlimactic manner. Pi’s obsession with closure can also be found in the founders of almost any religion to have ever been preached throughout history.</p>
<p><b>Embodiment, existence</b> “I have nothing to say of my working life, only that a tie is a noose, and inverted though it is, it will hang a man nonetheless if he’s not careful” (Martel 6).</p>	<p>Pi respects the importance of work, however finds much more value in the beauty of life itself. Pi believes that to ignore the offerings of life and to focus too much on work is detrimental to one’s health.</p>
<p><b>Style, use of imagery</b></p>	<p>Martel paints a disturbing picture in his</p>

<p>“A foul and pungent smell, an earthy mix of rust and excrement hung in the air. There was blood everywhere, coagulating to a deep red crust. A single fly buzzed about, sounding like an alarm bell of insanity” (Martel 127).</p> <p><b>Style, word choice to create tone</b>          “The ship sank. It made a sound like a monstrous metallic burp. Things bubbled at the surface and then vanished. Everything was screaming: the sea, the wind, my heart.” (Martel 97).</p> <p><b>Style, theme</b>          “I wept heartily over this poor little deceased soul. It was the first sentient being I had ever killed. I was now a killer. I was now as guilty as Cain...I had blood on my hands. It’s a terrible burden to carry” (Martel 183).</p>	<p>description of the lifeboat following the slow painful death of the zebra. He describes the air as smelling like “an earthy mix of rust and excrement”, the boat as having “blood everywhere”, and his only companion as “a single fly...sounding like an alarm bell of insanity”. Through this shockingly filthy and revolting portrayal of the lifeboat, Martel establishes a tone of absolute disgust.</p> <p>When describing the sinking of the <i>Tsimtsum</i>, Martel utilizes a variety of strong and violent words to establish a tone of disorder and fear. Martel describes the sound of the ship sinking as a “monstrous metallic burp” simultaneously noting its enormity and its violent, industrial nature. He also says that “everything was screaming” suggesting disorder and confusion.</p> <p>Another theme found in <i>Life of Pi</i> is the loss of innocence. Prior to his being stranded at sea, Pi is a god loving vegetarian who would never even consider eating the flesh of an animal. Once forced to end the life of another creature in the interest of prolonging his own, Pi is overcome by guilt. At this point, he has entered a phase of existence that, until his problem of being stranded is resolved, he is forced to endure, therefore making a transition from an innocent vegetarian to a hunter with “blood on my [Pi’s] hands”.</p>
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