

Dialectical Journal

The “dialectic” was the method Socrates used to teach his students how to be actively engaged in the struggle to derive meaning from an unfamiliar and challenging work. In a dialectical journal, students divide their paper into two columns. As you read, you identify certain passages that cause you to stop and respond to what you are reading.

Example

Black Like Me by John Howard Griffin

TEXT

“How else besides becoming Negro could a white man hope to learn the truth? Though we lived side by side throughout the South, communication between the two races had simply ceased to exist” (Griffin 1).

The completeness of this transformation appalled me. It was unlike anything I had imagined. I became two men, the observing one and the one who panicked, who felt negroid even into the depths of his entrails” (Griffith 11).

COMMENTARY/RESPONSE

This made me wonder if you can accurately understand someone unless you became them. After some thought, I discovered that there are no other ways in which to completely understand another person. Although I have lived in the same house with my sister my whole life and I feel as though I know everything about her, when I talk to people I do not know I always realize little things that I do not know or understand about her. (79 words)

In many movies and books, people wake up and realize how old they truly are. I think that the people this happens to feel the same as Mr. Griffin does because he feels that he is still a white man; but when he looks in the mirror, he notices that his skin color disagrees with his thoughts. Likewise, some people feel they are still young, but they are trapped in the body of a person who looks too old or too different to be them. (85 words)

You will use the model above to create your dialectical journal, and your teacher will use this model in evaluating your work. Please notice in the TEXT column, you cite, verbatim, passages from the novel and include quotation marks and page numbers according to the prescribed format.

For the Commentary column, you have several ways to respond to a text:

- 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.
- Tell what it reminds you of from your own experiences.
- Write about what it makes you think of feel.
- Argue with or speak to the characters or author.

You are required to have at least ten (10) passages with corresponding responses weekly. Each book you read should have a minimum of twenty (20) responses. Make sure that these responses are spread out over the entire text.

Each text and response combination will be worth four (4) points for a total of 100 points for this assignment. Points will be deducted on the TEXT side for failure to document accurately and completely according to the model provided. Points will be deducted on the RESPONSE side for superficiality and incompleteness. Each response must be at least 50 words in length.