

DIALECTICAL JOURNAL

The purpose of a dialectical journal is to identify significant pieces of text and explain the significance. It is another form of [highlighting/annotating](#) text and should be used to think about, digest, summarize, question, clarify, critique, and remember what is read. It is a way to take notes on what is read, using the actual text, so that when students are asked to write an essay about or utilize the information from the text they do not have to reread the entire piece. Instead, they can search their notes for direct quotes to use as supporting evidence for their opinions. A dialectical journal is also an effective way to assess students' comprehension. It can be used with any form of writing: textbook, short story, novel, essay, poem, newspaper article, scientific journal, or any piece of writing you choose.

To set up a dialectical journal, have students fold a piece of paper in half. On the left hand side of the page, have them title the column, *Note Taking*. On the right hand side of the page, have them title the column, *Note Making*. Explain that the left hand column is where they will write the sentence/s or phrase/s from the text that they believe illustrate a significant idea. They should put quotation marks around the sentence/s to show that they are someone else's words. If the passage they use is more than one or two sentences, they may abbreviate it in the following manner, using ellipses (three dots in place of the words that are missing at the end):

“Like the keeper of the lighthouse, she regarded it as a mooring, a checkpoint, some stable visual object that assured her that the world was still there; that this was life and not a dream...” Song of Solomon, p. 11

Right after the sentences/s or phrase/s, they should write the page number the ideas came from. In the right hand column, right next to the sentence/s or phrase/s they chose, they should explain in their own words what is significant about the ideas represented in those sentence/s or phrase/s. Ask them to draw across the page underneath the entries that belong together. It helps to give students a minimum of entries they must provide for each reading. Think about the purpose of the read before you assign a number of entries. If the students are reading independently for pleasure, you may only want to assign a minimal amount of entries per chapter so that you do not interrupt the natural reading flow or their pleasure because when students really love a book, they want to just read through. And love of reading is often one of our main goals! Right? Feel free to play with the criteria for your dialectical journals; you may ask them to pull out passages they have questions about, or passages on specific characters, or you may ask them to create symbols in the notetaking section that represent the significant ideas from the passages they select. Choose what you ask them to think about in their journals based on the concepts and skills you are trying to teach. Scroll down the page for an example of a dialectical journal.

TITLE OF TEXT KIRINYAGA

AUTHOR MIKE RESNICK

STUDENT NAME _____

DATE _____

SAMPLE DIALECTICAL JOURNAL

<p>Note Taking (exact sentence/s or phrases from the text)</p>	<p>Note Making (my original ideas about the significance of the text)</p>
<p><i>“Ngai is the creator of all things. He made the lion and the elephant, the vast savannah and the towering mountains, the Kikuyu and the Maasai and the Wakamba. Thus, it was only reasonable for my father’s father and his father’s father to believe that Ngai was all-powerful. And it was among the Kikuyu that Ngai waged His final battle against the god of the Europeans.” p. 1.</i></p>	<p>This history sets the scene for the story and tells us that there has been a conflict between the believers of Ngai and the Europeans. It tells us that the Europeans came and killed the animals and created factories and changed the whole environment in which the Kikuyu lived. This story must deal with the overtaking of one race by another and the feelings associated with not wanting to incorporate into a new lifestyle because you liked the one you had.</p>
<p><i>I sighed. “As long as you have known me, you have never understood me, Edward.”</i> <i>“Understanding is a two-way street,” he said with sudden bitterness. “When did you ever make an effort to understand <u>me</u>?” p. 5</i></p>	<p>The tension in this dialogue indicates that the father and son have very different opinions about how life should be. The father is Kikuyu and wants to return to that lifestyle, but the son has incorporated into the European lifestyle. The old man is irritated with the son for not holding on to his heritage and the son is irritated with his father for not giving it up. This dialog also indicates the lack of communication between the father and the son. The father would like the son to understand him and his beliefs but feels the son has turned away from him in favor of the European ways. The son on the other hand would have loved to have the father understand him and be proud of him and participate in his life, but feels that all he did was talk about his beliefs of Kikuyu and condemn anything that was different. Since the son took on the European ways and the father condemned the European ways the son felt he condemned him as well.</p>
<p><i>“Did you enjoy it?” he asked as we drove back onto the road.</i> <i>“Very Much,” I said. p. 8</i></p>	<p>The son so tries to please his father on the day of his leaving that he takes him to see two jackals that are in an empty field. The father is surprised at the site of them, but is very pleased. The son states that they will be moved to a game preserve because they are an anachronism or don’t belong there and the father states that it is appropriate that he is leaving for a new world because he is also an anachronism and doesn’t belong here either. This episode clearly shows how the two men are very different and have completely different ideas about how one should live one’s life. Thus, the elder leaves for a terraplanet in order to resume the life he has chosen.</p>