The Dialectical Journal:

A dialectical journal is your opportunity to have a dialogue, or conversation, with your book. Here, you write down significant passages or parts of the novel that interest you. You then include your thoughts, reactions, insights, and understanding as to why the passage is powerful or important. There are no right or wrong reactions to the text, as long as you are not merely summarizing what you read.

***What does this look like?***

You will divide your paper in half, and label it on the left side with “Important Passages” and the right side with “Commentary/Insight/Analysis/Reflection.”

**THE LEFT SIDE: IMPORTANT PASSAGES** The following are items that you can write about on the LEFT side of the journal; Teachers may direct you to focus on certain topics on certain days, so pay attention to all directions that are given.

- **Plot:** Find information about main events in the novel. This is a good place to notate the chronology of the story and comment on the significance of these moments.
- **Character:** Describe important characters. You may notate the character’s appearance, behavior (and what motivates them), how other characters relate to him or her, and what role the character plays in the story.
- **Setting:** When and where does the story take place? How does the setting impact the novel or the characters? Is a mood establish by the setting, and if so, what mood is created?
- **Themes:** Identify major themes in the story. What is the author saying about life or humanity? What lessons are we to learn, as readers, from the novel?
- **Imagery:** What images are created in the novel? Why do you think the author included themes images? Note also any recurring images in the story, and the significance of these repeated images.
- **Symbolism:** A symbol is a concrete object that represents an abstract idea, concept, or emotion. Are there symbols in this novel, and if so, what do these symbols represent?
- **Figurative language:** Make note of any powerful figurative language, which includes similes, metaphor, personification, and allusions.

**Important Note:** Be sure to include quotations from the entire novel, and from the required reading for that week. You may NOT use the same quote for more than one entry.

Other hints at what you can include text from the book:

- When a detail seems important to you
- When you have an epiphany
- When you learn or recognize any sort of pattern
- When you agree or disagree with something a character says or does
- When you find an interesting or potentially significant quotation
The right side of the journal will record your responses to what you wrote on the left hand side. These entries will be your responses to the text. *Each response must be at least 60 words (include word count at the end of each response).*

You MUST label your responses using the following codes:

- **(Q)** Question—ask about something in the passage that is unclear
- **(C)** Connect—make a connection to your life, the world, or another text
- **(P)** 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. What conclusions can you draw about the world, about human nature, or just the way things work?
- **(E)** Evaluate—make a judgment about what the author is trying to say

You may also:
- Compare the text to other characters or novels
- Write about what it makes you think or feel
- Argue with or speak to the characters or author
- DO NOT MERELY SUMMARIZE THE PLOT! This will result in a failing grade.

A sample dialectical journal entry: All parts that are pointed out with a text box below MUST be labeled in each entry to receive full credit.

**Passage Topic**

**Commentary/Insight/Analysis/Reaction**

**Important Passages**

**THEME:** “Mockingbirds don’t do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don’t eat up people’s gardens, don’t nest in corncribs, they don’t do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That’s why it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird.” (124)

**Page # from novel**

**(E, Q, C)** Here, Ms. Maudie is explaining to the children the importance of not harming something that causes no harm to others. This is not only where Lee gets her title, but it is also part of a pervading theme in the novel. I wonder if Boo Radley and Tom Robinson are metaphorical mockingbirds? Both men have not done anything wrong, but they are subjects of speculation and gossip. I wonder who will pay for the sin of harming them? (78)

**Entry word count**
Grading:

A (91-100) = Meaningful selections in regards to plot, character, setting, themes, imagery, and figurative language. Thoughtful interpretation and commentary about the text. Makes insightful personal connections and asks thought-provoking questions. Coverage of text is complete and thorough. Journal is neat and organized, with all labeled parts given (page number of passage, topic, page # from text, response type, and response word count).

B (81-89) = Less detailed, but good plot and quote selections. Some intelligent commentary; addresses some of the required topics. Some personal connections; asks pertinent questions. Adequately address all parts of a reading assignment. Journal is neat and readable.

C (75-79) = Few good details from the text. Most of the commentary is vague, unsupported, or plot summary. Some inclusion of appropriate topics, but is not very detailed or thorough. Journal is relatively neat, but parts may be difficult to read. Student has not followed all directions.

D (71-74) = hardly any good details from the text. All notes are plot summary. Little to no connection to assigned topics. Limited coverage of the text. Did not follow directions.

F (69-) Did not complete or attempts to plagiarize

NOTE:

❖ Points will be deducted from the TEXT PASSAGE SIDE (left side) for failure to document accurately and completely according to the model provided
❖ Points will be deducted on the RESPONSE SIDE (right side) for superficial and/or incomplete responses, and for failure to accurately and complete document according to the model provided.