

A Dialectical Journal for *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Directions and Sample Responses

What is a dialectical journal?

Simply put, "dialectical" means "the art or practice of arriving at the truth by the exchange of logical arguments" (dictionary.com). A dialectical journal, then, is used to arrive at the "truth" of a written work through the written response to quotations from that work. You should use the six activities used in "making meaning" to help guide your quotations and responses.

How many quotations should I have?

Three or four per night would be great. Make sure you write the date before each night's journals and that you include the page number for at the end of each (see format on next page).

What exactly constitutes a quotation?

A quotation can be narration OR dialogue. You are NOT limited just to what the characters say.

What kinds of quotations should I choose and what should I write about?

Find passages that you think help us better understand the author's subject matter, characterizations, attitude, and especially THEMES (messages/"big ideas"). If you find yourself simply repeating what the quotation says, you might want to select a different quotation or reevaluate how you are approaching the response. NO SUMMARIES!

What format should I use?

Use the left side of the double column notes to copy a significant quote or line from the story with its page number. Use the second column to react to that line, interpret it, ask a question about it, or complete any of the other activities described in the "making meanings" sheet.

Should I write or type these?

You can *neatly* handwrite these in *pen* or type them – just make sure they are legible (pen isn't bleeding through, responses aren't running together, writing can be easily read) and organized. While writing is more portable, some students type much faster and choose to work on these at home. I suggest using sticky note flags to mark quotations and make brief comments while reading if you select this method.

Are you going to collect these every day?

No, I will collect them at different points through the unit, as indicated on the calendar. Be prepared to relinquish these journals for a day or two so I can respond to them. I will most likely spot check different responses and give you comments.

How long should my responses be?

While I am more concerned with the *depth* of your thought, you need to stretch yourself and write a few sentences about each (at least three and possibly more).

I have provided examples of different types of responses for the first chapter. My notes to you are in boldface for each section. Your journal will not have these.

Quotations

"When he was nearly thirteen, my brother Jem got his arm badly broken at the elbow . . . (3).

(My Note: I have not included the entire quotation to which I am referring. Instead, I use an ellipsis [. . .] to quote only the part that is most important to what I want to talk about.)

Atticus, the lawyer, "knew his people, they knew him, and because of Simon Finch's industry, Atticus was related by blood or marriage to nearly every family in the town" (5).

(My Note: Instead of quoting the part about Atticus and his job immediately before this, I put it as a side note at the front before the quotation.)

"There was no hurry, for there was nowhere to go . . . nothing to see outside the boundaries of Maycomb County. But it was a time of vague optimism for some of the people: Maycomb County had recently been told that it had nothing to fear but fear itself" (7, 8).

(My Note: Since my quotation wraps to the next page, I made a note of it by putting both pages numbers after the quotation. Notice that there is ALWAYS a page number after each quotation.)

"The Radleys, welcome anywhere in town, kept to themselves, a predilection unforgivable in Maycomb. . . ." (9).

(My Note: In my response, I touched on one of the themes of the novel—prejudice—which is appearing in an atypical way.)

"One night, in an excessive spurt of high spirits, the boys backed around the town square in a borrowed flivver . . ." (10).

Responses

I remember breaking my foot before a choir concert. I was not feeling well and had to leave the risers before a concert. When I was hopping down from the third riser, I landed on the side of my foot and broke it. All I cared about when I was recovering was being able to walk without crutches or a walking cast again. This seems to be how Jem kind of feels.

(Making a Connection)

Atticus seems to be a well-respected person in Maycomb, and since he is a lawyer, he also must be fairly intelligent. Maycomb must be a relatively small town where everyone knows everyone if Atticus is indeed related to most of the people. I think Atticus most likely will play an important role in this book because of his position.

(Interpreting/Making a Prediction)

Apparently Maycomb is also a very slow, sleepy town that is pretty isolated from everything else. This seems to be especially true since they only have a "vague" notion of FDR's speech (an allusion to the Great Depression of the 1930s – must be the era in which the story takes place) and there is "nothing" outside of Maycomb County. I wonder why they see the world this way – maybe people don't travel because of the Depression or because that's just not what people did.

(Interpreting/Asking a Question)

It seems that the town is a little closed minded in viewing the Radleys since they don't go to church or do other things common in Maycomb. This seems to be a prejudice against their lifestyle since it seems that the town might not really know them and has become pretty superstitious about them. People often get suspicious about what they don't understand or what seems strange to them.

(Extending the Meaning)

This doesn't sound like a six year old, so it might not be as realistic. However, this *is* written as a flashback, so Scout must be MUCH older now as she is telling this. Maybe she is just smart.

(Challenging the Text)