A dialectical journal is a tool which helps provide you with the means to expand your analysis of literature. It is a written conversation with yourself about a piece of literature that encourages the habit of reflective questioning. You will use a double-entry form to examine details of a passage and synthesize your understanding of the text.

Your dialectical journal should be set up in the following way:

- A sheet of paper is divided in half (vertically) and labeled with two columns (you may create a Google document with a two-column table and print it once you have finished if you would like—you will not be allowed to print at school, however).
- The first column is labeled “Concrete Detail”. It will contain quoted phrases, lines, and passages from the text that stick out in your mind, remind you of something else, make you wonder or question, seem particularly beautiful or distressing, or seem significant in any way.
- Always accompany concrete details with page numbers, cited in proper MLA format! (see sample).

MLA format for a book citation:
Lastname, Firstname. Title of Book. City of Publication: Publisher, Year of Publication. Medium of Publication.

- The second column is labeled “Commentary” (your responses). This column must have responses of your own interpretation for each quote you choose, and you must write at least two complete sentences of commentary for each quote. Your comments may include reactions, ideas, opinions, comments, inferences, insights, questions, etc. from your head. What is it about the writing that stands out and makes the work distinctive? The important part is that you, the reader, are reading something and then responding with analysis. Have a conversation with the text and with yourself.
  - Your commentary should not simply explain what the quote means. You're NOT putting it into your own words. You are writing about the significance it has to the story. If you want, you can translate it, but you still need two sentences of commentary beyond that. Remember, your audience is me...I know what the quotes mean; I want you to tell me more...why is the quote you chose important to the story..."wow" your audience with your incredible insight!
- You should complete ten entries for each novel you read.
- Do not include a plot summary.
Ideas for Analyzing Text:

- Consider how the personality of a specific **character** (or the author in a nonfiction text) is established within a specific passage or stanza.
- Consider the use of **dialogue** and its effect.
- **Setting** is often a pivotal factor in the development of several aspects of a novel. Consider commenting on the details of the setting and how it furthers the plot, develops the mood, or enhances the experiences of the character.
- Consider the struggles evident in the text. What **conflict** occurs?
  - Discuss the central conflict in the novel. **Internal** conflict occurs within a character's mind or emotions. **External** conflict occurs when a character struggles against an outside force such as nature, society, or another human.

Consider commenting on a notable **literary techniques/devices** in the text. What is the impact of the technique on the overall work?

- **Irony**: a contradiction or incongruity between appearance or expectation and reality.
- **Symbolism**: something that, although it is of interest in its own right, stands for or suggests something larger and more complex—often an idea or a range of interrelated ideas, attitudes, and practices.
- **Allusions**: an indirect reference to a person, event, statement, or theme found in literature, the arts, history, mythology, religion or popular culture.

Consider commenting on **imagery** (especially predominant or recurring images).

- **Imagery**: creates or represents a sensory experience through any of the five senses: sight, touch, hear, smell, and taste.
- The use of **figures of speech** to express abstract ideas in a vivid and innovative way
  - **Simile**: a comparison of two unlike things using *like* or as
  - **Metaphor**: associates two unlike things without *like* or as
  - **Personification**: human characteristics applied to anything non-human such as an abstract idea, a physical force, an inanimate object, or a living organism
  - **Hyperbole**: exaggeration

Consider the effect of any unusual **organizational or rhetorical strategies** in the work.

- **Multiple narrators**
- **Unusual chapter divisions**
- **Pacing elements**: for example flashback (interrupts the present action of a narrative text to depict some earlier event—often an event that occurred before the opening scene of the work)
- **Unusual punctuation** or use of italics
- **Repetition** of words, phrases
- **Rhetorical questions**: a question not expecting an answer, or one to which the answer is more or less self-evident used primarily for stylistic effect
Sample journal entry:

Title: *The Great Gatsby*  
Author: F. Scott Fitzgerald

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concrete Detail</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
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| **Quote 1:** SETTING  
"My own house was an eye-sore, but it was a small eye-sore and it had been overlooked, so I had a view of the water, a partial view of my neighbor’s lawn and the consoling proximity of millionaires – all for eighty dollars a month" (Fitzgerald 10). | Nick Carraway, a man from a prominent family, will not shame his family by living a “bad” life; he must make friends with the rich and become popular, which is the great American Dream. Under normal circumstances, one would not buy a house that is an eye-sore, but the proximity to the affluent aids the decision. Pride is also present in the American Dream, and Nick can say that he lives with millionaires. In addition, Nick is new to New York, and living by millionaires is a great start to becoming a well-known man. The usage of the dash was very effective and emphasized the “privileges” Nick has compared to others. However, this urge to become popular with an upper class is destructive, for there is no limit to how popular one can be, so the hopes and dreams of people searching for an easy life can only be hopes and dreams. |

**Quote 2:**

# Dialectical Journal Rubric

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Qualities</th>
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| 90-100      | Detailed, elaborate responses | • Extra effort is evident.  
• Includes the required number of entries (10).  
• Quotes are relevant, important, thought provoking, and representative of the themes of the novel.  
• Comments indicate that you can “read between the lines” of the text (inference).  
• Identifies and interprets many literary elements, and explains how they contribute to the meaning  
• Creates new meaning through connections with personal experiences and other texts.  
• Sentences are grammatically correct with correct spelling and punctuation. |
| 80-89       | Detailed responses | • Solid effort is evident.  
• Includes an adequate number of entries (at least 8)  
• Quotes are relevant and connect to the themes of the novel.  
• Entries exhibit some insight and thoughtful analysis.  
• Identifies and interprets literary elements, but does not explain how they contribute to the meaning  
• Shows ability to make meaning of what is read.  
• Sentences are mostly correct with a few careless spelling and grammatical errors. |
| 70-79       | Somewhat detailed responses | • Includes an insufficient number of entries (at least 6)  
• Selected quotes may be interesting to you, but don't necessarily connect to the themes of the novel.  
• Entries exhibit insight and thoughtful analysis at times.  
• Rarely makes new meaning from the reading.  
• Most of the commentary is vague, unsupported, or plot summary/paraphrase  
• Lists literary elements; virtually no discussion on meaning |
| 60-69       | Simple, factual responses | • Includes few entries (at least 4)  
• Entries exhibit limited insight or none at all.  
• Interprets the text literally.  
• Exhibits reluctance to create meaning from the text  
• Sometimes confused by unclear or difficult sections of the text.  
• Most notes are plot summary or paraphrase  
• Few literary elements, virtually no discussion of meaning  
• Sentences contain numerous grammatical and spelling errors. |
| 50-59       | Perfunctory responses | • Includes very few entries (1-3)  
• Very little effort is evident.  
• Finds the text confusing, but makes no attempt to figure it out.  
• Creates little or no meaning from the text. |
| 0           | | • Failure to bring in by the due date |