

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE DIALECTICAL JOURNAL

The dialectical journal is a double-entry note taking system. It helps one to read critically and encourages the habit of reflective questioning. It is a place to record and explore ideas using writing as a tool for learning, to arrive at some profound truth (or truths) while engaging in a “conversation” of sorts with the text. As one component of your summer reading assignment, you will submit a dialectical journal demonstrating your interaction with whichever text you choose.

1. Complete the journal by creating a two-column table similar to the one in the example that follows.
2. The left column will be used to record insights from the book- direct quotations from the reading. These quotes/insights should be the most compelling observations you made while interacting with the text.
3. The right column is used for commenting on the insights recorded in the left column. Personal reactions to the notes on the left go here. The comments on the right may include:
  - what the passage prompts in thinking or memory associations;
  - feelings toward the author’s words;
  - words or passages not understood;
  - words or passages that look important;
  - connections among passages or sections of the work.
  - questions about the beliefs and values implied in the text
  - agree or disagree with the author’s point(s)
  - ways in which these insights affected you

As you take notes in your journal, you should regularly reread the previous pages of notes and comments; you may even want to draw connections in a right-column summary before starting another page of the journal. The page that follows is an example of a student journal on the novel *Song of Solomon* by Toni Morrison. Though we are not writing on a fiction piece, you can get the general gist of the process via this example:

TITLE OF TEXT SONG OF SOLOMON  
STUDENT NAME \_\_\_\_\_

AUTHOR TONI MORRISON  
DATE \_\_\_\_\_

<b>SAMPLE DIALECTICAL JOURNAL QUOTES / INSIGHTS</b> (exact sentence/s or phrases from the text)	Page	<b>REFLECTIONS / COMMENTARY</b> (my original ideas about the significance of the text)
“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...”	11	The watermark confirms the relationship Ruth has with her husband, Macon; one of contempt and distance, one in which she has been repeatedly denied her existence as a powerful human being, but instead is treated with scorn or as somehow only worthy to have sex, bear children, care for the house. The watermark began as an expression of how she sees beauty in the world and ends as a reminder of her vision denied. At once, it gives her strength to go on AND makes her feel trapped. It is the truth of her life.