

DIALECTICAL JOURNAL

As you read, choose passages that stand out to you and record them in the left-handed column of a T-chart (**ALWAYS include page numbers**). In the right column, write your response to the text (ideas/insights, questions, reflections, and comments on the passage).

Left Column: Quotations/Passages

Look for quotes/passages that seem significant, powerful, thought provoking or puzzling. For example, you might record:

- Effective and/or creative use of stylistic or literary devices
 - diction
 - syntax/sentence structure (simple/complex/compound/compound-complex, loose/periodic, balanced, inverted order/split order/natural order)
 - juxtaposition
 - parallelism
 - cumulatio
 - repetition
 - chiasmus
 - figurative language (simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, meiosis/ understatement, paradox, oxymoron, pun, etc.)
 - irony
 - sarcasm
- Examples of patterns: recurring images, ideas, symbols or motifs

Right Column: Responses/Analysis

You can respond to the text in a variety of ways. The most important thing to remember is that your observations should be specific and detailed.

- Raise questions about the beliefs and values implied in the text
- Give your personal reaction to the passage-explore and explain it
- Analyze the text for use of literary and rhetorical devices (tone, diction, syntax, symbolism, etc.)
- Discussed the effectiveness of the author's diction-what is powerful/weak, euphonious/cacophonous, denotative/connotative, etc.
- Analyze the passage in terms of its effectiveness in meeting the author's purpose.
- Describe the author's treatment of the subject matter.

Sample Dialectical Journal entry: *Life of Pi* Author: Yann Martel

The following examples demonstrate the Higher Level Responses of the journal.

Attitude toward self, narrator

"I am a person who believes in form, in the harmony of order...we must give things a meaningful shape...that's one thing I hate about my nickname, the way that number runs on forever. It's important in life to conclude things properly." (Martel, 285)

Pi's obsession with "form" and "the harmony of order" explains why religion appeals so strongly to him. He finds great importance in concluding things "properly". Pi is essentially asking what kind of life would we be leading if, when it was over, we simply died and remained dead to rot for eternity? Pi hopes and believes that there is more. He believes what he is told about afterlives and moral judgment because he is afraid of his life ending in a pointless and almost anticlimactic manner. Pi's obsession with closure can also be found in the founders of almost any religion to have ever been preached throughout history.

Attitude toward life, existence

"I have nothing to say of my working life, only that a tie is a noose, and inverted though it is, it will hang a man nonetheless if he's not careful." (Martel, 6)

Pi respects the importance of work, however finds much more value in the beauty of life itself. Pi believes that to ignore the offerings of life and to focus too much on work is detrimental to one's health.

Imagery to create Tone

"A foul and pungent smell, an earthy mix of rust and excrement hung in the air. There was blood everywhere, coagulating to a deep red crust. A single fly buzzed about, sounding like an alarm bell of insanity." (Martel, 127)

Martel paints a disturbing picture in his description of the lifeboat following the slow painful death of the zebra. He describes the air as smelling like "an earthy mix of rust and excrement", the boat as having "blood everywhere", and his only companion as "a single fly...sounding like an alarm bell of insanity". Through this shockingly filthy and revolting portrayal of the lifeboat, Martel establishes a tone of absolute disgust.

Diction, word choice to create tone

"The ship sank. It made a sound like a monstrous metallic burp. Things bubbled at the surface and then vanished. Everything was screaming: the sea, the wind, my heart." (Martel, 97)

When describing the sinking of the *Tsimtsum*, Martel utilizes a variety of strong and violent words to establish a tone of disorder and fear. Martel describes the sound of the ship sinking as a "monstrous metallic burp" simultaneously noting its enormity and its violent, industrial nature. He also says that "everything was screaming" suggesting disorder and confusion.

Theme

"I wept heartily over this poor little deceased soul. It was the first sentient being I had ever killed. I was now a killer. I was now as guilty as Cain...I had blood on my hands. It's a terrible burden to carry" (Martel, 183)

Another theme found in *Life of Pi* is the loss of innocence. Prior to his being stranded at sea, Pi is a god loving vegetarian who would never even consider eating the flesh of an animal. Once forced to end the life of another creature in the interest of prolonging his own, Pi is overcome by guilt. At this point, he has entered a phase of existence that, until his problem of being stranded is resolved, he is forced to endure, therefore making a transition from an innocent vegetarian to a hunter with "blood on my [Pi's] hands".