

Prepping for a great discussion.

We all know that some students have difficulty entering a discussion. Maybe they don't process as quickly as other students and need time to formulate and/or test out their thoughts. Or maybe it's because they haven't figured out how to support their ideas with text (an expectation in my classroom). This simple **Dialectic Journal Write** was introduced to me by my colleague Eve Berinati, and I have used it frequently to get the discussion rolling on any complex text.

- 1) Tell students to open their journals to two clean pages that face each other.
- 2) Divide each page in half with a vertical line, so that you end up with four columns.
- 3) Label each column, left to right: Quote, Reasoning, Partner, Reflection.
- 4) Students choose or are assigned a partner. (If you don't have an even number, the teacher gets to participate too.)
- 5) Explain that this is a SILENT activity. It is important that all thinking is done in writing, and since your writing will be read by another person, it is also important that everyone writes legibly.
- 6) Write - or project - the driving question about the text on the board.
- 7) Give students 5 - 7 minutes to find a quote from the text that relates to the question. The quote should be written out in its entirety in the first column, and cited with page number.
- 8) Give students another 5 minutes to write in the second column how that quote specifically connects to the question.
- 9) Students swap journals with their partner. For the next 5 minutes, the partner responds to the quote and analysis, either agreeing with and amplifying what has been said or giving a counter-argument. They should also pose another provocative question prompted by the analysis and/or provide another quote that relates to it.

- 10) Journals go back to their owners who read the partner's response and then reflect for 2 minutes on how their idea has deepened or changed based on the exchange.

Quote	Reasoning	Partner	Reflection
"Like Adam I was apparently united by no link to any other being in existence; but his state was far different from mine in every other respect. He had come forth from the hands of God a perfect creature, happy and prosperous, guarded by the especial care of his creator; he was allowed to converse with and acquire knowledge from beings of a superior nature, but I was wretched, helpless, and alone. Many times I considered sales as the fitter condition of my condition than others, like him, than I received the bliss of my protectors, the bitter gall of envy rose within me." (184)	I think think that Frankenstein should make a female companion for the monster because that is something the creator owes the creature. Frankenstein made it, is creative but the creature is so hideous that no one will become its companion so it is alone and miserable. I think something the creator owes its creation is happiness. Happiness in at least some respect and the monster isn't happy at all and because he's so miserable, he has become the monster that everyone thinks he is when they first see him. He He then brings death and destruction. The monster didn't ask to be created so to bring him into the world to give him life and then leave him to a miserable existence is not fair to the creation.	I like the quote you chose and the way it backs up your argument. I agree that the monster is miserable and though this may not seem fair, I think that is partially the monster's fault. He had a high expectation for his creator, leaving him inevitably disappointed, which then caused him to turn from mankind. He found a companion that taught him to speak, yet he still chose a path of anger and violence. I believe the monster brought this solitude onto himself and to create another creature like that would be a mistake.	I think that he didn't really have a companion in the people that taught him to speak because he was watching and wasn't interacting with them. I don't think he brought to himself as himself because no one would speak to him.

You can start your discussion by having partners report out on one thing that they discovered in their Dialectic Journal Write or simply opening up the conversation with, "Who made a surprising or satisfying discovery in their journal write?"

Write Around Reflection

This silent activity is a great way to synthesize an important discussion or even an entire unit. It allows students to thoughtfully process their ideas in small groups. Again, this protocol slows the “discussion” down so that everyone has a chance to voice their ideas.

- 1) Divide a large poster board with an X - corner to corner - creating four triangular spaces. Leave the center open.
- 2) In the center space, write a driving question that has grown out of the preceding discussion(s).
- 3) Divide the class into groups of four. A group of three is fine. Each student in the group should choose a different colored pen so that their line of thought can be tracked. Students should also have their texts, notes, etc.
- 4) Each group sits around the poster in front of one of the triangles. Doing this at a table is ideal, but the floor works too.
- 5) Instruct them that this is a SILENT activity. All communication will be done in writing, and therefore, it’s important to write legibly.
- 6) Starting at the top of their section, each student responds to the central question and includes a piece of evidence to support their ideas. A quote is good, but an illustrative example works as well. This portion of the exercise should last about 5 - 7 minutes.
- 7) When ready, the poster turns clockwise. Give students a chance to read the previous person’s response and then another 3 - 5 minutes to either deepen the idea or push back against it. Encourage this second person to add another quote or example.
- 8) When ready, the poster turns clockwise. Give students a chance to read the previous two responses and then another 3 - 5 minutes to either deepen the ideas or push back against them. Encourage the third person to pose a provocative question that grows out of the strand.
- 9) When ready, the poster turns clockwise. The fourth person reads the strand and writes a sentence that summarizes the big idea that developed in the write-around. (In the case of a group of three, this is the person who started the strand.)

10) After everyone has read their original strand, ask students to volunteer how that process went for them.

These posters often end up being very attractive. I usually put them on my classroom walls to demonstrate collaborative, scholarly thought.

