

Reading Journals

Practice is the best of all instructors.

-Publilius Syrus

Success is dependent on effort.

-Sophocles

To develop your language arts skills as much as possible this year, it's important to practice with each reading assignment. Focus on selecting significant passages, practicing close-reading, and developing insightful interpretations and questions.

1. As you read, mark key passages related to the novel's themes with post-its.
2. After you've finished reading, select a passage that you think might be important, for whatever reason. (The passage should typically be somewhere between a sentence and a paragraph in length; you may use ellipsis (...) to delete sections that aren't important for your purpose.) For example, you can pick passages that:
 - relate to the themes we've been discussing
 - remind you of something that happened to someone you know
 - discuss characters who do or say something that makes you angry
 - are confusing, or seem to have "hidden meaning" you don't yet understand
 - allow you to understand a character more deeply, or in a new way
 - use beautiful or interesting language
3. Type or handwrite your selected passage, verbatim (word for word), into your journal. Please also number it (e.g. RJ #1).
4. Respond to the passage in any way you feel is appropriate. **At a minimum, you should practice your close reading skills by examining the significance of key words, images or literary devices.** Whatever you choose, here's some advice:
 - It's okay to be wrong or not to understand; mistakes are often one of the best ways for us to learn. It's also okay for your initial thoughts to be less-than-organized. The purpose of this exercise is to record your thoughts as you read, to practice your interpretive skills, and to give us something to talk about in class the next day.
 - Asking good questions – even if you can't answer them – is an excellent way to respond. See the other side of this sheet for psychologist Arthur Costa's "Levels of Inquiry."
 - After you've picked your passage and written it out, expect to spend at least ten minutes writing. But really, you'll need to spend as long as it takes.
 - Once you've finished, read over what you've written and if necessary, clarify sections.
 - Use this process to improve your close reading skills. Dig into the details of the text that make this passage interesting.
 - Make connections between details within the passage and between the passage and other parts of the novel. You might also make connections to your own experience or other texts, history, or current events.
 - It's your job to make this an interesting and meaningful learning experience (it can turn into "busywork" if you don't genuinely practice **developing** your interpretive skills). If you're bored while writing, maybe you need to consider different passages, questions, or alternate meanings. **Remember that you aren't developing myelin/skills unless you are in your "sweet spot," practicing just above your current ability.**

Costa's Levels of Inquiry

Psychologist Arthur Costa developed three “levels of inquiry” to help learners develop better, more insightful questions. Remember that all three levels are important, and that to truly understand a concept, one should attempt to inquire about it at all three different levels. As you complete your journals throughout the year, consider these levels, and attempt to ask questions at each of them.

Level One: Basic Input and Gathering of Information	Define, List, Identify, Recite
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is the setting of <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i>? - Why did George and Lennie leave Weed? - Identify the characters who are neutral, those who are affiliated with the Montagues and those who side with the Capulets. 	
Level Two: Processing Information	Compare, Contrast, Analyze, Sequence, Make Analogies, Explain Why, Sort, Interpret
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Compare and contrast Boo Radley and Tom Robinson. - What is Steinbeck saying about loneliness in <i>Of Mice and Men</i>? - What is the most significant cause of the tragedy in <i>Romeo and Juliet</i>? 	
Level Three: Applying and Creating Your Own Ideas	Evaluate, Hypothesize, Judge, If/Then, Imagine, Predict, Generalize
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Would you risk the safety of your family for a principle, as Atticus does? - How do the lessons about community from <i>Of Mice and Men</i> apply to our experience at Los Altos High? - How would Friar Lawrence be judged in our modern legal system? 	

Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress Sample Reading Journal Entry

<p>RJ #1</p> <p>“The village headman, a man of about fifty, sat cross-legged in the centre of the room, close to the coals burning in a hearth that was hollowed out of the floor; he was inspecting my violin. Among the possessions brought to this mountain village by two “city youths”—which was how they saw Luo and me—it was the sole item that exuded an air of foreignness, of civilization, and therefore aroused suspicion.” (3)</p>	<p>Sijie opens the novel with a stark contrast between the village headman and the city boys, Luo and the narrator. The leader of the mountain village warms his room with burning coals that are essentially in a hole in his floor, whereas the narrator owns a violin. Sijie shows how the Cultural Revolution truly reversed status and power; Luo and the narrator seem to be completely stripped of the status and power they had previously enjoyed and their identities are reduced to being “city youths.” All that seems to remain is the “sole item” of the violin. The villagers identify the violin as a “toy,” revealing their limited education and experience. Nevertheless, the villagers have nearly complete power over Luo and the narrator. Anything that seems foreign or civilized arouses suspicion, and there is intense pressure to conform to the ways of the villagers. Even though Luo and the narrator are at the mercy of the villagers, they still wield power because they are more educated; in fact, they escape the near burning of the “bourgeois toy” by tricking the villagers with the “Mozart Is Thinking of Chairman Mao” lie. This scene raises questions about whether or not there is more power in official leadership roles and structures or if there is more power in internal qualities, such as education and intelligence.</p>
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