

Reading Journal

Types of reading journal entries

Reading journals give you the opportunity to reflect, speculate and express immediate responses to your reading. It will be important that you see your journal as part of a dialogue with your teacher about reading, rather than as work to be marked.

Entries can take a range of forms including:

- ? **notes**, e.g. about content and characters;
- ? **questions**, e.g. speculations while reading, questions for the author;
- ? **descriptions**, e.g. settings and people;
- ? **jottings**, e.g. thoughts and feelings aroused by the text;
- ? **graphic representations**, e.g. diagrams, mind-maps, time charts, comparison grids, sketches.

Making it a habit

- ? **Write a paragraph about what you discovered when reading today.** This may include:

questions left in your mind, i.e. what you do not understand at the moment but expect to be revealed later on;

parts of the book (words, lines) that you have particularly enjoyed;

your impressions and feelings about characters as conveyed so far;

similarities with other books you have read;

connections with your own experiences.

- ? **Look at the Strategy check-card, list the reading strategies that you have used.** Illustrate them with brief references to the text.

Ideas on what to write in your reading journal

Charting the plot

Can you make a chart that reflects changes in the book/play? Distribute on your vertical axis the words high, moderate and low and on the horizontal axis the chapter or page numbers. Pinpoint where the highs and lows are in the plot. Can you see that the writer varies the pace, i.e. follows a tense moment with a relaxed pace, has a slower description following fast action or dialogue? Is there a noticeable point in the plot where tension is at its height? What does the temperature line look like by the end of the book?

Drawings and diagrams

No artistic skills required. With a partner take it in turns to tell the story out loud. The one listening has to draw (use pin men, arrows, etc.) what they hear instead of writing notes. A drawing can help us see structure and contrasts in a plot. For some texts this may take the form of a spider diagram, a map or a journey.

Charactergrams

On a large sheet of paper, write the main character's name in the middle and place the names of other characters at varying distances from it, depending on the closeness of their relationship. Now draw lines between all those that have contact or a direct influence over each other. This is likely to look like a tangled web. Use different colours to plot the inter-relationship between the main characters and the others in the book.

Visualising the scene

In pairs take it in turns to select and read aloud from a particular moment or scene described in the text. In each case the listeners close their eyes, visualise the scene and then describe what they saw. This is ideally recorded in a reading journal and backed up with evidence from the text.

It depends where you stand ...

No two characters have quite the same view of an event/issue (just as in real life!). Choose two characters and one particular moment/event in the book. Think of a moment in the book and put yourself in the shoes of first one and then another character; write a short diary entry about the same moment.

Why? Why?

If you can't think what to write - say anything about the book and then turn that statement into a question. Answer the question and then ask another question of your answer. It can go on forever but you really start to think about the book and what the writer is trying to do, for example:

- ? I think this book is depressing.
- ? How is the book depressing?
- ? It uses dark and dreary descriptions of life in the past.
- ? What is dark and dreary in the descriptions?
- ? The words like 'miserable rivulets of water ran inside my boots and down my collar'.
- ? Why is this depressing?

This can help when you're stuck. Every time you answer one of your own questions ask another one about your answer ...

Which characters change?

Write down the names of characters that have stayed the same and those that have changed, learned and grown as people by the end of the book. Look at the ones who change, why do they? How does this make the book more interesting?

Summing it up

Try and put in one sentence what the book you have just read is about. Your sentences could be written on cards and displayed. Does everyone in the reading group recognise the book from your sentence?

Narrative hooks

Openings tell the reader a great deal about the book. In pairs or a small group discuss the following questions on the opening.

- ? How does the writer 'hook' the interest of the reader?
- ? What clues are there as to who will be the main character?
- ? What kind of story is it? What are the clues in terms of mood/tone/setting/characters/action?

Writing style

The writing style tells the reader a great deal about the meaning that the writer is trying to convey. In pairs, take one chapter and different pairs investigate features of:

- ? sentences, length and complexity;
- ? types of verbs, active/passive;
- ? vocabulary and choice of words;
- ? balance between dialogue and description.