

HOW TO KEEP A READER'S JOURNAL

So how should you go about keeping a reading journal?

- **Pick a journal.** I prefer that you find one that is like a Sketch Book, without lines I would prefer that you DO NOT keep your journal online.

- **Include an entry header.** Dating the entries is important. Each time you sit down to read, make an entry. Entries do not need to be all the same length or the same type.

- **Make this journal your own: keep it going, make it fun, really care about it. That will make it more interesting to share when classes start again.**

- **Your entries can take many forms: If you are artistic,** you may draw or paint something that caught your imagination; **if you are a poet or a songwriter,** you can write poems or song lyrics about something that happened or about a character or place. **If you are more of a geography person,** you can make a map, showing where an event took place, or where the character has travelled to or from. You can keep adding to this map in sections as you go along. **If you are more mathematical,** you might calculate out the miles he has travelled and try to find these real places on the map; or you can make a chart of his adventures from place to place.

- **If you would like more detailed instructions, and do not feel comfortable with a creative journal described above, you may follow any of the suggestions below, which are more traditional kinds of reading journals.**

Personal thoughts and reactions

Try not to censure your reactions to the text but to include more than "I liked (or hated)" type of statements. Be reflective; think about why you may be responding the way you are. Leave room for recording later reflections on the same topic/event/character. One way to do this is to take notes on the left-hand page of notebook and reserve the right-hand page for later additions, comments, questions, and so on.

Comments and questions on plot, narrative structure, point of view, characterization, or setting

Refer to any of the following kinds of questions to help guide your responses:

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Plot: What is the main conflict? What are the minor conflicts? How are all the conflicts related? What causes the conflicts? Where does the climax occur, if there is one? Why? How is the main conflict resolved? Which conflicts go unresolved?

Narrative Structure: How does the story move? What kind of narrative device is employed to move the plot? That is, are the characters on a journey through geographic space? Does the narrative move chronologically? etc. How does this structure seem to reflect or comment on other elements (i.e. characters and themes) in the text?

Point of view: Who tells the story? Can you trust the narrator to tell you the truth about events, characters, and settings of the story? Why has the author chosen this point of view? What effects does it have on other elements of the story?

Characterization: How are the characters portrayed? Are they flat, round, dynamic, static? Do they change? How and why do they change? What do they learn? What problems do they have? Do they have traits that contradict one another and therefore cause internal conflicts? Do they experience epiphanies? How or what? How do they relate to each other? Etc.

Setting: Where does the action take place? (Think not only about geographic location but also physical space: indoors, outdoors, small rooms, palatial homes, etc.) What does it look like, sound like, feel like? What relationship does place have to characterization, the plot, themes, and the narrative structure? At what period in history does the action take place?

Note page numbers. Write about and record favorite or interesting quotes in your journal and write down the page number and maybe even paragraph number where you found the excerpt.

Final impact of the story. At the end of the book, take some time to record the overall impact the story had on you. Did the story flow well and keep you riveted in the characters' world until the very end? Or, did it feel stilted and contrived? What impact did the characters have, if any, on you personally? Strong characters can make lasting impressions on readers' behaviors and thought processes. Write down whether the characters made this type of impression on you.

From <http://www.joelgoldman.com/keep-reading-journal/> and Griffith, Kelley.

Writing Essays about Literature: A Guide and Style Sheet, 5th edition. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1998.