59

**Reader Response Journals: General Guidelines**

1. First impressions: immediately after you finish reading a section of text, take some time to write down anything that comes to you in relation to the text—your initial reactions or responses. Don’t try to puzzle them out—just write freely. If the reading bores you, write that down. If you’re intrigued by certain statements, if you’re attracted to characters or issues or problems, write them down. Just keep writing. In fact, **give yourself permission to write**. This writing should last between 5 and 20 minutes.

2. Ask questions about the text. **This may be the most important activity in which you engage**. What perplexes you about some passage or point the author makes? Do you wonder why the author said a particular thing, in a particular way? You might begin with, “I wonder why…” or “I’m having trouble understanding…”

3. Make connections with your own experience. What does the reading make you think of?

Does it remind you of anything or anyone? Try to be very specific in your recollections.

4. Make connections with other texts or concepts or events. Do you see any similarities between this material and other books that you have read? Does it bring to mind other issues or incidents or people or descriptions that are somehow related?

5. Jot down ideas, images, details, lines that strike you for whatever reason. **Give yourself permission to speculate about them**: why are they there? What do they add? Why are they memorable? Do they have anything in common? Can you make an assertion about them? In response to images, begin: I see…I hear…I thing…I feel.

6. Copy passages, long or short, that strike you for any reason whatsoever. Underline key words or phrases. What is striking and why? How do the words and images work?

7. Write down words you do not know or find particularly effective.

8. Draw pictures in response to what you read, or make collages, adding words from the text.

9. Try agreeing with the author; add details to support his or her ideas.

10. Try arguing with the author; where do you disagree? Choose details to support your points.

11. Identify the author’s point of view, her or his attitude toward the subject, the purpose behind the piece of writing.

These entries may be written at home or in class. They may form the basis for class discussion, further writing assignments, group work. Obviously specific modifications and a range of variations are permissible for specific reading assignments.

60

**Suggested Starters for Reader Response Journals**

In your reader response journals you will be recording your reactions to the assigned readings for the course. Your entries should be unique, personal descriptions of the effect the reading is having on you. In these responses you can admit your confusion, expand on the author’s ideas, and attempt to discover your own. To help you at first, you might want to use one of the following openers to begin your entry:

I began to think of… I noticed that…

This reminds me of… I realized…

I’m not sure…

I was surprised… I can’t believe…

I can’t really understand… If I were…

I wonder why…

I know the feeling… Although…

61

**Reader Response Journal: Further Guidelines**

**General Rules:**

Some guidance is essential.

Some variety is essential—to suit a specific work, to elicit specific kinds of responses, to avoid boredom.

**Minimal Guidance:**

Write a personal response.

Copy a passage and comment on it. State an opinion and support it.

Ask questions. Make lists.

**Medium Guidance:**

Copy a striking or significant passage; tell why it is striking or important—what it tells

about character or theme or atmosphere or narration. Identify key words or phrases or images and write about their effects—what you see, feel, hear, think, imagine, understand, are reminded of. (Colour, mark, or code in some way; underline specific details.

Write down 5 striking things. A thing may be an idea, an event, a word, a person, a phrase, an emotion, a scene, a conversation; write about one of them. (Use this as the basis for

discussion.)

Write a personal response to a person or an event or the opening chapter or immediately after finishing…

Write one to two page lists: details, sentences, phrases, colours, natural objects… List moments of interest or significance.

**Specific Guidance**

List evidence of negative or positive qualities of particular character(s): i.e.

protagonist/antagonist.

Give examples of a particular voice (i.e. A child’s voice in *The Bluest Eye)*

List images of decay in *Hamlet.*

List phrases which characterize the narrator in ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred

Prufrock’.

List one page per character of details that you find interesting in *The Great Gatsby.* Name each chapter.

**Creative Ideas**

Copy a passage and write a ‘postcard short story’.

Select words from the text to write a ‘found poem’ about a character or situation. Write a new chapter, continue a chapter; write a new ending.

Make a collage or draw a representation: draw chapter titles. Change the genre or point of view.

Write a scene: create dialogue or stage directions.

Write letters between characters, or characters and their authors. Write the journal entry of one of the characters.

62

**Pre-Reading (Priming the Pump)**

Comment on the title, the opening paragraph, specific images, phrases: what is your

experience? What do you see? What do you