

Summer Reading Text: The Alchemist

Welcome to High School. I hope you are excited to start the last stage before college & well....adulthood. The novel for the summer reading is: The Alchemist by Paulo Coelho. As you read it, mark memorable quotations, unanswered questions, elements of narrative (plot, characters, theme, setting, language), and anything you may find interesting.

Have the answers to the questions below and come ready to discuss your responses on the first day of school.

1. At the start of the journey, when Santiago asks a Gypsy woman to interpret his dream about a treasure in the Egyptian pyramids, she asks for 1/10 of the treasure in return. When Santiago asks the old man to show him the path to the treasure, the old man requests 1/10 of his flock as “payment”. Both payments represent a different price we have to pay to fulfill a dream; however, only one will yield a true result. Which payment represents false hope? Can you think of examples from your own life when you had to give up something to meet a goal and found the price too high?
2. Paulo Coelho once said that alchemy is all about pursuing our spiritual quest in the physical world as it is given to us. It is the art of transmuting the reality into something sacred, of mixing the sacred and the profane. With this in mind, can you define your personal legend? At what time in your life were you able to act on it? What was your “beginner’s luck”? Did anything prevent you from following it to conclusion? Having read *The Alchemist*, what inner resources do you need to continue your journey?
3. One of the first major diversions from Santiago’s journey was the theft of his money in Tangier, which forced him into taking a job with the crystal merchant. There Santiago learned many lessons on everything from the art of business to the art of patience. Of all these, which lessons were the most crucial to the pursuit of his personal Legend?
4. When he talked about the pilgrimage to Mecca, the crystal merchant argued that having a dream is more important than fulfilling it, which is what Santiago was trying to do. Do you agree with Santiago’s rationale or the crystal merchant’s?
5. The alchemist tells Santiago “you don’t even have to understand the desert: all you have to do is to contemplate a simple grain of sand, and you will see in it all the marvels of creation.” With this in mind, why do you think the alchemist chose to befriend Santiago, though he knew that the Englishman was the one looking for him? What is the meaning of the two dead hawks and the falcon in the oasis? At one point the alchemist explains to Santiago the secret of successfully turning metal into gold. How does this process compare to finding a Personal Legend?
6. Why did Santiago have to go through all the dangers of tribal wars on the outskirts of the oasis in order to reach the Pyramids? At the end of the journey, why did the alchemist leave Santiago to complete it?
7. Earlier in the story, the alchemist told Santiago “when you possess great treasures within you, and try to tell others of them, seldom are you believed.” At the end of the

story, how did this simple lesson save Santiago's life? How did it lead him back to the treasure he was looking for?

8. Explain the role of Fatima. Does she help or hinder Santiago's journey? What does her character represent to Santiago?
9. Did you enjoy reading the Alchemist? Why or why not?
10. What is the most important lesson Paulo Coelho is projecting through Santiago's journey?

If you're on Twitter, you may want to look up the author. It's pretty inspirational.