

9th Grade English Summer Reading

Name: _____

The Alchemist by Paulo Coelho**Background information:**

The Alchemist is subtitled "A Fable About Following Your Dreams." Fables are cautionary tales that have a point to make. The universal point this story makes is that everyone has a special destiny, and yet not everyone resolves to attain it because it takes hard work. Reaching one's destiny requires leaving behind familiar surroundings. It also demands persistence, the ability to change when appropriate and the willingness to respond to omens that point the way.

Like the title character, most of the characters in this story are not given names. In a traditional fable, characters are often animals that represent a specific trait. The characters here are humans, but they are only identified by what they do or whom they represent. The main character, a young Spanish shepherd, does have a name, Santiago, which is a derivative of "saint." Santiago is disturbed by a recurrent dream that seems to have a message for him. He seeks a gypsy to explain its meaning. She affirms what the dream is trying to tell him, that he will find his treasure at the Egyptian pyramids. He meets an old man who is actually an unassuming king, who tells him that he needs to learn to respond to omens. The king explains "the principle of favorability, beginner's luck. Because life wants you to achieve your destiny."

Santiago leaves his sheep to embark on a long journey across foreign territory in search of a hidden treasure, his destiny. The journey is a universal analogy to the journey of life itself. Though Santiago travels far, learns much and faces mortal danger to get to his treasure, in the end he finds that treasure, his destiny, back at home in the very place where he started. From the start, as in life, the journey is filled with difficulties and unanticipated challenges. Through the challenges of loss and hard work, Santiago learns to recognize and respond to omens. He meets and interacts with several characters along the way from which he learns something important about himself. Whether they intend to or not, the characters along the way help guide him to his treasure.

Prologue and Prereading

1. The main character is guided by dreams and omens which appear to him throughout his journey. Have you had a dream or sign influence your life? Explain.

2. According to legend, According to legend, why does Narcissus stare in the lake?

3. How does Narcissus die? _____

4. Why does the lake cry and is the lake's perspective the same or different than Narcissus'? _____

Part I

5. Who is Santiago, where does he live and what is his job?

6. Who occupies Santiago's mind? Describe this person.

7. What does Santiago learn from his sheep? _____

8. What inspires Santiago to become a shepherd? _____

9. Where does Santiago go to have his dreams interpreted?

10. What does the interpreter tell him about the language of dreams?

11. What payment does the interpreter request?

12. What does Melchizedek consider to be "the world's great lie"?

13. What is the "mysterious force" that Melchizedek (king of Salem) makes reference to and what does it do? _____

14. Why does Santiago want to go to Africa? _____

15. What 2 stones does the king of Salem give Santiago and what do they represent?

16. What advise does the king of Salem give Santiago regarding happiness?

17. What are Santiago's first impressions of Tangier? How does it differ from Spain?

18. How does Santiago lose his money and could he have prevented it?

19. How does he feel afterwards? _____

20. Who give Santiago a job and why? _____

Part II

21. What is the crystal seller's dream? How does Santiago inspire him to follow his dream?

22. How does Santiago contribute to the success of the crystal shop?

23. When Santiago begins his trek across the desert, he meets an Englishman who is a student of alchemy. In many ways they are alike: both are pursuing their "Personal Legends," both have encountered the ideas of alchemy. How is their approach to life and learning different? Why does the alchemist choose the boy as his pupil over the Englishman?

24. The Englishman tells Santiago that he would like to write "a huge encyclopedia just about the words luck and coincidence. It's with those words that the universal language is written" What is meant by the "language of the world"? Why do YOU think it means?

25. Throughout *The Alchemist*, the concept of Maktub—the idea that our destiny is already written—is endorsed by many characters. What is the difference between being controlled by fate and discovering one's "Personal Legend" or destiny?

26. When Santiago meets the alchemist, he wants to give up his journey to find his treasure and remain at the pyramids. He has become a respected counselor at the oasis, he has fallen deeply in love with Fatima, and he wants nothing more than to stay where he is. How does the alchemist convince him to go on?

27. The alchemist says that for the boy to find his treasure he must listen to his heart. Why does the alchemist feel that the heart is more important, or more trustworthy, than the mind? How and why is the heart able to understand things the mind can't grasp?

28. When Santiago and the alchemist are captured by one of the warring tribes, Santiago must turn himself into the wind to save his life. He asks the desert, the wind, and the sun to help him, but none know how to turn a man into the wind. Where does the boy find the answer? What is the larger significance of this answer?

29. How do you interpret the novel's ending? Why is it significant that Santiago's treasure is not buried where he thought it was? What is the meaning of the fact that Santiago learns

this from a man who also had a dream but refused to follow it?

30. What time period do you imagine *The Alchemist* takes place in? Are there any clues in the novel? Why do you suppose Coelho hasn't clearly indicated when the events described in the story take place? Why do you think Santiago is simply called "the boy" throughout the novel? _____

31. *The Alchemist* is about a shepherd boy who journeys by caravan across the desert, has many magical experiences, and meets many extraordinary characters. How were you able to relate to the story even though the world it describes is so different from life in contemporary America? What aspects of the story seem most relevant to you? Has reading the novel changed the way you view your own life?

32. Are omens really out there and are they important? What are omens? Are they just illusions that we see to justify something we feel or want to do, or are they something more?

33. Are the king, the crystal merchant and the alchemist the same person or spirit?

34. What was the point of finding the treasure close to where it was first dreamed about?

35. Was the journey or finding the treasure more important? What does this mean about life? What happens in life when one actually achieves their personal legend?

36. What was the point of the boy becoming the wind? _____

37. Does the simplistic and primitive style of this book add or detract from the main goal, what ever you think the main goal is? _____

38. What does it mean to say "the universe conspires to help you achieve what you want"?

Who or what is the author referring to when he says "the universe"?
