

Center for the Humanities
Level 1: Foundations of Civilization

Mr. Marr

Summer Work

Our experience in history will begin with an examination of the Renaissance, Reformation and the Age of Exploration. To help establish a context and framework for our study, we will read the novel *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho. You may purchase this book at any bookstore and there are copies available at local libraries. Although plainly written and easily understood on a surface level, the book offers the potential for profound personal discovery. Ideally, this will facilitate a more personal connection with the history we study together.

Part I – Choose 2 of the following questions and answer fully in writing. Identify which question is being answered in your answer.

1. At the start of his journey, when Santiago asks a gypsy woman to interpret his dream about a treasure in the Egyptian pyramids, she asks for one tenth of the treasure in return. When Santiago asks the old man to show him the path to the treasure, the old man requests one tenth 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? Offer an example from your own life when you had to give up something to meet a goal and found the price too high? Explain
2. Paulo Coelho once said that alchemy is all about pursuing our spiritual quest in the physical world as it was 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 first 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 you need to continue your journey? Explain
3. One of the first major diversions from Santiago's journey was the theft of his money in Tangiers, which forced him into taking a menial 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 and why?
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 crystal merchant's? Why or why not
5. The alchemist tells Santiago "you don't have to understand the desert: all you have to do is 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 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? At this point in your young life, please articulate your Personal Legend.

Part II - Create a physical representation which captures an idea, relationship or moment you personally find meaningful from the story. Also provide a written explanation of your physical representation. Be prepared to share your creation and an explanation of your creation with the class.

Examples of physical representation: painting, sculpture, collage, photo-essay, brief movie, collection of objects, an object (this would require significant explanation I believe), etc. **Be creative here!** You **WILL NOT** be graded on your artistic ability. You will be graded on your explanation of your chosen moment in the book.

Questions? Concerns?? Let me know!

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