

Study Guide for Summer Reading CP12A

THE ALCHEMIST BY PAULO COELHO

1. Coelho opens with the modified myth of Narcissus. Look up the myth of Narcissus. How does the new version differ from the original myth?
2. Why did he make the choice to leave the seminary at the age of sixteen after learning to read and write? What does being a shepherd allow him to do?
3. How does Santiago's father react when his son tells him that he wants to travel?
4. The novel opens with Santiago thinking about his sheep. What does he observe about their existence? How might the sheep symbolize the way some people live their lives?
5. The novel begins with the boy deciding to spend the night with his flock in an abandoned church. Describe the church and the tree. Describe his recurring dream. He travels to Tarifa in the hope that a gypsy woman will be able to interpret his dream. What is her interpretation?
6. Santiago meets an old man. On page 24, he tells the story about the miner and the emerald. Paraphrase the story. How does it connect to Santiago's situation?
7. Who is the old man Santiago meets while sitting on a bench in the marketplace? (his name and the name of his kingdom). Describe what he looks like.
8. The man says that the book that Santiago is reading contains "the world's greatest lie." What is this lie?
9. According to the king, what is a Personal Legend? He says he appears in many different guises. What are some of the disguises that he employs when he connects with people?
10. What is the story about the baker? What does the King say is the "Principle of Favorability" and who or what grants this?
11. After he meets Melchizedek, where does Santiago decide to travel? What makes Santiago hesitate?
12. How has Santiago benefited from the "Principle of Favorability" or beginner's luck so far?
13. What does Melchizedek give Santiago to help him on this journey, and how does he tell the boy to use the gift?
14. What is the story of the oil and the spoon?

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15. What difficulties does Santiago face in Tangier?
16. When Santiago gazes at the stones, what mistake does he realize that he has made in dealing with the thief? What happens when Santiago asks the stones to tell him if he will find his treasure?
17. Santiago realizes that he must make a choice about how to view himself. What are the two choices he has? What choice does he make?
18. By what means does Santiago eventually come to work in the Crystal Merchant's shop?
19. When Santiago and the Crystal Merchant talk together, the merchant tells the boy how long it will take in order for Santiago to get to Egypt. How long does he say it will take and under what circumstances?
20. Author P. Coelho says that the biggest obstacle most people face in pursuing their Personal Legend is "the fear of realizing the dream for which we fought all our lives" (viii). How does this explain the Chrystal Merchant's failure to travel to Mecca?
21. Santiago learns many lessons during his year at the Crystal Merchant's shop. What do you think he learns?
22. Coelho says that, while defeats are an unavoidable result of the mistakes we make in pursuing our Personal Legends, "The secret of life is to fall seven times and get up eight times" (vii). At this point in the novel, how do we know that Santiago has learned this lesson of persistence?
23. Specific words carry meaning within the novel. The Chrystal Merchant introduces Santiago to the Arabic word, *makub*; this word loosely translated means what?
24. Whom does Santiago meet when he joins the caravan to the Egyptian pyramids? What is the stranger searching for?
25. As the caravan travels, the Englishman spends his days poring over books while Santiago throws his book away. Why does Santiago do this?
26. When the Englishman asks Santiago what the boy learned about alchemy from reading his books. Santiago sums up his reading in a few short sentences. What does he say he has learned?
27. Upon what does Santiago say that all the things he has learned about alchemy can be written? How does his answer relate to what the Englishman has told him?
28. According to the Englishman, how were the alchemists he read about changed by the years they spent "in their laboratories, observing the fire that purified the metals"?

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29. Read the conversation on pages 84-5 between Santiago and his new friend, the camel driver. What life lesson is the camel driver trying to impart to the boy?

30. Who is Fatima?

31. Santiago believes he has seen an omen in the desert. What has he seen and what does he think it signifies?

32. Who does he tell about the vision? What is the meaning of the vision? How does this omen change Santiago's status in society?

33. Santiago leaves the chieftain and encounters a powerful, intimidating stranger on horseback, who terrifies him at sword-point. Who is the stranger? What does the stranger demand?

34. Why does Santiago say he wants to stay at the oasis?

35. Santiago spends the next week trying to "listen to his heart" as The Alchemist has instructed him to do. There are several pages of dialogue between Santiago and his heart in this section. What do you think the writer wants the reader to understand about his dialogue?

36. When Santiago and the Alchemist are captured by one of the warring tribes, what must Santiago do to save his life?

37. Though Santiago has asked for assistance from the sun, wind, and desert, what is their response? Where does the boy find the answer?

38. 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 does this simple lesson save Santiago's life? How does it lead him to the treasure he was looking for?

39. How do you interpret the novel's ending?

40. What is the meaning of the fact that Santiago has learned from a man who also has a dream but refused to follow it?