

## Olentangy Local School District Literature Selection Review

Teacher: OLHS English Department

School: Liberty High School

Book Title: *The Alchemist*

Genre: Fiction

Author: Paulo Coelho

Publisher: Harper One

Copyright: 1988

**Book Summary and Summary Citation:** (suggested resources include book flap summaries, review summaries from publisher, book vendors, etc.)

=Paulo Coelho's masterpiece tells the mystical story of Santiago, an Andalusian shepherd boy who yearns to travel in search of a worldly treasure. His quest will lead him to riches far different—and far more satisfying—than he ever imagined. Santiago's journey teaches us about the essential wisdom of listening to our hearts, of recognizing opportunity and learning to read the omens strewn along life's path, and, most importantly, to follow our dreams.

**Provide an instructional rationale for the use of this title, including specific reference to the OLSD curriculum blueprints and/or State standards.**

The Alchemist is a text that exposes students to narrative writing that also uses fable in its storytelling technique. Students will use the text as a model for narrative writing connecting to the following skills:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3

*Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3

*Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.*

Students who also read this as a whole class, will discuss the development of the character and creation of thematic meaning by the author. Practicing the following skills:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3

Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

**Include two professional review of this title:** (a suggested list of resources for identifying professional reviews is shown below. Reviews may be “cut and pasted” (with citation) into the form or printed reviews may be attached to the form). Reviews should suggest an appropriate grade-level or grade-band.

Review #1: The Guardian:

<https://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2015/oct/10/the-chemist-paulo-coelho-review>

*This is one of the key repeated phrases found in The Alchemist, and as overly inspirational poster-y as it may sound, there might be some truth to it. After all, I really wanted to read something beyond exceptional after trudging through too much un-original dystopian fiction – and the universe gave me The Alchemist!*

*Quips aside though, Coelho’s short 163–page book is a singularly inspirational masterpiece. The plot line is that of a simple quest – a Spanish shepherd boy, Santiago, keeps getting the same dream that there is treasure lying underneath the Egyptian pyramids. After meeting an old king who offers him some advice and some magic stones, Santiago embarks on his journey to cross the Mediterranean and the Sahara to find his treasure and accomplish his Personal Legend (a concept equivalent to our purpose in life). Amidst swindlers, tribe wars and endless sand, Santiago finds his one true love, learns alchemy and the language of his heart, and of course, fights to reach his treasure.*

*But reading this book simply for the plot would be akin to viewing Starry Night as globs of paint – losing at least 70% of the beauty Coelho truly presents. With a dreamy and pensive writing style, the author weaves into the storyline multiple sage concepts which a philosopher could ponder for years on. Insightful ideas about one’s own destiny, about rising above failure, about the unity of the universe, are all things Coelho pens into the comparatively simplistic diction of the text. The descriptions are awe–inspiring and the word choice is immaculate, but really it’s the depth of soul behind Coelho’s words that spin the magic of this novel.*

*For anyone who reads not only to escape reality but also to understand reality, *The Alchemist* can offer the best of both worlds. The events of the novel sit just on the borderline of miraculous and the ambience is simply just not that of our humdrum teenage world. However, *The Alchemist* also supplies insight and inspiration that extends beyond Santiago's Sahara and into all lives, whether young, old, or teenage. *The Alchemist* may not be your regular YA fiction book, but it most definitely still deserves a place on your bookshelf!*

Review #2 Kirkus Review: <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/paulo-coelho/the-chemist/>  
Coelho is a Brazilian writer with four books to his credit. Following *Diary of a Magus* (1992—not reviewed) came this book, published in Brazil in 1988: it's an interdenominational, transcendental, inspirational fable—in other words, a bag of wind.

The story is about a youth empowered to follow his dream. Santiago is an Andalusian shepherd boy who learns through a dream of a treasure in the Egyptian pyramids. An old man, the king of Salem, the first of various spiritual guides, tells the boy that he has discovered his destiny: "to realize one's destiny is a person's only real obligation." So Santiago sells his sheep, sails to Tangier, is tricked out of his money, regains it through hard work, crosses the desert with a caravan, stops at an oasis long enough to fall in love, escapes from warring tribesmen by performing a miracle, reaches the pyramids, and eventually gets both the gold and the girl. Along the way he meets an Englishman who describes the Soul of the World; the desert woman Fatima, who teaches him the Language of the World; and an alchemist who says, "Listen to your heart" A message clings like ivy to every encounter; everyone, but everyone, has to put in their two cents' worth, from the crystal merchant to the camel driver ("concentrate always on the present, you'll be a happy man"). The absence of characterization and overall blandness suggest authorship by a committee of self-improvement pundits—a far cry from Saint- Exupery's *The Little Prince*: that flagship of the genre was a genuine charmer because it clearly derived from a quirky, individual sensibility.

**What alternate text(s) could also fulfill the instructional requirements?**  
***Animal Farm* by George Orwell**

**Document any potentially controversial content:**  
none

**Keeping in mind the age, academic level, and maturity of the intended reader, what is the suggested classroom use: (check all that apply)**

xGifted/Accelerated                      xRegular                      x At Risk


**GRADE LEVEL(S):** 6  7  8  9  10  11  12

**Reading Level of this Title (if applicable):**

**Suggested Professional Literacy Review Sources:**

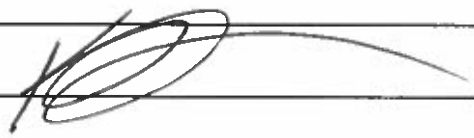
- School Library Journal
- Horn Book
- Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books
- VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates)
- Library Journal
- Book Links
- Publisher's Weekly
- Booklist
- Kirkus Review
- Wilson Library Catalog
- English Journal (and other resources of the National Council of Teachers of English)
- The Reading Teacher (International Reading Association)
- Literature for Today's Young Adults

**Signatures:**

**Teacher:**  **Date:** 10-1-21

**Department Head:**  **Date:** 9/30/21

**Building Administrator:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Curriculum Supervisor:**  **Date:** 9/30/21