



**WHITE PLAINS PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
WHITE PLAINS HIGH SCHOOL  
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Emerly Martinez  
Principal

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Dear Ninth Grade English Honors Student:

We would like to wish you a wonderful, productive summer as you prepare for your first year at White Plains High School.

As an incoming English 9 Honors student, you are required to read two books: The Alchemist by Paulo Coelho (full text or graphic novel) and one additional book of your choosing from the attached list of suggested titles. As you read, employ close reading strategies while focusing on identifying literary elements such as plot structure, theme, conflict, and character development.

For The Alchemist, you will complete a written assignment (attached). The **first part** of this assignment requires you to write six journal entries that relate to both the story and to your life. These journal entries are due on the first day of school. Please complete your journal entries digitally so that they can be easily uploaded to Schoology. **Do not upload pictures of your journal entries.**

The second and third parts of the assignment are due sometime during the first two weeks of school. Your teacher will instruct you on how and when to submit parts two and three.

We have high expectations for a successful year ahead, and we look forward to seeing you in the fall!

Sincerely,

Camilla Arredondo  
Jennifer DeGraphenreed  
Marlena Simmons

***Attached:*** Suggested book list and The Alchemist assessment

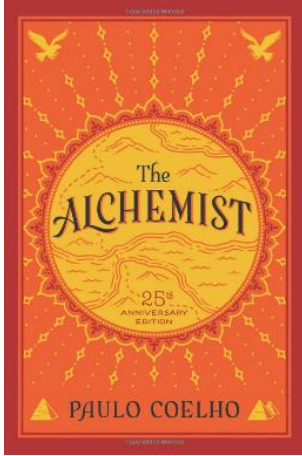
### English 9H Summer Reading Suggested Book List

Book Title and Author	Brief Description	Genre
<i>Becoming</i> by Michelle Obama	An intimate, powerful, and inspiring memoir by the former First Lady of the United States.	Memoir
<i>The Poet X</i> by Elizabeth Acevedo	Xiomara Batista feels unheard and unable to hide in her Harlem neighborhood. Although she has learned to let her fists and her fierceness do the talking, Xiomara refuses to be silent in world that may not want to hear her.	Novel in Verse
<i>Dear Martin</i> by Nic Stone	Stone’s debut novel confronts the reality of police brutality, misconduct, and fatal shootings in the U.S., using an authentic voice to accurately portray the struggle of self-exploration African American teens experience every day.	Novel
<i>We Are Displaced: My Journey and Stories from Refugee Girls Around the World</i> by Malala Yousafzai	Yousafzai writes with gut-wrenching detail, showing readers the many complex layers of life as a refugee including the struggle of escape, the frustrations of bureaucracy in the face of mortal danger, and the painful goodbyes along the way.	Memoir
<i>Just Mercy</i> by Bryan Stevenson (Young Readers Edition)	A Harvard Law graduate decides to give up a lucrative career to defend prisoners on death row.	Nonfiction
<i>The Distance Between Us</i> by Reyna Grande	Grande’s memoir tells the story of her life before and after she illegally emigrated from Mexica to the United States.	Memoir
<i>Children of Blood and Bone</i> by Tomi Adeyemi	A West African-inspired fantasy novel that conjures a world of magic and danger. The protagonists find themselves on a dangerous quest for power.	Fantasy
<i>Life as We Knew It</i> by Susan Pfeffer	Miranda’s disbelief turns to fear in a split second when a meteor knocks the moon closer to the earth. How should her family prepare for the future when worldwide tsunamis wipe out the coasts, earthquakes rock the continents, and volcanic ash blocks out the sun?	Sci-Fi
<i>Dante and Aristotle Discover the Secrets of the Universe</i> by Benjamin Alire Saenz	Aristotle is an angry teen with a brother in prison. Dante is a know-it-all who has an unusual way of looking at the world. When the two meet at the swimming pool, they seem to have nothing in common. But as the loners start spending time together, they discover that they share a special friendship--the kind that changes lives and lasts a lifetime.	Realistic Fiction/Coming of Age
<i>They Both Die at the End</i> by Adam Silvera	This devastating yet uplifting story about two people whose lives change over the course of one unforgettable day reminds us that there’s no life without death and no love without loss.	Fantasy
<i>Dry</i> by Neil Schusterman and Jarrod Shusterman	When the California drought escalates to catastrophic proportions, one teen is forced to make life and death decisions for her family in this harrowing story of survival.	Dystopian
<i>The Iliad: Graphic Novel</i> by Gareth Hinds	More than 3,000 years ago, two armies faced each other in an epic battle that rewrote history and came to be known as the Trojan War. <i>The Iliad</i> , Homer's legendary account of this nine-year ordeal, is considered the greatest war story of all time and one of the most important works of Western literature.	Graphic Novel
<i>Eleanor and Park</i> by Rainbow Rowell	Set over the course of one school year in 1986, this is the story of two star-crossed misfits-smart enough to know that first love almost never lasts, but brave and desperate enough to try.	Realistic Fiction/Romance

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## English 9H

### The Alchemist Summer Reading Assignment



**The Alchemist** is an allegorical novel by Brazilian author Paulo Coelho. The Alchemist follows a young Andalusian shepherd named Santiago in his journey to the pyramids of Egypt after having a recurring dream of finding a treasure there. Along the way he meets mentors, falls in love, overcomes many obstacles, and learns the true importance of who he is. The Alchemist helps us remember that everyone has their own journey. Sometimes these journeys intersect. Sometimes they may be different from our own.

**Part One Directions:** Please read The Alchemist by Paulo Coelho (the original text or the graphic novel; it is your choice). As you read, complete the journal prompts below. Each entry should be 3-5 sentences in length and should answer all parts of the prompt.

#### Journal Prompts (complete in order on loose leaf or a Word doc) (10 points each)

1. A central theme in The Alchemist is to *pursue your dreams by following what your heart desires*. Fully describe a **goal or dream** that you are working towards. What is the purpose of this goal? What will it help you to achieve after attaining it? What strengths do you possess that will help you along the way?
2. Re-examine the goal/dream that you wrote about in your last journal entry. What fears or weaknesses within you (inner obstacles) need to be overcome in order to attain this goal/dream? Do not reflect upon outside obstacles. What knowledge or skills do you lack at this point that may hinder your progress if not addressed?
3. Coelho says, "*The secret of life, though, is to fall seven times and to get up eight.*" What **outside** obstacles must be faced to achieve your goal? How will you successfully overcome these obstacles while still maintaining your true sense of self?
4. Santiago meets many people along his journey that help him in his pursuit of his "personal legend." What **mentor/helper** do you have on your journey to guide you? What skills/talents does this person possess that you would like to acquire within yourself? What strengths do you have available within you?
5. What adjustments might need to be made if the original goal set is unobtainable? Will the possibility of failure change the way you view yourself, or the way you believe others (parents, friends, teachers, etc.) will perceive you? Do you believe that the effort put into the journey will have been wasted, or do you believe that learning from mistakes/failure is part of the learning process?
6. Consider the following quote from The Alchemist: "*At a certain point in our lives, we lose control of what's happening to us, and our lives become controlled by fate. That's the world's greatest lie.*" Do you agree or disagree with this quote? What can we control, and what things are out of our control?

**Your journal entries (Part One) are due on the first day of school.  
There will be a forum in Schoology for you to upload your work.**

**Parts Two and Three will be due during the second full week of school. Your English teacher will provide you with the due date and submission format on the first day of school. It is provided for you so that you can complete it while the story is still fresh in your mind, so it is best not to procrastinate! ☹️**

**Part Two Directions:** Read the following chapter from “How to Read Literature Like a Professor” and answer the questions that follow (20 points)

### **Every Trip Is a Quest (Except When It’s Not)**

**OKAY, SO HERE’S** the deal: let’s say you’re reading a book about an average sixteen-year-old kid in the summer of 1968. The kid—let’s call him Kip Smith, who hopes his acne clears up before he gets drafted—is on his way to the A&P to get a loaf of bread. His bike is a one-speed with a coaster brake and therefore very embarrassing to ride, and riding it to run an errand for his mother makes it worse. Along the way he has a couple of disturbing experiences, including an unpleasant encounter with a German shepherd. And it’s all topped off in the supermarket parking lot when he sees the girl of his dreams, Karen, laughing and fooling around in Tony Vauxhall’s brand-new car, a Barracuda.

Now, Kip hates Tony already because he’s got a name like Vauxhall and not Smith, and because the Barracuda is bright green and goes approximately the speed of light, and also because Tony has never had to work a day in his life. Karen, who is laughing and having a great time, turns and sees Kip, who asked her out not so long ago. And she keeps laughing.

Kip goes on into the store to buy the loaf of Wonder Bread that his mother told him to pick up. As he reaches for the bread, he decides right then and there to lie about his age to the Marine recruiter, even though it means going to Vietnam, because nothing will ever happen to him if he stays in this one-horse town where the only thing that matters is how much money your father has.

What just happened here?

If you were an English teacher, and not even a particularly weird English teacher, you’d know that you’d just watched a knight have an encounter with his enemy. In other words, a **quest** just happened.

*But it just looked like a trip to the store for some white bread.*

True. But think about it. What is a quest made of? A knight, a dangerous road, a Holy Grail, at least one dragon, one evil knight, one princess. Sounds about right? That’s a list I can live with. We’ve got a knight (named Kip), a dangerous road (nasty German shepherd), a Holy Grail (a loaf of Wonder Bread), at least one dragon (trust me, a ’68 Barracuda could definitely breathe fire), one evil knight (Tony), one princess (Karen).

*Seems like a bit of a stretch.*

At first, sure. But let’s think about what a quest is made of. It needs five things:

1. a quester;
2. a place to go;
3. a stated reason to go there;
4. challenges and trials along the way;
5. a real reason to go there.

Item 1 is easy; a quester is just a person who goes on a quest, whether or not he knows it's a quest. In fact, he usually doesn't know. Items 2 and 3 go together: someone tells our main character, our *hero*, to go somewhere and do something. Go in search of the Holy Grail. Go to the store for some bread. Go to Mount Doom and throw in a ring. Go there, do that.

Now remember that I said the *stated* reason for the quest. That's because of item 5. The real reason for the quest is *never* the same as the stated reason. In fact, more often than not, the quester fails at the stated task. (Frodo makes it all the way to Mount Doom, but does he throw the ring in the fire? No, he does not. Really—go read it again if you don't believe me.) So why do heroes go on these quests, and why do we care? They go because of the stated task, believing that it is their real mission. We know, however, that their quest is educational. They don't know enough about the only subject that really matters--themselves. **The real reason for a quest is *always* self-knowledge.**

Frodo may have saved the world from Sauron, but that really just turned out to be a bit of luck. What his quest actually brings him is a new understanding of the value of mercy and who needs it: Gollum, Frodo himself, and probably everybody in Middle Earth. Or here's another example. You know the book, I'm sure: *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* (1957).

*Wait a minute. The Grinch is on a quest?*

**Sure. Here's the setup:**

1. *Our quester*: a grumpy, cave-dwelling creature who's had it up to here with the noise, celebration, and general happiness of Christmas.
2. *A place to go*: from his mountaintop cave to the village of Whoville, far below.
3. *A stated reason to go there*: to steal every Christmas present, tree, and bit of decoration he can lay his hands on.
4. *Challenges and trials*: a risky sleigh trip down the mountain, considerable effort packing up the Christmas presents and trimmings, an encounter with a two-year-old girl who puts all the Grinch's efforts in peril simply by asking a question, and a painfully difficult trip back up the mountain with an overloaded sleigh.
5. *The real reason to go*: to learn what Christmas actually means, to have his shriveled heart expand back to its proper size (or even bigger), and to find genuine happiness.

Once you get the hang of it, you can see how *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* follows the conventions of a quest tale. So does *The Lord of the Rings*. *Huckleberry Finn*. *Star Wars*. *Holes*. And most other stories of someone going somewhere and doing something, especially if the going and the doing weren't the protagonist's idea in the first place. A word of warning: if I sometimes speak here and, in the chapters, to come as if a certain statement is always true, I apologize. "Always" and "never" are not words that have much meaning when it comes to literature. For one thing, as soon as something seems to always be true, some wise guy will come along and write something to prove that it's not.

Let's think about journeys. Sometimes the quest fails or is not taken up by the protagonist. And is every trip really a quest? It depends. Some days I just drive to work—no adventures, no growth. I'm sure that the same is true in writing. Sometimes plot requires that a writer get a character from home to work and back again. But still, when a character hits the road, we should start to pay attention, just to see if, you know, something's going on there.

Once you figure out quests, the rest is easy.

1. Who is the “quester” in The Alchemist? \_\_\_\_\_ (5)

2. Where is he seeking to go? \_\_\_\_\_ (5)

3. What is his stated reason for going there? \_\_\_\_\_ (5)

4. What are his challenges and trials along the way? Discuss at least three (15)\_\_\_\_\_

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5. List at least two possible things that may have happened if the protagonist had not taken up or followed his quest (5)\_\_\_\_\_

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