

English 1

Required Summer Reading Assignment

Assignment

1. Read the novel *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho.
2. Choose one of the following topics and write a one-page response reflecting on the questions asked.
3. Your response must include specific references and examples from the novel and from your research to demonstrate comprehension and critical thinking.
4. Compose your response in a Google Doc for submission on the first day of class.

Topic 1

The Significance of the Places in Santiago's Journey

Santiago embarks on a journey across several significant locations, each playing a crucial role in his quest for his Personal Legend. Each location represents a step in Santiago's personal growth and self-discovery.

Choose one of the places Santiago visits in *The Alchemist* listed below. Research information and key facts about the location. Then, explain its significance in his journey, describing how the location contributes to Santiago's growth and the lessons he learns.

1. **Andalusia, Spain** – Santiago's home region. This is where he first dreams of finding treasure near the Egyptian pyramids.
2. **Tarifa, Spain** – Santiago visits a gypsy woman who interprets his dream. He also meets Melchizedek, who introduces him to the concept of a Personal Legend.
3. **Tangier, Morocco** – Santiago meets the crystal merchant.
4. **The Sahara Desert** – Santiago joins a caravan, meets the Englishman, and learns about omens and destiny.
5. **The Oasis (Al-Fayoum, Egypt)** – Santiago meets Fatima and encounters the alchemist.
6. **The Monastery in the Desert** – The alchemist takes Santiago here.
7. **The Pyramids of Egypt** – Santiago finally reaches his destination.

Topic 2

The Influence of Islamic and Middle Eastern Culture in *The Alchemist*

Mecca, located in Saudi Arabia, is Islam's holiest city, as it is the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad and the foundation of the Islamic faith. Every adult Muslim is required to make at least one pilgrimage to Mecca in their lifetime.

Research Mecca and the core beliefs of Islam. Explain how elements of the Muslim faith influence a theme or character in *The Alchemist*. Additionally, consider the historical and cultural significance of Mecca and how it contributes to the novel's setting and message.

Topic 3

The Impact of Paulo Coelho's Life on *The Alchemist*

In 1986, Paulo Coelho's life was profoundly transformed when he completed a 500-mile pilgrimage across northwestern Spain. During this journey, he experienced a spiritual awakening that inspired him to pursue his dream of becoming a writer.

Research Coelho's pilgrimage and identify three key similarities between his journey and Santiago's in *The Alchemist*. Reflect on how their experiences parallel each other in terms of personal growth, challenges, and the pursuit of their dreams.

Topic 4

Enlightenment in the desert

Much of the action in *The Alchemist* unfolds in the desert, a setting that has long been associated with spiritual quests. Throughout history, many religious, philosophical, and modern figures have embarked on journeys into the desert seeking enlightenment, self-discovery, or a deeper connection with the divine.

Research the concept of desert spirituality and select a figure—whether from biblical tradition, philosophy, or contemporary life—who has experienced profound transformation in the desert. Explain how Santiago's journey in *The Alchemist* parallels their experience. Additionally, explore why the desert serves as an ideal landscape for a spiritual quest. Consider its vastness, isolation, and challenges, and how these elements contribute to personal and spiritual growth.