

Oakland Catholic High School
Department of English Summer Reading 2026

Shared Text for 9th Grade

As rising 9th-grade students, we hope you are already avid readers. We look forward to sharing many great works of literature with you over the next four years. At Oakland Catholic, we expect students to do plenty of independent reading, and we encourage you to begin that habit over the summer.

Whether you are enrolled in College Prep (CP) or Honors English next year, you are required to read **one shared text** this summer. This book will serve as the starting point for your English class discussions and your first writing assignment.

You will need to obtain a **paper copy** of the book and bring it with you on the first day of school. This year's shared text is:

The Alchemist by Paulo Coelho
ISBN: 978-0062416216

ASSIGNMENT:

In *The Alchemist*, a "Personal Legend" is a person's unique destiny or purpose—a path that leads them to their true potential and fulfillment. As you begin your high school journey, consider how you, too, are beginning the pursuit of your own Personal Legend.

1. Before Reading: Author Background:

Read the attached biography of Paulo Coelho. As you read, annotate or make notes about moments where Coelho's real-life experiences overlap with Santiago's fictional journey.

2. While Reading the Novel:

Highlight or underline quotes that stand out to you about the idea of a Personal Legend. Pay attention to Santiago's growth, the choices he makes, and the lessons he learns.

3. After Reading:

Choose **ONE** quote about Personal Legend that resonated with you. Write a one-page personal response by hand, explaining:

- Why this quote stood out to you
- *What it means in the context of the novel*
- How it connects to your own hopes, dreams, or goals

Be sure to include the **quote with the correct page number** in your response.

Biography of Paulo Coelho, Brazilian Writer

By Rebecca Bodenheimer



Paulo Coelho (born August 24, 1947) is a Brazilian writer and lyricist from Rio de Janeiro. He achieved fame with his second novel, *The Alchemist*, which has sold at least 65 million copies and holds the Guinness World Record for being the most translated book in the world by a living author.

Early Life and Education

Coelho was born in Rio de Janeiro to devout Catholic parents, Lygia Araripe Coelho de Souza and Pedro Queima Coelho de Souza, and attended Jesuit schools during his childhood. He had dreams of being a writer early in his life, but his parents were opposed as they felt it was a dead-end career. They went so far as to commit him to a mental asylum three times, beginning when he was 17; he was subject to electro-shock therapy there. He eventually began law school at the request of his parents, but dropped out in the 1970s, joining Brazil's hippie subculture and traveling abroad.

Early Career Under the Dictatorship

In 1972, Coelho began to write lyrics for Brazilian rock singer Raul Seixas, one of many musicians protesting the military dictatorship that was in place between 1964 and 1985. The military overthrew a left-leaning president in 1964 and began a campaign of repression, utilizing censorship, kidnapping, and torture and targeting left-wing activists, artists, and intellectuals.

Coelho was imprisoned various times during the dictatorship and subjected to torture, an experience he wrote about in a [2019 op-ed for the Washington Post](#). In that piece he drew connections between the military dictatorship and the current authoritarian-leaning presidency of Jair Bolsonaro, who has professed admiration and nostalgia for the dictatorship.

Coelho's Pilgrimage and *The Alchemist*

After traveling to Europe in 1982 and meeting a spiritual mentor, Coelho embarked on the famous Road to Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage in Spain in 1986. This event changed his life, led him to return to Catholicism, and inspired his first novel, "The Pilgrimage." From then on, he devoted himself to writing. He later stated regarding the impact of his pilgrimage, "When I reached Compostela, at the end of the Road to Santiago, I thought, what am I going to do with my life? That's when I made the decision to burn all my bridges and become a writer."

It was Coelho's second novel, *The Alchemist*, that converted him into a household name. The book chronicles the journey of a young Andalusian shepherd, Santiago, who embarks on a search for an Egyptian treasure that has appeared in his dreams; he ultimately finds the treasure back in his homeland. The novel is filled with inspirational messages about destiny that have been widely quoted.

Published in Coelho's native Portuguese in 1988, it was not until it was translated to French in the early 1990s that the novel caught the attention of the world. New translations followed and *The Alchemist* holds the Guinness World Record for the most translated book in the world by any living author. It has sold anywhere between 65 and 80 million copies. Actor Laurence Fishburne has spent close to two decades trying to develop the novel into a feature film, and it appears the project may be coming to fruition soon.

Since *The Alchemist*, Coelho has published a book roughly every two years. He has published both fiction and non-fiction/memoir, and is known for drawing on themes of spirituality and self-discovery. His novels often combine personal narratives with larger, philosophical questions. He also blogs extensively at <http://paulocoelhoblog.com/> and is an active Twitter user who often posts inspirational quotes for his followers.

Reception of Coelho's Work

Despite his massive popularity with readers, Coelho has not always been lauded by literary critics, particularly in his home country of Brazil. Some critics believe he writes in a "non-literary" and unadorned style, at least in his native tongue of Portuguese. His books have also been critiqued as being "more self-help than literature," as offering "snake-oil mysticism," and for being full of vapid, inspirational messages such as what you might find on a Hallmark card. Coelho became a target of literary critics particularly in 2012, when he disparaged the work of James Joyce, widely considered to be one of the best writers of the 20th century.