



PRESTWICK HOUSE

Activity Pack

THE ALCHEMIST

BY PAULO COELHO



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Written by Ashley Watson

Name: _____

Date: _____

Part One

Point of View

Objectives: Introducing point of view
Recognizing how point of view determines perceptions

Activity

Point of view is determined by the perspective of the person narrating the story. When we discuss point of view, we refer to three basic narratives: first-person, third-person omniscient, and third-person limited.

In a first-person narrative, we are receiving the impressions of only one of the characters, and they will be colored by his or her age, gender, beliefs, and so on. The third-person omniscient point of view allows us into various characters' thoughts. A third-person limited narrator can show us what is happening to the other characters, but we are limited to the basic facts. First-person narratives are always limited.

The following passage is taken from the beginning pages of *The Alchemist*. Read the quote to see if you can detect the point of view used in the early stages of the narrative.

He swept the floor with his jacket and lay down, using the book he had just finished reading as a pillow. He told himself that he would have to start reading thicker books: they lasted longer, and made more comfortable pillows.

This passage is an example of third-person omniscient narration. It may be "limited omniscient," but this determination needs to be made after more is read.

Once you have assessed from what point of view the story is told, consider it from a different perspective. You'd certainly have a different concept of a crime novel if the story were told by the police, by the victim, or by the criminal. A reader's perception of a character can be influenced by the way the story is narrated. To demonstrate this, read the small section near the beginning of the book when the boy meets the merchant's daughter for the first time. Write it as if he would have related the story himself; for example, "a girl's voice behind *me*." You may add descriptive details or remove some, but remain true to the sequence of events, and use other characters' quotes as they appear.

You must replace what you take out and stay true to the original punctuation as much as you can. Remember to use "I" when the boy is speaking directly, and quote the other characters just like the book's quotes.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Part One

Dialogue

Objectives: Recognizing the effect of dialogue in a novel
Evaluating the use of dialogue in the book

Activity

The point of view in a story can limit the amount of dialogue. Even if you have completed the activity on point of view, go back and look at the distinctions of the types of narration, first- and third-person.

You'll note that *The Alchemist* doesn't have a great amount of dialogue in some places, or if there is dialogue, it is filtered through the experiences or thoughts that relate to the dialogue. Remember, all narratives contain bias, based on characters' age, gender, hopes, experiences, etc., as well as the general outlook of the character speaking. These biases are revealed in both dialogue and through events. In other words, reading dialogue spoken by a main character from any specific point of view can change the reader's understanding of the text, as compared to if the text had been written through a different perspective.

Read the following passages, which have little or no dialogue and answer the questions that follow. Then, choose one passage and add your own dialogue between Santiago and another character; remember to write it from Santiago's perspective. Be creative, and if you get stuck, try to imagine what you think Santiago or the other character would say—remember this is fiction. For example, if you choose this passage, you could even add in a new scenario, such as the boy asking for his money.

Example from the book:

“There were thousands of people there, arguing, selling, and buying; vegetables for sale amongst daggers, and carpets displayed alongside tobacco. But the boy never took his eye off his new friend. After all, he had all his money. He thought about asking him to give it back, but decided that would be unfriendly. He knew nothing about the customs of the strange land he was in.”

Written in dialogue:

“I was wondering if I could hold my money,” I decided to ask my new friend.

“No. I need to hold it for safekeeping. You are in a strange land, and you don't know the thieves from the trustworthy people,” he said to me.

“Of course, I am not yet familiar with this place,” I responded, but still wary of his demand to hold my money.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Part One

Plot Development

Objective: Using chapter titles to aid plot development

Activity

Chapter or section titles frequently give us an overview of a chapter's content or identify a significant incident. There are no chapters in this book, however; it begins with part 1 and does not give clear hints at what will happen. Although Coelho breaks up each part with section dividers, he does not include section titles. If Coelho had broken up the book into chapters with titles, would it give you more incentive to read on? Do you think the section dividers are sufficient? Now that you are near the end of Part One, determine if you are more satisfied or curious without having a clue about what will happen in Part Two.

Think about how the plot does not progress along a straight line—some of the sections move back and forth in time, take place in different settings, or focus on other characters. Break up Part One into your own chapters, giving each chapter a title. You can make the chapters as large or small as you like, but make sure that each chapter includes a major event in the plot and that you aren't just replacing the section dividers with chapter titles. You must have at least three chapters for Part One. Chapters can reflect part of an event, some type of foreshadowing in the chapter, a quotation, or something else that relates to the book.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Part One

Language Game

Objectives: Developing strong communication skills through participation in group work
Learning to use universal language as a means of communication

Activity

When Santiago finds himself in a foreign country, he realizes that he does not know the customs or the language. When two merchants who speak different languages understand each other, however, the boy thinks, "There must be a language that doesn't depend on words." The use of universal language as a means of communication seems to be a motif in Part One. Think of examples of communication that everyone understands. If someone you know waves at you, the greeting is either one of "hello" or "goodbye," depending on the circumstances. As you can tell, non-verbal communication is quite important in society.

For this activity, you will be divided into two teams. Each team will list at least a dozen main ideas or details from the text for the other team to guess, but the clues must be conveyed without using language—no words or initials allowed. Some examples of how this could be accomplished might be to draw it on the board, using sign language, acting out the scene, etc.

Additional Rules: Each team will give its ideas or details to the teacher who will place them in a container from which the opposing team will draw. The method of communication should be chosen before the team member draws the clue.

Scoring: Your teacher will determine how the game is scored.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Part Two

Imagery Chart

Objectives: Using antonyms to illustrate contrast in settings
Using symbols to represent descriptions of settings

Activity

The caravan travels through the desert to reach the oasis. It moves from one environment to a completely different environment. The words used to describe an oasis are antonyms for those that describe a desert—wet versus dry, for example. Using the example that we have supplied—contrasting the city and the country—as a guide, create a chart that describes the oasis and the desert as they are represented in the story. For every word, phrase, or sentence you list in the description column for one setting, you should have an equal number of antonyms to describe the opposite setting. Try to come up with at least ten items that you can contrast. Use a thesaurus if you need additional words. In the final column, write down the possible effect that is depicted through the use of your choices.

Another way to describe a setting is through the use of symbols. Choose a few words from each setting and draw symbols to represent them. Try not to use words in your symbols unless they need clarification, as in “omen.” Be creative and challenge yourself to use less common symbols, or invent new ones.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Part Two

Performing a Skit

Objectives: Recognizing types of conflict in a work of literature
Understanding how conflict works through creating skits

Activity

The main character in *The Alchemist* struggles with overcoming his fear when he is told to turn himself into the wind near the end of the book. This kind of conflict is known as “character versus self.” Other examples of conflict are “character versus nature,” or “character versus other character.” Can you think of other characters or situations in the book in which these conflicts are present?

Form small groups and decide on a type of conflict you would like to represent. Create a skit to demonstrate that conflict without telling your audience which of the three types of conflicts you are presenting. You can adapt scenes from Part Two of the book, or you can create your own characters and situations. You don't need to write a script, but you will want to work together to come up with the best way to act out your conflict. Practice as many times as you can before you perform your skit in front of the class. The more creative you are, the easier it will be.

Audience members should wait until the end of the skit before guessing which of the three types of conflict the skit represents. Each group should have a turn to guess before the performing group reveals its conflict.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Parts One and Two**Personification****Objective:** Recognizing personification and its purpose**Activity**

One of the lessons the boy learns from the desert is that there's an order to the universe, and every being has its place. To emphasize this, near the end of Part Two, the desert asks Santiago, among a few other questions, "What is love?" When human characteristics, such as speaking, hoping, etc., are given to objects, animals, or nature, it is called personification.

Find examples of personification in the book and list them in the following chart along with what you believe is the intended lesson or message.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Parts One and Two

Understanding Omens

Objectives: Identifying and analyzing omens
Understanding the use of omens in the story

Activity

An omen is an interpretation of something as a sign that helps us make a decision or answer a question. Omens appear in many forms: dreams, superstitions, talismans, coincidences, objects, events, feelings, people, etc. Some people don't agree with the concept of omens, but they are an integral part of *The Alchemist*. The author uses omens as a means of guiding Santiago through the decisions he needs to make to achieve his Personal Legend. The interpretation of omens is subjective and can affect the outcome of a decision or situation in many ways.

Form small groups and find at least 10 omens that appear throughout the book (Part One and Part Two). Choose one member of your group to write down the omens you find. As a group, determine the meaning of the omens and how they influence Santiago's actions and impact his life. Then, as individuals, list a few occurrences in your life that you interpreted as omens and how you responded to them. If the concept of omens is illogical to you, write down situations you've encountered that could be perceived by others as omens.

After the lists are complete, your group will participate in a class discussion about the omens you found. Then, conduct another discussion on your personal experiences regarding omens and how they influenced your decisions and the course of your life. This part of the discussion is voluntary; you may choose whether to share your experiences and thoughts with the class.