

**Reflections:**

*A Student Response Journal for...*

# *The Alchemist*

*by Paulo Coelho*

written by Amber Reed

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## **Part 1**

1. Santiago is haunted by a reoccurring dream, so he seeks out a woman who interprets dreams. Have you or someone you know ever had a reoccurring dream? Write a paragraph describing the dream. In addition, provide an interpretation, or your best guess, as to the dream's meaning.
2. Over time, Santiago has become attached to his sheep. He enjoys reading to them from his books and talking to them as if they are people. Santiago also notices that their sleep habits have become synchronized; most of the sheep awaken when he does. Think of a character from a book or movie who has a close attachment with an animal, either wild or domestic. Write a short story relaying an account of this special bond. For instance, you may describe how the character and animal form a bond, or a time when one helps the other. If you prefer, create a story based on these characters. The story should not exceed three pages.
3. The merchant's daughter is surprised that Santiago can read; she had assumed that all shepherds were illiterate. When have you or someone you know ever witnessed or promoted a stereotype? Compose an editorial for your school newspaper in which you discuss how this stereotype came about and whether you think that it is accurate. In addition, provide your perspective on the damaging effects of stereotypes.
4. Santiago and the merchant's daughter converse for hours. The merchant's daughter is amazed by stories of Santiago's travels, and Santiago begins to imagine village life. Write a journal entry in which you discuss a person from real life or a fictional character who taught you something about a different culture or lifestyle. What did you learn? Discuss at least one similarity or difference between this culture and your own.
5. Santiago explains that, despite his parents' wishes, he has wanted to see the world since childhood. At age sixteen, he leaves the seminary and becomes a shepherd in order to travel. Write a short paragraph about a dream that you had as a young child. What did you hope to do as an adult, and why?

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6. Santiago is relieved to have the freedom to pursue his dream, and he visualizes potential places to visit. He thinks, “I couldn’t have found God in the seminary.” (Pg. 10) What is your interpretation of his thought? Complete the following conversation by explaining your interpretation to a friend:

**Friend:** “I don’t know what that’s supposed to mean. How could you *not* find God in a seminary?”

**You:** “Well, I think that...”

7. Santiago has harbored a fear of being kidnapped by gypsies since he was a child. His fear is renewed when he visits the gypsy woman for a palm reading. Think of a character from a book or movie that has a reoccurring fear which began in childhood. If you prefer, use Santiago for your response. Pretend that you are this character’s psychologist and create an evaluation. Briefly describe the source of the fear and the symptoms. Next, provide an evaluation by giving your opinion of what may help to cure or alleviate the character’s fear. The assessment should not exceed one page.
8. The gypsy woman bluntly tells Santiago, “I have to get back to my cooking, and, since you don’t have much money, I can’t give you a lot of time.” (Pg. 13) Santiago is insulted by the woman’s callous statement but says nothing. Imagine that you are Santiago, and construct a letter to the gypsy woman explaining why her comment has upset you. In your letter, describe a similar instance of discrimination that you or someone you know witnessed in the past.
9. The gypsy woman says, “It’s the simple things in life that are the most extraordinary.” (Pg. 15) Consider the simple things that make your life extraordinary. Create a list of at least ten items.

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10. As a traveler, Santiago is not required to maintain relationships with the people that he meets. In the seminary, however, he had encountered the same people day after day. Santiago bitterly reflects on life in the seminary in the following passage:

“If someone isn’t what others want them to be, the others become angry. Everyone seems to have a clear idea of how other people should lead their lives, but none about his or her own.” (Pg. 16)

Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Write an editorial that voices your opinion by providing your observation of human behavior. If possible, include an example that supports your view. The editorial should not exceed one page.

11. Santiago meets Melchizedek, an old king, who initiates a philosophical discussion about personal freedoms. Melchizedek states that most people believe they have no control over their lives because their lives are dictated by fate. Consider the king’s perspective, and provide short answers for the following questions. Please use complete sentences for your answers.
- A. Is Santiago in charge of his life as he asserts, or is it his fate to travel? How can you tell the difference, if at all?
  - B. Have you ever felt that an event in your life was out of your control and that you had no way to alter its course?
  - C. Have you ever made a decision that you knew would change your life?
  - D. Do you believe in fate?

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12. Melchizedek tells Santiago that, when people are children, “everything is clear and everything is possible.” Over time, however, “a mysterious force begins to convince them that it will be impossible for them to realize their Personal Legend.” (Pg. 21) Do you agree or disagree with Melchizedek’s statement? In your opinion, what is this “mysterious force” to which he refers? Provide your answers in a paragraph.
13. Melchizedek observes that many people place too much importance on what others think of them. As a result, they lose focus on their Personal Legends and concentrate their efforts on improving public image. In your opinion, what roles do public image and social acceptance play in the choices that people make? Write a paragraph describing a time when someone you know or a character from a book or movie either gave up on a dream because of social scrutiny or ignored public opinion and persevered. Also, explain whether you agree with the person’s or character’s decision.
14. Melchizedek explains that he is a muse, or a source of inspiration, for many people, especially those who are on the verge of giving up their dreams. In one instance, he appeared as a rock and aided a defeated miner in discovering treasure. Consider two individuals from real life or a fictional work who, while on the verge of giving up, found last-minute inspiration. Write an article on these persons to submit to your school paper. The article should focus on the positive outcome that one may achieve through determination.
15. Santiago considers all the good things in his life, and he reflects that “people fail to recognize the good things that happen in their lives every day.” (Pg. 27) Think of someone you know or a character from a book or movie who fits this description; someone who seems unable to see the good things in life or who focuses on negative events. Imagine that you are entering him or her into a contest entitled “Most Pessimistic Person of the Year.” Create an entry form by explaining why this person should win the award, and provide an example of this person’s behavior that illustrates his or her pessimism.

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16. Santiago is faced with a decision to remain a shepherd or to begin a strange adventure in search of treasure. He is afraid to leave the comfort of his flock, which he has grown to love, but he is intrigued by the aspect of finding treasure. What would you suggest to Santiago if you were his friend? Compose an email to Santiago with your suggestion, and be sure to include reasons for your choice.
17. Melchizedek mentions that the universe has a way of providing beginner's luck to those who are just starting to pursue their Personal Legends. Santiago's journey begins with a stroke of luck when he easily sells all his sheep. Have you or someone you know ever experienced beginner's luck? Compose a short fictional story that is based on this true event. Use your experience for the base plot, but create fictional characters and a different setting. The narration should be in third person, and the story should not exceed three pages. Also, be sure to include a title for your story.
18. Santiago learns early in his journey that sacrifices must be made in order to achieve his goal. The gypsy woman requires one tenth of Santiago's treasure for payment, just as Melchizedek requires one tenth of Santiago's flock. Think about a current or historical figure that you admire for his or her accomplishments. The person may also be someone you know, such as a teacher or coach. Compose a short essay on the individual that summarizes the reasons for your admiration and the sacrifices that he or she made to succeed. Your essay should not exceed two pages.
19. Santiago is superstitious; he believes that butterflies, crickets, grasshoppers, lizards, and four-leaf clovers are good omens. What are some other good-luck signs that you have heard about? Compose a list of five items or omens. Once complete, write a brief paragraph expressing whether you believe in omens and why.