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English 10

The Alchemist
Discussion Questions

Directions:

Read the assigned selections and answer the following questions for each section. Answer each question thoroughly, using complete sentences and details from the novel.

As you read and reflect on these questions, it is important to remember that *The Alchemist* is a **fable**. In fact, *The Alchemist* is subtitled "*A Fable about Following Your Dreams*." Like most fables, *The Alchemist* has a theme/moral that reflects a universal truth concerning life and human existence. The universal point this story makes is that everyone has a special destiny, and yet not everyone tries to achieve it because it takes hard work. Reaching one's destiny requires leaving behind familiar surroundings. It also demands courage, persistence, the ability to change when appropriate and the willingness to respond to omens that point the way.

Also, like many fables, the story told in *The Alchemist* does not make its universal point directly, or in so many words, by the author telling the reader in plain language what the moral of the story is. Instead, the story of the main character in *The Alchemist* is what we call an **allegory**. An allegory is a narrative that has two levels of meaning: a literal one and a figurative or symbolic one. As a reader, your challenges with this fable are to watch for and try to interpret **symbols** (**symbolism**=something that is itself but also represents something else or something deeper). Remember, most anything in a story can have symbolic meaning, including objects, characters, places, names, events, etc. We will apply what we have learned from Joseph Campbell's model of the Hero's Journey in order to delve beneath the surface of *The Alchemist* and examine its symbolic meaning.

Beginning through page 25

1. What is the name of the shepherd boy? How long has he been a shepherd? What is the name of the region in Spain where he grazes his flock?
2. What is the significance of Santiago becoming a shepherd rather than a priest, as his parents had hoped? Why did he make the choice to leave the seminary at the age of sixteen after learning to read and write? What does being a shepherd allow him to do?
3. As Santiago considers why he needs to keep his jacket, even though he spends most of the day carrying it around in the heat, a central theme of his hero's journey is introduced. The jacket, therefore, is a symbol, or something that is itself but also represents something else or something deeper, in this case, a theme. What is that theme or lesson, and how does the jacket embody, or symbolize that theme?





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"The land was mined, and I had to find some other way to earn a living. So now I'm a camel driver. But our doctor taught me to understand the word of Allah: people need not fear the unknown if they are capable of achieving what they need and want."

"We are afraid of losing what we have, whether it's our life or our possessions and property. But this fear evaporates when we understand that our life stories and the history of the world were written by the same hand."

Sometimes, their caravan met with another. One always had something that the other needed — as if everything were indeed written by one hand. As they gathered around the fire, the camel drivers exchanged information about windstorms, and told stories about desert.

At other times, mysterious, hooded men would appear; they were Bedouins who did surveillance along the caravan route. They provided warnings of thieves and barbarian tribes. They came in force and departed the same way, dressed in black tents that showed only their eyes. One night, a camel driver came to the fire where the Englishman and the boy were sitting. "There are rumors of tribal wars," he told them.

The three fell silent. The boy noted that there was a

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