Honors World Literature Summer Reading 2014

The Alchemist by Paulo Coelho

Assignments:
1. Complete Background Webquest
2. Annotated Reading (notes in book as directed below)
3. Complete Guiding Questions
4. Hero’s Journey Outline

Due Date: Thursday, September 4, 2014

Preliminary Notes About the Novel:

The Alchemist is written in a fable format. Generally speaking, fables use recognizable, simple characters and settings in order to illustrate a simple truth about life or human nature.

Even though you may not initially understand some of the unusual terminology in the story (Soul of the World, for example), its themes are ones which are probably familiar to you. Can you think of some old, familiar proverbs or songs that capture some of these ideas? For example, think about what ends up being more important for Santiago—the journey….or the destination??? Where is it that Santiago eventually finds happiness? People have been writing and singing about the answers to these questions for years!

The novel integrates ideas and philosophies of many faiths and historical periods. Many of these ideas concern the pursuit of truth, one’s intended destiny and the attainment of personal happiness. Coelho refers to these combined elements as one’s “Personal Legend.” He tells the story of Santiago in order to teach us how we may find and live out our own Personal Legends. These ideas, though, have been explored since ancient times in one form or another by countless faiths and peoples. Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Taoism, Christianity, Judaism, countless tribal cultures, in addition to ancient and modern philosophers, all attempt to define the idea of one’s Personal Legend (though they may call it by different names), and all subscribe paths to achieving personal fulfillment. Thus, although the legend is about no faith or philosophy in particular, it is about all faiths and philosophies.

In an interview, Paulo Coelho talks about “Four Pillars of Alchemy– four important “tips” for finding one’s Personal Legend:

1. One must believe in “The Soul of the World.” The ancient Latin term for this concept is “anima mundi.” In short, this idea suggests that everything in the world is interconnected; that is, what one does affects everything else, from the smallest grain of sand to the largest whale, and vice versa. Writers and thinkers such as Plato, Walt Whitman and Khalil Ghibran have attempted to illustrate this interconnectedness in their works.
2. One must listen to the voice of the heart. Coelho suggests that sometimes we must follow our feelings and intuitions, even if we do not fully understand them. Through feeling one gains wisdom.
3. One must be faithful to one’s dreams, for they both test and reward us. In other words, the path to achieving one’s Personal Legend may not be an easy one, but we must endure the tests in order to gain the rewards.

4. One must “surrender oneself to the universe.” Coelho suggests that we must allow ourselves to be open to recognizing and learning from omens and signs which come our way.

ASSIGNMENT #1

Summary:
The Alchemist tells the story of Santiago, the young Andalusian shepherd who dreams of buried treasure in Egypt and embarks upon a challenging and enlightening journey to find it. With all the simplicity and symbolic richness of a fable, Paulo Coelho’s novel is both a hunt for buried treasure and a spiritual quest, with a hero who overcomes trials along the way with the help of disguised teachers who guide him.

Webquest—Before you begin reading, complete the following questions about the novel, The Alchemist. Answer the questions in complete sentences on a separate piece of paper. YOU MUST CITE YOUR SOURCE

1. What is alchemy? What does an alchemist do?

2. Alchemy is a subject, a field of study. List and discuss two other subject to which alchemy is related or similar.

3. What is the Philosopher’s Stone? The Philosopher’s stone has been mentioned in novels, films, and even video games. Give at least two examples where it is mentioned.

4. List 5 interesting facts about the author Paulo Coelho.
ASSIGNMENT #2

Directions: Below is a detailed explanation of the definition and purpose of annotative reading. Read the notes and use the guide to annotate your copy of The Alchemist. Yes…you are WRITING IN YOUR BOOK.

Summer Reading Assignment- Annotative Reading- The Art of Active Reading:

One of your major tasks as a high school student is to practice the art of active reading. Active reading is an essential practice for anyone who wants to become a more successful student or simply a better reader.

What is active reading?

First, active reading requires you to read with a pen or a pencil. As you read you take notes, indicate important parts of the book, and offer your own interpretation of the reading.

**All of your notes will be written in the pages of the actual book you have been assigned. **

Why is active reading so important when reading a book?

1. First, it keeps you actively engaged- not merely conscious but wide awake.
2. Second, it allows you to remember the important scenes, characters, images, themes, etc. of the book
3. Third, writing your reactions down helps you to remember your thoughts while reading the book.

If you develop the habit of actively reading you will not only become a better reader but a better thinker as well. It is also important to note that active reading is a technique that crosses into other subjects and is essential for success at the college level.

**When Actively Reading use the following indicators...**

**Underline:**
- Unfamiliar vocabulary words (you are expected to supply the definition in the nearest margin)
- Major Characters (just once)
- Important Quotes

**Star:**
- Major plot events
- Foreshadowing
- Themes
- References to omens

**Annotated Reading Notes:**

**Inside Back Cover of the Book:** Construct a list of characters names, themes, and important scenes. Be sure to indicate location of these references with page numbers

**Bottom and Side Page Margins:** Interpretive notes, questions and/or personal connections to the reading.

**Top Margins:** Plot- a few words or phrases that summarize major events that happen on that page (useful for quick references).

*Please note that you do not need to write on every page.*
ASSIGNMENT #3

Directions: Answer the guiding questions on a separate sheet of paper in complete sentences.

*The Alchemist* Guiding Questions

1. Why does Coelho open with the modified myth of Narcissus? How does the new version differ from the original one? How does it change the myth’s meaning? What might the author be suggesting about how we perceive ourselves and the world?

2. The novel opens with Santiago thinking about his sheep. What does he observe about their existence? How might the sheep symbolize the way some people live their lives? How does his observation that they “have forgotten to rely on their own instincts” foreshadow what might be coming in the novel?

3. To what degree is Santiago’s father’s observation about travelers (page 9) true about Santiago?

4. Why does the old fortune-teller say that Santiago’s dream is difficult to interpret? Why is Santiago suspicious of her?

5. The old man tells Santiago a story about a miner and an emerald. How does it connect to Santiago’s situation? What does the old man mean when he says that “treasure is uncovered by the force of flowing water, and it is buried by the same currents?” What does this quote have to do with the story of the miner and the emerald?

6. What point does the old man make in the story about the boy in the castle and the drops of oil? (p. 30-32) How might the old man’s story apply to us in our modern lives?

7. How does the King assist Santiago in recognizing omens? When does Santiago use this help?

8. How do Santiago’s thoughts and perceptions about himself and the world begin to change on pages 42-44? Describe 3 things that Santiago sees now that he had never noticed before.

9. What lessons does Santiago learn by working at the crystal shop? Why do you think Coelho chose to have Santiago work in a crystal shop?

10. How does the crystal merchant’s explanation for NOT taking the pilgrimage to Mecca highlight the difference between Santiago and the merchant? What effect does the merchant say Santiago has had on him?

11. The Englishman and his goals are described on pages 65-70. What is he looking for? Give specific examples from the text. (Quotes and page #’s)

12. What does the English man demonstrate for Santiago that he already knows?

13. On page 78, the Englishman says that the progress made at the crystal shop is an example of the principle of the SOUL OF THE WORLD. What does he mean? How does he define this?

14. How does the English man connect the relationship between the caravan and the desert?
15. What are the Englishman’s books about? Why is he in Africa?

16. Define the word Bedouins (p. 84) and explain what they have to do with the novel.

17. Define the word oasis (p. 86) and explain what it has to do with the novel.

18. The oasis is described in great detail. How do its lushness, laughter and color reflect what Santiago finds there? Use quotes to support your answer. Where else in the novel does Coelho provide details about the physical setting in order to lend more meaning to the events which occur there?

19. Explain how Santiago’s union with Fatima represents the Language of the World (according to Santiago on page 98). Why does Fatima accept that her new husband wanders the desert, as she explains on page 98?

20. What is the meaning of the two dead hawks in the oasis? How does this omen change Santiago’s status in society?

21. During their trek through the desert the alchemist tells Santiago, “There is only one way to learn. It’s through action. Everything you need to know you have learned through your journey” (125). What are some of the things that Santiago has learned on his journey through action? Use quotes to support your answer.

22. Why do you think the alchemist tells Santiago the story about the man’s dream about the two sons (the poet and the soldier)?

23. Why did Santiago have to go through the dangers of the tribal wars on the outskirts of the oasis in order to reach the Pyramids? At this point, the boy remembers the old proverb: “The darkest hour of the night came just before the dawn.” How does this apply to his situation now? At the end of the journey, why did the alchemist leave Santiago alone to complete it?

24. Earlier in the story, the alchemist told Santiago “when you possess great treasures within you, and try to tell others of them, seldom are you believed.” At the end of the story, how did this simple lesson change Santiago’s life? How did it lead him back to the treasure he was looking for?
ASSIGNMENT #4
Directions: Below are the stages of the Hero’s Journey. Read the stages then create an outline detailing the stages of Santiago’s Hero’s Journey. Explain how Santiago goes through each stage in the same format as the outline below. The outline must be typed and you must cite the page that corresponds with each stage of the journey.

The Hero’s Journey

I. The Departure
   a. The Call to Adventure: The call to adventure is the point in a person’s life when they are first given notice that everything is going to change, whether they know it or not.
   b. The Refusal of the Call: Often when the call is given, the future hero refuses to heed it. This may be from a sense of duty or obligation, fear, insecurity, or any of a range of reasons that work to hold the person in his or her current circumstances.
   c. The Beginning of the Adventure/Crossing the Threshold: This is the point where the person actually crosses into the field of adventure, leaving the known limits of his or her world and venturing into an unknown and dangerous realm where the rules and limits are not known. There is usually a place in between the two worlds called a threshold.
   d. Supernatural Aid/Mentor (Can appear anytime during the departure): the hero will need assistance in his or her journey and the mentor teaches, but more likely, allows the hero to discover that which was inside the hero all along. The mentor normally dies or leaves the hero somewhere along the journey.

II. The Initiation
   a. The Road of Trials: The road of trials is a series of tests, tasks, or ordeals that the person must undergo to begin the transformation. Often the person fails one or more of these tests, which often occur in threes.
   b. The Experience with the Unconditional Love/ Temptation: At this point in the adventure, the person experiences a love that has the power and significance of the all-powerful, all-encompassing, unconditional love. This is a very important step in the process and is often represented by the person finding the other person that he or she loves most completely. Alternatively, the hero often meets a temptress, someone or something that tries to induce the hero into abandoning his/her quest.
   c. The Ultimate Boon: The ultimate boon is the achievement of the goal of the quest. It is what the person went on the journey to get. All the previous steps serve to prepare and purify the person for this step, since in many myths the boon is something transcendent like the elixir of life itself, or a plant that supplies immortality, or the Holy Grail.

III. The Return
   a. The Refusal of the Return: Oftentimes the hero is reluctant to return home. Things have changed so much for the hero that home would seem quite different.
   b. The Rescue from Without: Just as the hero may need guides and assistants to set out on the quest, often times he or she must have powerful guides and rescuers to bring them back to everyday life, especially if the person has been wounded or weakened by the experience. Or perhaps the person doesn’t realize that it is time to return, that he or she can return, or that others need his or her boon.
   c. The Crossing or Return to Threshold/Master of Two Worlds: The return home. The trick is to retain the wisdom gained on the quest to integrate that wisdom into a human life, and then maybe figure out how to share the wisdom with the rest of the world. This is usually extremely difficult. Heroes often have difficulty resettling into their earlier home lives, but when they do, they can become a master of two worlds.