

Alchemist Study Guide

PART 1 (through pg. 90)

Pre-Reading

In *The Alchemist*, Coelho states that “simple things are the most valuable and only wise people appreciate them.”

Produce a written or artistic response (or bring something to class) which depicts something that is “simple” yet valuable to you. Be prepared to explain specifically why/ how the item is valuable.

Study 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 later events in the story?

3. Why does the old fortune teller say that Santiago's dream is difficult to interpret? (p. 14-17). Why is Santiago suspicious of her?

4. The old man tells Santiago the story about the miner and the emerald on p. 26. How does it connect to Santiago's situation? What does he 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 miner/emerald story?

5. What point does the old man's story about the boy in the castle and the drops of oil (p. 33-35) make? How might this story apply to us in our modern lives?

6. How do Santiago's thoughts and perceptions about himself and the world begin to change on pp. 45-47? Describe three things that Santiago sees now that he had never noticed before.

7. What lessons does Santiago learn by working at the crystal shop? Why do you think Coelho chose crystal? How does the crystal merchant's explanation for not taking the pilgrimage to Mecca (p.57) highlight the difference between Santiago and the merchant? What effect does the merchant say Santiago has had on him?

8. The Englishman and his goals are described on pp. 67-73. What is he looking for? What does he demonstrate to Santiago that he already knows? On p. 81, he 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? How does he connect the idea to the relationship between the caravan and the desert?