

The Alchemist

Ten Years On: Introduction

Vocabulary

disinter – unbury, reveal
impetus – encouragement, goad

1. The author says that four obstacles stand in the way of a person who tries to live his or her dream. What are these obstacles?

2. What does the author classify as the secret of life?

3. The author is a citizen of another country. What is the country?

Prologue

1. The Prologue is a fable. What does it involve?

2. Why would the author include a fable before the story even begins?

Part One (Pages 3 – 47)

Vocabulary

breastplate – personal armor covering the chest

crook – the curved stick used by a shepherd

geologists – people who study rocks and the layers of rock and dirt

infidels – unfaithful ones or nonbelievers

levanter – a wind that comes from the eastern end of the Mediterranean, near Turkey, which is sometimes called the Levant

Moorish – relating to the Moors, the Arab/Berber Muslim people who arrived from Africa and conquered Spain in the 8th century

sacristy – a room in a church used to store sacred vessels for communion

scabbard – the metal case used to hold a sword

seminary – school, especially one in which students study to become priests

trajectory – the path of a moving object

1. Who is Santiago? How is he introduced in the beginning of the story?

2. What is strange about Santiago's dream?

3. Where is Santiago going?

4. Santiago spends a lot of time thinking about his sheep and their place in the world. Why would the author include this kind of thought?

5. The Introduction has prepared the reader to understand that something significant occurs while the boy and girl are talking. What is it, and what does it mean?

6. What is the geographical setting for this part of the story?

7. What did the boy's parents plan for him, and how did he change the plan?

8. What does Santiago plan to do in Tarifa?

9. One ethnic group is singled out in a negative light. What group is stereotyped by the presence of the old woman who interprets dreams, and how is this group described?

10. What is the price of Santiago's consultation with the old woman about the dream?

11. Santiago meets an old man in the village. The old man says that Santiago's new book is irritating and contains the world's greatest lie. How does it irritate, and what is the lie?

12. Who is the old man, and what is his name? What Biblical references does this imply, and why would the author include these in the story?

13. What does Melchizedek want in payment for helping Santiago? How does this payment differ from the one demanded by the Gypsy woman?

14. How does the old man convince Santiago of his power?

15. How does Melchizedek explain the concept of the Personal Legend to Santiago?

16. How does the old man explain why few people attain their Personal Legend?

17. Melchizedek, who has identified himself as the king of Salem, reveals that he may appear in other forms. Why has the author given him these powers, and how will these powers add suspense to the story?

18. What reason does Melchizedek give for demanding payment of one tenth of the flock for advice about finding the treasure?

19. Santiago initially thinks of his quest in simple terms (sell the sheep and search for the treasure) but he comes to realize that the quest requires a change in his thinking. What fundamental change would Santiago be required to make if he decides to seek his Personal Legend?

20. What does the old man tell Santiago to follow?

21. Why does Melchizedek let Santiago see the golden breastplate, and what does the old man take from the breastplate as a gift for Santiago?

22. Melchizedek tells Santiago a story that concludes with the secret of happiness. Retell the story and its message.

23. What do we learn about Melchizedek after he walks away?

24. Where do we next see Santiago, and what does this location tell us?

25. What does Santiago learn about the local people, their customs, and their faith?

26. What happens when Santiago follows his new friend to the marketplace, and what story does this echo?

27. What is Santiago's reaction when he realizes he has been fooled and robbed?

28. A turning point occurs, helping Santiago rethink his frustration. What helps Santiago change his outlook? How does this incident strengthen the structure of the novel?

29. Although he does not speak Arabic, he has a "conversation" with the candy seller. Why is this important?

30. Describe Santiago's first exchange with the crystal merchant and what they learned from each other.

31. What does Santiago say he needs money for, and what does this tell the reader?
