

*Paolo Coelho's
The Alchemist*



PERSONAL QUEST *PROJECT*

The Alchemist

Personal Quest Project

Paolo Coelho's 1987 masterpiece *The Alchemist* follows a boy named Santiago as he goes on a journey. Although Santiago is allegedly looking for treasure near the pyramids of Egypt, his journey ends up being more about finding himself than about finding anything material.

When talking about his novel *The Alchemist* in interviews and lectures, Coelho frequently uses the term *personal legend*. Many strands make up Coelho's idea of a *personal legend*, and we will examine these as we read through the novel. For now, the term might loosely be defined as *one's picture of oneself in relation to the larger universe*. Coelho believes that the attainment of a personal legend is the key to happiness – but, as Santiago discovers, a personal legend can only be discovered if one is willing to go on a *quest* that will lead one to it.

Over the next month, I would like you to go on a *personal quest*—a journey that will lead you toward some kind of understanding of yourself and of your personal legend. Needless to say, your quest does not have to be physical, although there can be some physical components to it. Instead, your quest will be symbolic, emotional, artistic, personal, spiritual, intellectual—or perhaps all of these and more.

You will document your quest in a series of journal entries. Each week during our study of *The Alchemist*, you will bring a journal entry to class. Written guidelines will be given for each journal entry.

Your personal quest will culminate in an **individual oral presentation**. Read the attached guidelines carefully, and get ready to begin your quest!

Journal entry #1: Defining your quest

Your task for this journal entry is to define and design your quest. Begin by asking yourself a few mind-numbing questions:

What do I personally believe to be the greatest source of human happiness or satisfaction? What are the greatest impediments to the achievement of happiness?

What are some of the central driving forces that impel people forward in their lives? What forces or motivations have impelled me forward in my life so far?

If I could choose one burning question about life that I could find the answer to, what would it be? What are some of the paths that might be taken toward finding the answer to this question?

What are some aspects of myself (my personality traits, my behavior patterns, my motivations, my basic nature, my influences, my passions and obsessions, etc.) that I am wrestling with or trying to understand? How might I go about understanding them?

Fill at least a page of your journal with brainstorms and “loose” answers to these questions. Examine your page to see if any patterns emerge: are there certain themes that run through your brainstorms? Can you discern any kind of inclination or direction behind them?

Use your page of brainstorms and your conclusions about them to define and describe your personal quest. Your quest does not have to be toward something that can be achieved over the next month in tangible form, but it should be something that is at least potentially achievable.

In 100 words or less, describe a personal quest that you will undertake over the next month of your life. Briefly explain why this quest is of personal significance to you, and how you hope that it will enlighten you or otherwise enhance your life.

As you devise and describe this quest, give some thought to how you might begin to undertake it. Your next journal entry will involve writing a description of your method and mapping out a timeline for your quest.

Journal Entry #2: Planning and carrying out your quest

Now that you have decided what the nature of your personal quest is going to be, you are ready to map out a strategy and timetable for carrying it out. For this journal entry, your task is to devise a concrete “game plan” that will ensure that you devote as much “quality time” to your quest as possible.

Your journal entry must include ALL of the following:

Method: Describe the activities, strategies, or methods that you will use to carry out your quest. For example, if your quest is to learn about your lineage and heritage, you might want to do any or all of the following: (a) have a long conversation with a grandparent or other family member; (b) examine photograph albums, family trees, or other family documents; (c) do internet research about your lineage; (d) reflect and write down your thoughts about your family.

Timetable: Keeping in mind that your quest has to be “complete” by January 7th (about one month from now), make at least a preliminary decision about where and when you will carry out your quest. Your timetable might be spread out over several days or weeks, or you might wish to carry out your entire quest in a block of time. For example, if you are analyzing your own dreams, you might want to keep a dream journal and write your dreams down every morning; if you are planning to beat your own swimming record you might want to attempt to do so in a single afternoon.

Projected Outcome: Jot down some thoughts about what your own expectations of your quest are at this stage. What problems or obstacles do you anticipate? What are your fears or worries? What do you hope to learn, gain, feel, or discover?

As you write down your thoughts about the above, keep in mind that your final journal entry, which will be due on the day that you present your quest, will be a piece of writing that you do *after* you have “completed” your quest. Also keep in mind that as part of your presentation, you will be required to find or make an object that somehow represents your quest.

Be prepared to share your journal entry in class!

Journal Entry #3: WRITTEN PIECE

When you have completed the quest that you have mapped out for yourself, you must produce a piece of writing that somehow captures the essence of your quest.

THERE ARE NO SET GUIDELINES FOR THIS WRITTEN PIECE: it can be any length, in any genre, and in any format that seems appropriate to you. You might wish to write a poem or a song, a play script or a short story; you might feel inclined to engage in philosophical reflection; you might wish to merely to let your thoughts flow onto the paper in a “stream of consciousness.”

The only requirements for your written piece are the following:

- (1) It must be submitted after your presentation along with entries #1 and #2.
- (2) It must be genuine and heartfelt, and must do justice to your quest.
- (3) It should be completed on the day of your presentation (and can be incorporated into your presentation if you wish).

Guidelines for Personal Quest Presentations:

The purpose of your individual oral presentation is two-fold: (1) to share your personal quest with your peers and (2) to practice your public speaking skills. As with your final journal entries, I do not wish to be overly “prescriptive” about the form that your presentation should take – the very nature of this project suggests that these presentations should differ greatly from one student to another.

The only requirements for your individual oral presentation are the following:

- (1) It should be about 3-5 minutes long. At least 3 minutes of this time must be taken up with you speaking continuously and fluidly.
- (2) It should capture the essence of your quest—or at least those parts of it that you wish to share publicly.
- (3) You must either *find* or *make* an object that somehow epitomizes or symbolizes your quest, and must find a way to use this object in your presentation.

Beyond these guidelines, the sky is the limit! You are free to dance, sing, or otherwise perform; you can include background music, a slide show, or a video; you can include interactive parts to your presentation such as a role play or a Q & A; you can bring in additional objects such as family photo albums.

There will be no rubric used to assess these presentations. Enjoy the process, and don't think about it in terms of a grade!

Presentation schedule

You have now designed your personal quest and have mapped out a timetable and method for carrying it out. The following is the schedule for these presentations:

Date	Class/presenters	Class/Presenters	Class/Presenters	Class/Presenters
Monday	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.
Tuesday	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.
Wednesday	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.
Thursday	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.
Friday	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.