

LESSON 8. Alchemist

Communicative area: inferring meaning from context

1.   Listen to the excerpt from *The Alchemist*. Follow in the book. Be ready to answer the questions.

1. Where does the action take place? How do you know?
2. What is the weather like in this country? Why do people always sleep during the day in summer?
3. Explain the meaning of the words: We have to be prepared for change, he thought, and he was grateful for the jacket's weight and warmth.
4. Where is the boy going? Why is he so excited?
5. What was the boy's purpose in life? What did his parents want him to be?
6. How did the boy's father try to keep him from travelling?
7. What was his father's secret desire?
8. What was the most important thing for the boy?

The Alchemist

After Paulo Coelho



And now it was only four days before he would be back in that same village. He was excited, and at the same time uneasy: maybe the girl had already forgotten him. Lots of shepherds passed through, selling their wool.

"It doesn't matter," he said to his sheep. "I know other girls in other places."

But in his heart he knew that it did matter. And he knew that shepherds, like seamen and like travelling seamen, always found a town where there was someone who could make them forget the joys of carefree wandering.

The day was dawning, and the shepherd urged his sheep in the direction of the sun. They never have to make any decisions, he thought. Maybe that's why they always stay close to me.

The only things that concerned the sheep were food and water. As long as the boy knew how to find the best pastures in Andalusia, they would be his friends. Yes, their days were all the same, with the seemingly endless hours between sunrise and dusk; and they had never read a book in their young lives, and didn't understand what the boy told them about the sights and other cities.

... he gathered his jacket closer to his body. He knew that a few hours from now, with the sun at its zenith, the heat would be so great that he would not be able to lead his flock across the fields. It was the time of day when all of Spain slept during the summer. The heat lasted until nightfall, and all that time he had to carry his jacket. But when he thought to complain about the burden of its weight, he remembered that, because he had the jacket, he had withstood the cold of the dawn.

We have to be prepared for change, he thought, and he was grateful for the jacket's weight and warmth.

The jacket had a purpose, and so did the boy. His purpose in life was to travel, and, after two years of walking the Andalusian terrain, he knew all the cities of the region. He was planning, on his visit, to explain to the girl how it was that a simple shepherd knew how to read. That he had attended a seminary until he was sixteen. His parents had wanted him to become a priest, and thereby a source of pride for a simple farm family. They worked hard just to have food and water, like the sheep. He had studied Latin, Spanish, and theology. But ever since he had been a child, he had wanted to know the world, and this was much more important to him than knowing God and knowing about man's sins. One afternoon, on a visit to his family, he summoned up the courage to tell his father he didn't want to become a priest. That he wanted to travel.

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“People from all over the world have passed through this village, son,” said his father. “They come in search of new things, but when they leave they are basically the same people they were when they arrived. They climb the mountain to see the castle, and they wind up thinking that the past was better than what we have now. They have blond hair, or dark skin, but basically they're the same as people who live right here.”

“But I’d like to see the castles in the towns where they live,” the boy explained.

“Those people, when they see our land, say that they would like to be here forever,” his father continued.

“Well, I’d like to see their land, and see how they live,” said the son.

“The people who come here have a lot of money to spend, so they can afford to travel,” his father said. “Amongst us, the only ones who travel are the shepherds.”

“Well, then I’ll be a shepherd!”

His father said no more. The next day, he gave his son a pouch that held three ancient Spanish gold coins.

“I found these one day in the fields. I wanted them to be a part of your inheritance. But use them to buy your flock. Take to the fields, and someday you’ll learn that our countryside is the best, and our women are the most beautiful.”

And he gave the boy his blessing. The boy could see in his father’s gaze a desire to be able, himself, to travel the world – a desire that was still alive, despite his father’s having to bury it, over dozens of years, under the burden of struggling for water to drink, food to eat, and the same place to sleep every night of his life.

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... The boy thought back to that conversation with his father, and felt happy; he had already seen many castles and met many women (but none was equal of the one who awaits him several days hence). He owned a jacket, a book that he could trade for another, and a flock of sheep. But, most important, he was able every day to live out his dream.

... Whenever he could, he sought of a new road to travel... The world was huge and inexhaustible... It’s the possibility of having a dream come true that makes life interesting, he thought...

2. Read about the book and its author. Have you ever heard his name? Have you ever read his books?

Every few decades a book is published that changes the lives of its readers forever. Paulo Coelho’s *The Alchemist* is such a book. With over 20 million copies sold worldwide, *The Alchemist* has already achieved the status of a modern classic.

This is the story of Santiago, an Andalusian boy who dreams of travelling the world in search of a treasure as extravagant as any ever found. From his home in Spain he journeys to the exotic markets of Tangiers and then into the Egyptian desert, where a fateful encounter with the alchemist awaits him.



The Alchemist is a transforming novel about the essential wisdom of listening to our hearts and following our dreams.

Paulo Coelho was born in Brazil and has become one of the most widely-read authors in the world today. His best-loved book, *The Alchemist*, has been translated into 42 languages. Paulo Coelho is a storyteller with the power to inspire nations and to change people's lives.

3. Discuss with a partner.

1. Do you like travelling? Have you seen a lot of different places?
2. Have you been to Spain? Would you like to go? Why?
3. What is your purpose in life?
4. Do you think it is more important to make your dream come true than to have food, drink and shelter?
5. Would you like to read *The Alchemist*? Why (not)?

LESSON 9. Guiding a tour

Communicative area: talking about the aspect of a tour guide job

1. Read the jokes about tour guides. Do they have anything in common?

A bus of tourists arrives at Runnymede. They gather around the guide who says, "This is the spot where the barons forced King John to sign the Magna Carta."

A fellow at the front of the crowd asks, "When did that happen?"