

World Studies

Summer Reading Assignment

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Your Summer Reading consists of two novels by world (and world class) authors. The first is *Things Fall Apart* by the Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe, the story of the clash of European and African cultures at the end of the nineteenth century and the impact of that clash on the life of a stubborn and proud Ibo warrior, Okonkwo. The second is *The Alchemist* by the Brazilian author Paulo Coelho, an allegorical fable about a young Spanish shepherd's journey through North Africa in search of treasure and his personal destiny.

On your second day of classes this Fall, you will take tests on each of these novels designed to assess the care with which you read them. In addition, also on the second day of classes, you will turn in your written assignments, which are described below. The written assignments should be typed in 12 point font, double-spaced, with all pages stapled together in one packet, arranged in the order of the prompts set forth below, with a cover (title) page indicating that these are your summer reading responses, and containing your name, the date, and the class (World Studies). Your HFA pledge should be handwritten in the upper left hand corner of your cover page.

Things Fall Apart

1. Throughout the novel, the protagonist, Okonkwo is concerned with being a strong, powerful person. What does it mean to be a strong person in Ibo society? What does it mean to be a strong person in modern American society? Write a short personal essay in which you compare Okonkwo's values about strength to your own. Use examples from both the novel and your life experiences to illustrate your views on personal strength. Your response should be a minimum of 300 words, but word count is far less important than substantive and thoughtful analysis and reflection.
2. What unique and special function do the *egwugwu* serve in the Ibo culture? What values of that culture are suggested by the power, fear, and respect that the *egwugwu* command? Compare and contrast the justice meted out by the *egwugwu* with that imposed by the British civil authority toward the end of the novel. Your response to this prompt should be a minimum of 300 words.

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The Alchemist

1. Mechizedek, the King of Salem, tells the protagonist Santiago that when we are children, “everything is clear and everything is possible,” but that as we grow older, “a mysterious force” begins to convince us that we will not achieve our youthful dreams (p.23). Do you agree with Mechizedek? Why or why not? What is the mysterious force to which he refers? Why do we begin to define ourselves by our limits as we grow older? What attitude does Santiago seem to have about his own dreams and aspirations? How does his attitude compare to your own? Respond to these questions in a reflective piece of at least 300 words.

2. The alchemist says that “people become fascinated by pictures and words, and wind up forgetting the Language of the World” (p. 89). What does he mean by this statement? What are “pictures and words”? What is “the Language of the World”? How does it differ from ordinary language? Why do “pictures and words” dominate the way in which most people in the West understand the world? Formulate a critical written response to these questions of at least 300 words.

Remember, my first impression of you as a student and as a person will be formed by the writing you submit to me in response to these questions. Impress me with your profundity, thoughtfulness, critical thinking skills, and gift for insightfulness! Show me something that makes you special and memorable! Prove to me that you are a scholar who is excited about learning and eager to share what you have learned with others!