Discussion Questions for The Alchemist

1. Santiago became a shepherd rather than a spriest as his parents had hoped. Why is this so significant to the story? What advantage does being a shepherd offer him?

2. Before his journey begins, Santiago asks a gypsy woman to interpret his dream about finding treasure in the Egyptian pyramids. She requests for one tenth of the treasure in return for the favor. When Santiago asks an old man to show his the way to the treasure, the man asks for one tenth of his flock as payment. Although both interactions represent the fact that one must pay a price to follow one's dreams, only one of these payments will yield the desired result. Which one? Why? Which payment is a representation of false hops? How can you tell?

3. When we are children, "everything is clear and everything is possible" says King Mechizedek, but he cautions that as we age some mysterious force convinces dreamers to abandon their dreams. What do you think of this statement? What are the mysterious forces that cause people to abandon their dreams?

4. The Alchemist talks about a "universal language;" the language of the world. What is this language? How is it different from spoken language? Why would people's "fascination with pictures and words" cause people to forget the universal language? What are the consequences of forgetting it?

5. Santiago is repeatedly encouraged to read signs and omens/ What do signs and omens have to do with his quest? How are they related to the "universal language?" What kinds of signs and omens have you experienced in your life?

6. What is a "Personal Legend?" How does one find their own Personal Legend? What is your own Personal Legend?

7. At one point the alchemist reveals to Santiago the secret of turning metal into gold. Why did he share the secret? How does it relate to finding a Personal Legend?

8. Are you surprised at where Santiago's treasure was hidden? Why is it significance that his treasure lies buried in the exact place where his journey began?

9. What aspects of the story are the most relevant to you? Has reading this novel changes the way you see your own life? How?

10. Many spiritual quests involve a journey into the desert. Why do you think that is? In what ways is the desert a perfect setting for a spiritual journey? How did the desert help Santiago on his journey?

11. Discuss the significance of the novels' ending. What does the tree, beneath whose roots the treasure is burred, represent? Why did Santiago have to travel so far when the treasure was at home the whole time?