Tabitha Roper

ENGL 7711

Old School Analysis

28 March 2013

**Part 1. Creating a Traditional Prompt**

**Prompt:** Throughout the reading of a text, the author uses characters, plot, setting etc. to reveal a main message or theme to the readers. As you read through Paulo Coelho’s *The Alchemist*, evaluate these to arrive at a conclusion about a possible theme. Identify and analyze the overarching theme associated with Santiago’s Personal Legend, including how Coelho builds upon that idea in his novel to portray that theme. Cite textual evidence and specific examples as proof of your claims/points as development of that theme.

**Part 2. Creating a Scenario-Based Prompt**  
**Scenario:** Your school is going to be celebrating and promoting the idea of the American Dream, that working hard in life with a dream/goal in mind will allow you to create the life you want. They are looking for a novel that is taught in the school, not necessarily an American author, to be the face of the event. Their goal is to try to raise awareness of potential of following one’s dreams for students in all financial situations of the community.

**Task:** You are to create and send to your school a slogan for the event and write a rationale for *The Alchemist* to become the poster novel for the event. You should provide textual evidence and specific examples that prove that Santiago embodies the ideas that the event is encouraging. Create a poster with your slogan for advertisement.

For example:  

No Dream is Beyond Reach

No Dream is Beyond Reach

**Part 3. Crafting the Essay**

Coelho’s Life Lesson Novel

When Paulo Coelho, author of *The Alchemist*, was just a boy, he had dreams of becoming a writer. However, his parents had other plans for him. In fact, when he was just sixteen, they committed him to a mental institution to save him from his senseless dreams. After escaping, becoming a hippie, making mistakes in life, writing songs for a Brazilian rock band, and making his own journey, he finally accomplished his life-long dream when he became a writer. *The Alchemist* is Coelho’s most successful novel and has achieved that fame by its simple yet intricate shaping of its theme, which arguably might be inspired by Coelho’s own life journey to find and achieve his own dreams. Santiago is Coelho’s main character, and it is through him, and a few characters along the way, that we learn that regardless of the struggles, or deserts, which are put in our way in life, our dreams are still there and are just within the reach of those who fight for them to come true.

The beginning of the novel introduces us to this battle within the character of Santiago. He is deciding how to follow his dream of traveling. In fact, Santiago parallels with Coelho in many ways, especially with the father discouraging the dream from occurring. However, Coelho might have only wished his dad to have behaved in the same way as Santiago’s father did. Although Santiago’s dad gave him his blessing to leave to travel as a shepherd, it is clear that his father had no intentions of his son becoming a successful shepherd or traveler due to his comment, “Take to the fields, and someday you’ll learn that our countryside is the best, and our women are the most beautiful” (Coelho 33). His father is convinced that he is correct, and his son will have to learn the hard way before he comes back. This is the first hurdle Santiago will have to overcome in order to achieve his dreams. However, Santiago meets this challenge with confidence and excitement upon beginning his journey towards his dream.

In a way, his father was correct in that being a shepherd was not going to make his son happy, but he was also the inspiration behind that dilemma. Nevertheless, it is a stepping stone towards following his dreams. Becoming a shepherd teaches and prepares him to be ready to accomplish his task of finding his treasure on his journey. Santiago does buy his sheep and travel the Andalusia countryside. He is happy in a way, but it is not his dream, and so he literally dreams of more: the pyramids of Egypt. Although this might seem strange and insignificant at first, this is Santiago’s inner desire to really travel coming forth. It is his calling to action to discover his destiny. His dreams were not to travel limitedly with sheep that hold him back and have no appreciation of the locations and journeys. The sheep are an inconvenience to Santiago, not a convenient job that also allows him to travel. He is not living his dream, which is evident in Melchizedek’s insight on the baker. Santiago’s traveling with his sheep is compared to the baker’s job, both of which are preventing their holders from following their dreams of traveling. Santiago listens to the old man and does decide to sell his sheep, for more money than he had originally to buy them, and travel to find his treasure and thus achieve his dream. He is a step on the right path in fighting to achieve his destiny.

However, it is not as if the remainder of the novel is all about Santiago achieving his dream. In fact, he encounters many hardships that almost uproot his journey altogether. Just after arriving in Africa, he is met with two obstacles; he cannot speak the language, and all of his money is stolen by a thief. Without knowing what to do to move forward, he finds a crystal merchant who speaks his language, Spanish, and enters into an agreement which requires Santiago to work for him. This brings Santiago’s traveling dreams to a screeching halt. Working towards one’s dream is never easy. It requires hard work and dedication. This step is crucial in determining Santiago’s work ethic and commitment to his dreams. Only, Santiago does not plan to continue on his journey; he plans to save enough money to go back to purchase his sheep and return to the fields of Andalusia as a shepherd. His misfortune has smashed his enthusiastic pursuit of his dreams. He will have to be successful working for the crystal merchant before he again finds the courage to follow his dreams. This is one metaphorical desert he will have to cross before continuing to find his treasure.

However, he is not the only one that has decided to not follow his dreams. The crystal merchant is another of the many examples in the novel that are archetypal characters portraying the unhappy and empty people who never followed their dreams. The crystal merchant has always wanted to, and really needed to out of religious beliefs, travel the holy pilgrimage to Mecca. However, he has always come up with excuses preventing him from leaving. “I began to make some money, but I could never bring myself to leave someone in charge of the shop; the crystals are delicate things” (Coelho 118). It is not that the crystal merchant does not trust his crystal to another. The truth lies in the fact that he is too scared to leave, because the actual city of Mecca might become a disappointment compared to his imaginings of the city and just the thought of the journey is what keeps him going. Despite the fact that Santiago brings much success and profit to the crystal merchant that would allow for him to make the pilgrimage, he is still unable to begin his journey. “I am proud of you,” the crystal merchant tells Santiago. “You brought a new feeling into my crystal shop. But you know that I’m not going to go to Mecca” (Coelho 131). He refuses to accomplish his life-long dream, even though he has the means by which to do it now. The crystal merchant is very different from Santiago in that he is resistant to things that will make him successful and thus closer to running out of excuses for traveling to Mecca. He blatantly refuses to cross that literal and metaphorical desert, and prefers to live with his dream in his head only.

The crystal merchant, while being a great example of one who has not and will not follow his dreams, is also the final encouragement that Santiago needs to finalize his decision to not go back home. The crystal merchant tells Santiago “I’m not going to go to Mecca. Just as you know that you’re not going to buy your sheep” (Coelho 131). This aids in getting Santiago to think about continuing on his journey rather than returning to his sheep. Then he also stumbles across the two stones that Melchizedek had given to him before he leaves, and the crystal merchant reminds Santiago of Melchizedek on the day of his departure. These come together as motivation for Santiago to continue following his dream of traveling to the pyramids, but not before he had to conquer a few deserts in order to have the strength to continue. His dream never left him; it just seemed out of reach for a while. Upon his departure, he has made the decision to again be on the path working towards his dream.

At a certain point in his journey of accomplishing his dreams, Santiago arrives to the crossing of the literal desert of his journey. He will have to fight against the desert, its tribal wars, the temptation of love, and other hardships along the way in order to make it to the oasis, and then his pyramids. For example, when he meets Fatima, he immediately falls in love with her. He has no desire to continue on his journey because he believes that “I have already found my treasure. I have a camel, I have my money from the crystal shop, and I have fifty gold pieces. In my own country, I would be a rich man…I also have Fatima. She is a treasure greater than anything else I have won” (Coelho 239). He has found love and wants to abandon his journey to achieve his dreams. However, the alchemist’s wisdom and the support of Fatima encourage Santiago along his way of fighting for his dreams.

Shortly after leaving the oasis, the alchemist shares knowledge with Santiago that is an integral secret of following the path to achieve one’s dreams. He states, “They were looking only for gold…They were seeking the treasure of their Personal Legend, without wanting actually to live out the Personal Legend” (Coelho 260). The message building upon Coelho’s theme is strong here. The journey, struggles, and trials along the way of achieving one’s dreams are what makes the pursuer ready to accomplish and fully appreciate their dreams when they do achieve them. Dreams do not come to those who do not work for it. Dreams are not handed out for free on the streets every day. The pursuer of the dreams actually needs to pursue and work towards the accomplishment. Also, the pursuer must be knowledgeable of the dream that they actually want to accomplish because they must be willing to live out the requirements and duties that go along with the dream. One cannot dream to be an actor and not ever want to be in front of a camera or learn lines. The pursuer must be willing to work hard for achieving his dreams and continue working hard to keep his dream going once it has been achieved, or it would pointless for the dream to come true..

The last of the hurdles that Santiago must battle his way through in order to achieve his dreams lies in the desert past the oasis. He must accomplish his biggest stepping stone, trusting in himself and his abilities, in order to appease the captors that he runs across on his journey. He has to look his death in the face and face his fears in order to truly trust in himself and his abilities by becoming the wind. Coelho is mentioning on the idea that fear, even the fear of dying, should never prevent the progression of our journey towards accomplishing our dreams. Fighting to achieve, even in the face of the deepest fears, is the only way for dreams to come true.

When it all comes down to the basics, Coelho presents four types of obstacles that prevent individuals from fighting to achieve their dreams: disbelief, love, fear of defeat, and fear of success. Disbelief is exhibited in Santiago at the beginning when his father convinces him that he cannot travel the world as he wishes to, so Santiago believes him and settles on becoming a shepherd, which is traveling but not as Santiago pictured it.

Love is also exhibited with Santiago when he meets Fatima in the oasis and wants to abandon his dreams. Luckily for him, Fatima wants him to achieve his dreams and has faith that he will return. Coelho speaks to the readers through the alchemist stating his message about love, “You must understand that love never keeps a man from pursing his Personal Legend. If he abandons that pursuit, it’s because it wasn’t true love…the love that speaks the Language of the World” (Coelho 249). Coelho’s message is that love should never prevent someone from fighting to achieve their dreams, but if love does prevent, it was not true love.

Fear of defeat is again seen with Santiago’s defeats, but also with the Englishman’s defeat of coming all the way to the oasis to find the alchemist, yet the alchemist is looking to help Santiago. However, the alchemist’s comment about the Englishman, “He has other things to do first. But he’s on the right track. He has begun to try to understand the desert,” hints to the reader that the Englishman will achieve his dream if he continues fighting for it (Coelho 238). Many of the setback or steps along the way to achieving dreams are placed there in order to prepare for the accomplishment of dreams. For example, had the Englishman not met Santiago along the journey to the oasis, he might not have already begun his path of understanding the desert, which is part of what the alchemist states he still needs to do before moving along further towards his dream of becoming an alchemist. As long as the Englishman continues to work towards his dream, the alchemist gives hope that he will achieve becoming an alchemist.

The last of the four obstacles, fear of success, is seen most clearly in the crystal merchant. Fearing the accomplishment of discovering his dream is what keeps him from traveling to Mecca. He describes to Santiago “I’ve already imagined a thousand times crossing the desert, arriving at the Plaza of the Sacred Stone, the seven times I walk around it before allowing myself to touch it. I’ve already imagined the people who would be at my side, and those in front of me, and the conversations and prayers we would share. But I’m afraid that it would all be a disappointment, so I prefer just to dream about it” (Coelho 120). This demonstrates his fear of success. He has built this pilgrimage up in his mind for so many years. He has imagined every minute detail a thousand times over. He is afraid that if he does succeed in accomplishing his dreams, either it will be less exciting than him imagined trip or it will leave him with nothing to then live for every day. So he chooses to not follow after his dream so as to not be disappointed or without a purpose. Even though, Coelho sends another message through Santiago’s journey, the finding of the treasure at the end of his journey, and the receiving of a kiss from his beloved Fatima from far away. It is while Santiago is pursuing his dreams that he meets the love of his life. “The boy smiled. It was the first time she had done that. ‘I’m coming, Fatima,’ he said” (Coelho 341). It is only after he finds his treasure and accomplishes his life-long dream and personal legend that he smiles and is happy to continue along with his life and future with Fatima. Coelho is showing that there are things to live for after one’s dreams have been achieved. In fact, it is then that the true happiness within our lives is able to be had because we have accomplished that which was designed for us to achieve, and nature, omens, and old kings can rest at ease because our dreams have become a reality.

Even the overarching symbol and basis for the title of the novel, alchemy, is wrapped around the idea of the personal legend. The personification of metal going on a journey to turn itself into gold is the ultimate following of a dream down to the base level of natural, worldly things. The job of the alchemist is to use his learned skills, which was a part of his life dream, to encourage the metal to follow its dream of becoming gold. The Englishman is on a journey to achieve his dream, which is to discover the means by which to turn metal into gold, thus becoming an alchemist. And Santiago is on his way towards achieving his dreams of travel and finding his treasure, which happen to be, ironically, in the same exact spot where his dreams of the pyramids began. However, Coelho is mentioning again what the alchemist has already made clear. Those that do not fight to accomplish their dreams, those that do not demonstrate the dedication to the dream will never achieve their dreams. That’s what if takes to face one’s fears and go after fighting for one’s dreams.

It takes all of these deserts in order for Santiago to be ready to accomplish and achieve his dream. For instance, had Santiago dreamed that his treasure was under his head at the church, he would have dug it up and never achieved his dream of travel. He would have never left the fields, left his sheep, learned about omens, recognized his knowledge of the language of the world, met Fatima, learned to trust in himself and his abilities, learned how to sell crystal, or learned how to overcome severe difficulties in the face of danger or death. Santiago’s dream was to travel, and in the end, the journey was his treasure. He is not ecstatic at the discovery of his treasure to spend it and be rich; he is longing for and ecstatic about returning to his future with Fatima. His dream was to travel, and he fought through all the different obstacles and deserts that were put in his way in order for him to make his dream come true. His journey made him become the man he was meant to be and shaped him to be a worthy receiver of his treasure, and thus dreams.

**Part 4. Meta-Analysis**

This assignment turned out to be more difficult than I expected. So many of my ideas for writing or project prompts come to me during the planning process of teaching something or while actually teaching. It was more difficult to craft the Part 2 Prompt. Usually, I assign projects that would be more like the Part 2 Prompt, rather than writing assignments. It was tough coming up with an alternate prompt that was both challenging and different from the Part 1 prompt. Of course the wording of the prompt was different; however, I imagine the content still managed to be quite similar. I feel as though this essay that I wrote could have minor tweaks made in order to be able to fit both prompts.

I loved the movie poster idea, especially for working with the topic of theme within a text. So much about the theme of a work can be portrayed through an image on the cover of a novel or movie cover design. However, I wanted to be more creative than copying that idea for this assignment, plus I did not think that would be allowed. I do, however, plan to tweak that prompt in order to match it to the novel I will be teaching in a month, *The Great Gatsby.* I have done a similar movie poster assignment before; however, this one is more rigorous and requires more content knowledge in order to have produced the final product. I have a new goal now to try to be more inventive during the drafting of my own essay prompts.

After I got the prompts written, I had to decide which of them I wanted to do. I have only ever written analysis or persuasive papers in great depth, which is probably why I chose to write on the topic of the first prompt. However, as mentioned before, I feel as though my prompts are not that different in terms of the final product’s content. My essay could easily be adapted to fit both writing prompts. Because of this, I also experimented with the design of coming up with the two example images above in the Prompt 2 assignment.

While writing the first prompt, I wanted to create a traditional style analysis prompt. In my American Literature course, I make students complete a literary analysis of a short story, so I wanted to write one on theme so as to use my paper as an example in my own class, perhaps not all of it as they would probably not ever read anything this long as an example. I was totally surprised last year when I assigned a literary analysis research paper and the majority of my students had no clue what a literary analysis consisted of. In fact, most had never heard of literary analysis. I decided this would be a great opportunity for me to create an example to be used during the teaching of literary analysis and also complete this assignment. I will probably take portions of my paper to show them as an example. I also chose the novel, *The Alchemist,* to analyze because we teach that novel in 10th grade Literature courses, and many of them are likely to be familiar with the novel; therefore the analysis will make more sense to them. They will have a vested interest in the example for more reasons than just that it will help them get an idea of what they are supposed to be doing.

When I started writing the actual essay, I realized that it had been about four years since I had written my own literary analysis, and while that is not a terribly long time, it did take me a while to figure out how I wanted to structure my paper and begin writing. I noticed that I wanted to give too much plot summary at first, which is what my students do quite often in their papers, and had to revise my writing to remove that bulk. It was interesting that I noticed myself doing that because I thought through my mental process of removing unessential plot summary so I could take that process back into my classroom with me. Students have a hard time realizing that the summary does not need to be developed in an analysis. I tell them to assume that the reader knows your short story, but that never seems to help. They think that a particular piece of plot needs to be present in order for their claim to be understood. Also, some students feel as though the summary portion of their paper acts as the transitions and flow of the paper. I know I used to do this when writing papers, and I would not be surprised if I still have too much summary in my own paper, even after multiple revisions. I know it was a weakness that I had as a student that I had to be consciously aware of when writing. However, if I can teach students how to pare down the plot summary in such a way that the majority of their references are for the analysis examples, rather than pointless, I would feel successful, especially considering that this paper is the first analysis that they have ever written.

With the second prompt, I was trying to get some literary analysis to occur and then the students use that knowledge to complete another prompt building on the analysis. That was my goal; however, the prompt turned out to be just a more creative wording of a literary analysis paper assignment, but also including a creative portion. My goal is to continue thinking about how to write prompts more like the second. For those students who have never heard of a literary analysis, the second prompt would be easier to get started on because they have a more directed prompt of a specific theme, and they have been instructed to go find proof in the text of the creation of that given theme. Perhaps this is an idea for my literary analysis introduction to my kids. Teach them analysis through a similar prompt.

For my own classroom, I see myself assigning a prompt like the first one that I completed and then having students work in small groups of 3 to 4 to complete an assignment similar to the one I wrote for Prompt 2, but including a presentation portion to the class. I could see that being more interesting to the students while still maintaining relevance and rigor.