

The Alchemist

By
Paulo Coelho

Most of my reading is non-fiction, but I do enjoy picking up a piece of fiction from time to time just to enjoy a good story. In Paulo Coelho's The Alchemist, you get a non-fiction piece wrapped in a great story. That's a great recipe for teaching as stories deliver messages in a manner that is more powerful and remains with the reader for much longer. Below is a blow-by-blow summary of the book and the lesson that Coelho is looking to convey through each step of the novel:

- The story starts with the protagonist (a young Spanish shepherd) having a dream under a tree by a church. The dream tells him to make the long, arduous journey from Spain to Egypt where he will find treasure. He is apprehensive about following the dream. **LESSON – We all have dreams and are afraid to pursue them due to the comfort of our current life.**
- The boy speaks to a King who encourages him to follow his dream. **LESSON – Reaching out to those that are wiser than us often shows us that we have the answers within us and need to listen to what we already know.**
- The boy heads off on his journey and quickly loses everything. **LESSON – Pursuing your dream will not be easy, you may lose everything, and you will certainly be tested along the journey.**
- The boy uses his skills and becomes successful in business; however, the business he works on is not part of his dream. **LESSON – We all have skills that we can “fall back on” if we fail in the pursuit of our dream / there is always the comfort of a “normal” life available. While this path will provide material satisfaction, it is unlikely to provide true satisfaction.**
- The boy resumes his journey to Egypt. Along the way he meets an Englishman that speaks to him about “The Alchemist” – one who can turn any metal to gold. **LESSON – Along the journey we will meet individuals that believe in the magical solution. It is easy to believe in the magical solution versus the inner strength we possess.**
- They reach an oasis where the protagonist meets the love of his life. While she loves him and wants him to stay, she encourages him to continue on with his journey. **LESSON – We are surrounded by those that love and support us. This is a blessing that we all too often take for granted.**
- Before heading back out to the desert on his journey, he has a vision that the oasis will be attacked. While the vision scares him, he shares it with the oasis leaders. The leaders act on his vision, BUT warn him that if the vision is not true, he will be put to death. In the course of this series of events, he meets the alchemist. **LESSON – There is significant risk in opening up about our dreams to others. Do it anyways.**
- His vision proves to be true and he heads back on the journey along with the alchemist. Together they face a number of challenges. The Alchemist tells him that he needs to finish his

journey alone. **LESSON – We have the strength within ourselves to accomplish things alone. We need to trust in ourselves and follow our dreams.**

- He makes it to Egypt but finds no treasure. To make things worse, he is attacked by a band of thieves that beat him and steal all his money. One of the thieves mentions that he had a dream about treasure buried near a church. The protagonist returns to the tree where he was sleeping at the beginning of the story, digs, and finds his treasure. **LESSON – Sometimes our treasure is right there at our feet, but we do not recognize it until we endure the hardships of a long journey. Further, the treasure that we take for granted is the dream of many.**

Coelho does a wonderful job of keeping the reader transfixed at each step of the story and teaches the reader a number of lessons in the process. His core message is that we all have a dream and have the power within ourselves to follow that dream and achieve personal satisfaction. While the form of his message is different than that chosen by Steven Covey, Napoleon Hill, or other non-fiction writers; his message about the importance of self-reliance and believing in the power we possess within ourselves is identical to that which is echoed by others that focus on self-development.