



COMMUNICATION SKILLS QUIZ

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BRANCH- CSE B

Q) Select any two writers of your choice and pick one story/ poem/ essay/ book written by each of them. Write a critical review of these two texts citing the strengths and weaknesses of these works.

This question encourages an in-depth, analytical look at two literary works by different authors, pushing readers to go beyond surface-level impressions and dive into the intricacies of style, theme, and technique. By comparing and contrasting these works, we gain a broader understanding of the author's intentions, their strengths in storytelling, and potential limitations in their narratives.

For this exploration, I've chosen Robert Frost and Paulo Coelho, each known for their unique contributions to literature. From Robert Frost, I'll examine *Birches*, a work that explores nature and self-discovery, while from Paulo Coelho, I'll review *The Alchemist* which delves into pursuit of one's personal destiny.

Robert Frost's *Birches*: A Reflection on Nature and Memory

BIRCHES by Robert Frost



When I see birches bend to left and right
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,
I like to think some boy's been swinging them.
But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay.

In *Birches*, Robert Frost explores ideas of youth, memory, escape, resilience, and balancing reality with imagination. The speaker sees birch trees bent over by ice but imagines that a boy had bent them by swinging on them—bringing back memories of his own childhood. This memory represents a longing for the innocence and freedom of youth, a way to temporarily escape from life's adult responsibilities. Yet, the speaker understands that he must return to reality, accepting life's demands with resilience. The poem uses nature as a powerful metaphor for navigating life's struggles and cherishing moments of simplicity.

Strengths

One of Frost's key strengths in *Birches* is his masterful blend of natural and philosophical themes. He uses the image of birch trees—bent by ice storms but imagined as bent by a boy swinging on them—as a symbol of resilience, innocence, and the longing for simplicity. This metaphor allows him to explore complex ideas, like the desire to escape life's difficulties temporarily and return to a simpler time, while also recognizing the need to face reality with maturity. His ability to convey such deep themes through something as relatable as a tree makes the poem both accessible and thought-provoking.

Frost's language also plays a significant role in the poem's appeal. He uses simple, clear language, which feels grounded and sincere, but still manages to be evocative. For example, lines like "One could do worse than be a swinger of birches" reflect a sense of wonder and an appreciation for life's simple joys. This straightforward yet vivid language gives the poem a universal quality, inviting readers from various backgrounds to connect with the themes of nostalgia and freedom.

Frost's use of meter and rhythm is another strength that enhances the poem's reflective tone. Written in blank verse (unrhymed iambic pentameter), the poem has a natural, conversational flow that feels relaxed yet purposeful. This rhythm helps readers move seamlessly through the poem, making it feel as if the speaker is gently sharing his memories and thoughts. Additionally, the structure—fluid and somewhat meandering—mirrors the speaker's wandering memories and reflections, as if he's both remembering and dreaming. This loose structure allows readers to feel the meditative quality of the poem, enhancing its contemplative mood.

Weaknesses

However, *Birches* does have some potential weaknesses, especially for readers with different tastes or expectations in poetry. The poem's nostalgic tone, while generally appealing, can feel overly sentimental for some, especially for those who might view Frost's romanticized vision of rural boyhood as overly idealistic or unrealistic. This emphasis on childhood innocence and simple rural life might seem disconnected from the experiences of readers who don't share this background or who find idealized memories to lack complexity.

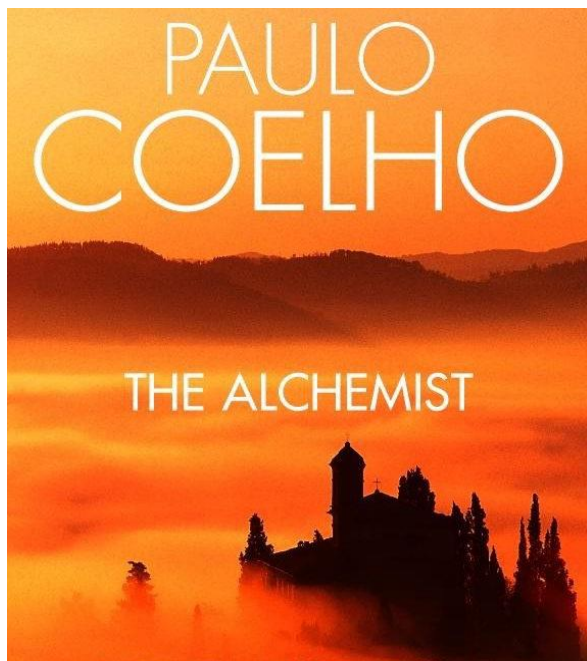
The focus on birch trees as a central metaphor, while powerful, can also feel repetitive and drawn out. Frost uses birches to represent multiple ideas—

youth, resilience, escape, and acceptance of life's challenges. For readers who prefer more concise or varied symbolism, this extended focus may feel stretched. Some may find that Frost spends too much time on the same image, making it less impactful.

Additionally, while the poem's simplicity is usually a strength, it may limit interpretative possibilities for readers looking for more intricate or experimental language. Frost's commitment to traditional form and accessible language can seem conventional to those who enjoy modern, abstract, or unpredictable poetic forms. Readers who seek poetry with less structure or more complexity in language and form might find Frost's straightforward style limiting, as it doesn't encourage as much interpretive exploration as more abstract poems might.

Overall, *Birches* is a carefully crafted, accessible poem with rich imagery and a gentle rhythm, but its sentimental tone, extended metaphor, and traditional style may not resonate with everyone.

Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*: A Journey of Self-Discovery



The Alchemist tells the story of Santiago, a shepherd who embarks on a quest to find a treasure hidden near the pyramids of Egypt. As he encounters various characters, Santiago learns about the importance of pursuing one's "Personal Legend" or life purpose. Coelho's novel combines philosophical themes with mystical elements, offering readers a modern fable on self-discovery, fate, and resilience.

Strengths

One of the key strengths of *The Alchemist* is its accessibility and universal appeal. Coelho writes with simplicity, making the book approachable to readers of all ages. The themes of following one's dreams and seeking meaning in life resonate globally, making the novel a bestseller across cultures and languages. Coelho's use of simple, allegorical

storytelling is effective in conveying deeper messages, allowing readers to reflect on their own journeys.

The novel's structure as a parable gives it an almost timeless feel. By using a fable-like format, Coelho encourages readers to view the story as both literal and symbolic. This duality adds to the novel's charm, as readers can engage with it on multiple levels: a straightforward adventure story or a spiritual allegory. Additionally, Coelho's emphasis on omens and signs adds an element of mysticism, creating an atmosphere of magic and wonder that aligns well with the theme of self-discovery.

Weaknesses

However, *The Alchemist* has also received criticism for being overly simplistic. Some readers find its life lessons cliché or feel that its philosophical elements lack depth. The repetitive message of following one's dreams can feel didactic, especially for those who may find the novel's optimism unrealistic. Coelho's emphasis on destiny and omens may also appear overly idealistic, as it risks suggesting that all obstacles in life can be overcome through sheer belief, which may feel detached from real-world complexities.

Another potential limitation is Coelho's characterization. Santiago and other characters are often one-dimensional, serving more as symbols for various life lessons than as fully fleshed-out individuals. While this style suits the novel's parable-like nature, it might disappoint readers looking for more nuanced character development.

Conclusion

Both *Birches* and *The Alchemist* are deeply reflective works that offer insights into the human experience—Frost through the lens of nature and memory, and Coelho through the theme of personal destiny. Frost's poem shines with vivid imagery and a balance of nostalgia and wisdom, capturing universal feelings of youth and longing. Yet, it risks being overly sentimental to some readers. *The Alchemist*, on the other hand, is a philosophical journey with a straightforward style that makes it widely accessible, though its didactic tone and idealistic message may alienate those seeking complexity.

In comparing these two works, we see different approaches to themes of self and reflection. Each work leaves a lasting impression, appealing to readers with varying tastes and reminding us that there are many ways to explore life's deeper questions.