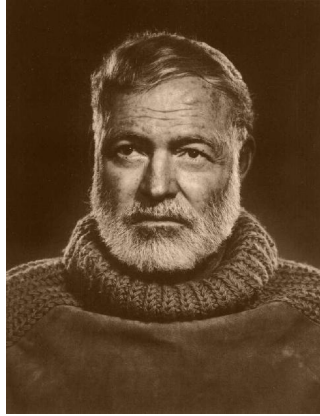


THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA

by Ernest Hemingway



THE AUTHOR

Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) was born in Oak Park, Illinois, a wealthy suburb of Chicago, the second of six children of a doctor and his wife. He learned early to love hunting and fishing - a love he never lost throughout his long career. After graduation from high school he tried to enlist in World War I, but was rejected because of poor eyesight. He volunteered for service in the Red Cross instead, and served in Italy, gaining firsthand experience that later contributed to his novel *A Farewell to Arms* (1929).

His earliest writing experiences came as a newspaper reporter, first for the *Kansas City Star* and then for the *Toronto Daily Star*. These newspapers contributed greatly to his literary style, which was spare, concise, and simple (Hemingway once said that his fiction was like an iceberg - seven-eighths of it unseen, but giving stability and direction to the part that could be seen). The latter sent him to Paris as its European correspondent. It was there he first met such literary luminaries as Ezra Pound, James Joyce, and Gertrude Stein. During this time, he wrote his earliest short stories. The late twenties saw his greatest literary output, including his first novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, and *A Farewell to Arms*. In 1928 he left Paris and moved to Key West, Florida, where he would live and write for the next twelve years. This era was a period of experimentation and self-promotion - he wrote a bullfighting treatise (*Death in the Afternoon*) and an account of his African safari (*Green Hills of Africa*) that did more to make him a celebrity and to create a public persona than to enhance his reputation as a writer. His best work during these years was his short stories, including *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* and *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber*. He traveled to Spain in 1937 to cover the Spanish Civil War, and out of that experience came the material for *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. After the publication of this book in 1940, he published no novels for the next decade, during most of which he lived in Cuba, enjoying deep-sea fishing, and even occasionally using his fishing boat to spy on German submarines in the area (he was prepared to drop a bomb down the hatch of one if he had the opportunity, but the chance never arose). He did go to England to report on World War II in 1944, but spent most of his time after the Normandy invasion “liberating” his favorite Paris watering holes.

Hemingway regained the public eye, and won both a Pulitzer Prize for fiction (1953) and the Nobel Prize for Literature (1954), by publishing *The Old Man and the Sea* in 1952. The book not

only restored his reputation, but made him wealthy. He used his wealth to travel again to Europe, take in some bullfights, and then return to Africa. It was in Africa that he barely survived two plane crashes, which left him with physical damage from which he never recovered. His health problems made it increasingly difficult for him to write effectively. In 1960, he left Cuba and bought a home in Ketchum, Idaho, where he moved with his fourth wife. A year later, battling worsening depression, he ended his life by putting a shotgun bullet in his brain.

The Old Man and the Sea (1952) was Hemingway's last novel, and was based, like most of his other writings, on his personal experiences. During his years in Cuba, he often went deep-sea fishing and caught marlins similar to the one described in the story. In an essay written in 1936, Hemingway narrated an actual incident very similar to the one at the heart of the novel. He interviewed the fisherman in question and promised to turn his adventure into a book, which he did more than fifteen years later. The short novel goes beyond a mere fishing adventure, incorporating favorite Hemingway themes like human isolation, man's relationship with nature, and the frequently-cited "code hero" who demonstrates "grace under pressure." It is also autobiographical in the sense that Hemingway, like his protagonist, had gone through a dry spell during which he published no novels, and when he finally did publish one, the critics tore it to pieces like the sharks did the huge marlin. Like Santiago's great catch, however, the novel turned out to be Hemingway's final triumph.

The page numbers in this study guide are based on the Collier paperback edition published in 1986.

PLOT SUMMARY

Santiago, the old man of the title, fishes alone in the Gulf Stream off the coast of Cuba, but has not caught anything for eighty-four days. The villagers consider him unlucky, so the parents of Manolin, the boy who used to fish with him, have told him to go out with another boat. The boy wants to return to Santiago, but the old man tells him to obey his parents. The boy brings him a beer and they talk about the first time they went out together, when the boy was only five years old. Back at the old man's shack, the two talk baseball - Santiago is a Yankees fan - and the boy offers to get sardines for them to use the next morning. The boy, in fact, takes care of the old man's needs as much as he can, providing food and warm clothing, because the old man is poor and does not take care of himself.

Early the next morning before the sun is up, the old man walks down the road to awaken the boy. Before heading out to sea, they have coffee together, which is the only nourishment the old man will have all day. He intends to go far out to sea, farther than the other fishermen, hoping to catch a great fish. He sets his hooks at varying depths, baiting them with small tuna and sardines. Two hours after sunrise, he sees a large black bird diving into the water after flying fish. He knows a school of dolphins must be near, and he follows them, hoping to catch a straggler to lure the great fish that is his target. He doesn't, but next the bird leads him to a school of tuna, and he catches a ten-pound albacore to use for bait.

At noon, he feels a tug on one of his lines and knows that a marlin, a hundred fathoms deep, is playing with one of his baited hooks. Suddenly the fish takes hold of the hook and swims rapidly away, and the old man lets out many fathoms of line. Then he pulls hard on the line to set the hook, and soon the fish is towing his boat rapidly through the water. He assumes that the fish cannot maintain such a pace for long, but four hours later, the great marlin is still towing his boat out to sea.

He wishes he had the boy with him because of the strain on his back, arms, and legs. Incredibly, he has not yet gotten so much as a glimpse of the monstrous fish. Night falls and the contest continues. The old man wishes he had a radio so he could listen to the baseball game, and wishes the boy could be there to see the fish when it surfaces. He reminds himself to eat the albacore in the morning to keep up his strength. As time passes, he begins to identify with and pity the fish, wondering what it is like and what strategy it is using against him.

As the fight goes on, the old man remembers one time when he hooked a female marlin. The male stayed with her until the end, then dived deep, displaying his beauty in the sun before plunging into the depths. Santiago and the boy were sad and asked pardon of the female before butchering her. Soon he turns his attention back to the giant marlin, still wishing the boy were with him. In the dark, he fastens all his remaining lines together to use in the battle with his stupendous catch. The fish lurches unexpectedly and he cuts his hand on the line, and it soon begins to cramp up. He notices that the marlin is slowing and swimming at a shallower depth, so he takes time to eat six slices of the tuna he caught earlier. Soon the great marlin surfaces; its sword is as long as a baseball bat and its body two feet longer than the old man's boat, the biggest fish he has ever seen or heard of.

By noon, the fish is still swimming at a steady pace and Santiago's left hand is still cramped and useless. Though he is not a religious man, he begins to pray and promises to take a pilgrimage to the shrine of the Virgin of Cobre if she lets him catch the fish. As night approaches, he sets a small line to catch another fish for food. Finally his left hand uncramps and he begins to use it. He realizes that he never found out the baseball scores from the night before, and that he will soon be missing the game between the Yankees and the Tigers. Then he thinks about a great arm-wrestling match he had fought years earlier against an enormous black man; the two had struggled mightily against one another for twenty-four hours before Santiago had been crowned the Champion.

At sunset, he catches a dolphin, brings it on board, and clubs it to death, intending to eat it later. He then ties the oars across the stern to slow the marlin down during the night; he knows that he has the advantage now because he has food and the marlin does not. He muses about how many people the marlin will feed, but then wonders if anyone is truly worthy of eating such a magnificent creature. He rests for two hours, but realizes that he has had no sleep since he left his home almost two days before. In order to sustain his strength, he fillets the dolphin and eats part of it, along with a flying fish he found in the dolphin's maw. He then braces the line around his body and goes to sleep. Suddenly he is awakened by the line dragging through his hand, cutting it badly, as the fish races ahead, leaping out of the water again and again. He puts more pressure on the line to tire out the fish still further.

As the fish weakens, it swims with the current, then begins to circle around the old man's boat. At sunrise on the third day, Santiago gradually begins to pull the line in, shortening the marlin's circle little by little. After two hours, the circle is noticeably smaller, and the old man hopes he will soon be able to see the great fish. After each turn he is able to pull in more and more line, and when he sees the fish, it is only thirty yards away. He is amazed by the enormity of the creature. In two more turns, he thinks he can drive his harpoon into the marlin's heart. Every time the fish gets almost close enough, it swims away again, and the old man is growing increasingly faint. Finally the fish comes alongside the boat and the old man drives his harpoon deep into the creature's heart. After a series of wild death spasms, the great fish goes belly up in the water, its blood staining the sea around it.

Santiago then proceeds to lash the body of the fish to the side of his boat. He estimates that the creature weighs about fifteen hundred pounds, which will earn him a fortune when he sells the

meat in the market. He then raises his sail and heads for home. As he sails, he takes a bunch of seaweed and shakes out the shrimp that inhabit it, eating them to nourish him on the journey. An hour later, the first shark appears, having smelled the blood of the dead marlin. The shark races toward the boat and takes forty-pound bite out of the marlin before the old man drives a harpoon through its brain. He knows that more sharks will come, and now he has lost his last harpoon. In desperation, he lashes his knife to one of the oars so he can fight off the sharks. He begins to regret having killed the great marlin. After taking an occasional bite of the marlin's meat, which is delicious, he sails on for two more hours, then sees two more sharks. He kills both of them, but not before they have eaten a quarter of the meat on the great marlin. He apologizes to the fish for having caught it and exposed it to such humiliation. Soon another shark arrives and Santiago kills it, but loses his knife in the process. Now the only weapons he has are the oars and a short club. At sundown two more sharks arrive, taking huge bites out of the carcass. He clubs them repeatedly, but cannot kill them, and now only half of the great fish remains. At ten o'clock he can see the glow of Havana in the distance, but at midnight a large pack of sharks attacks what remains of the marlin. He fights them off as best he can with his club and the tiller, losing both, but finally the attack ends because there is nothing left for the sharks to eat. The old man then steers for home, landing late at night and securing the boat on the shore. He staggers to his shack with the mast over his shoulder, resting five times along the way, and collapses into his bed.

The next day the weather is not suitable for fishing, and the boy rises late and looks in on the old man, who is still sound asleep. A crowd of fishermen gathers on the beach, staring with wonder at the monstrous carcass; one measures it and finds that it is eighteen feet long. When the old man wakes, the boy brings him coffee and asks what he wants done with the carcass. The head can be used for fish traps, and Santiago tells the boy that he can keep the fish's spear. The boy tells him that they sent out the coast guard and search planes to try to find him, but could not. The boat on which the boy sailed had caught four fish in three days, and he has decided to go out with the old man again no matter what his parents say. The boy tells him to take some time to get well, then brings him the newspapers so he can catch up on the baseball scores. When the boy returns, the old man is again fast asleep, dreaming about lions he once saw on the coast of Africa.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Santiago - The old man of the title, he is a fisherman in the Gulf Stream who catches a gigantic marlin, but finds that by the time he brings it back to shore, the sharks have eaten most of it.
- Manolin - The boy who is the old man's best friend, he used to go out with Santiago, who taught him how to fish, but his parents have begun to send him out with another boat because they consider Santiago unlucky.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“Everything about him was old except his eyes and they were the same color as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated.” (p.10)

“He was too simple to wonder when he had attained humility. But he knew he had attained it and he knew it was not disgraceful and it carried no loss of true pride.” (p.13-14)

“He rested sitting on the un-stepped mast and sail and tried not to think but only to endure.”
(p.46)

“Then he began to pity the great fish that he had hooked.” (p.48)

“Fish, I’ll stay with you until I am dead.” (Santiago, p.52)

“Fish, I love you and respect you very much. But I will kill you dead before this day ends.”
(Santiago, p.54)

“I wish I was the fish, he thought, with everything he has against only my will and my intelligence.” (p.64)

“Blessed Virgin, pray for the death of this fish. Wonderful though he is.” (Santiago, p.65)

“But I must have confidence and I must be worthy of the great DiMaggio who does all things perfectly even with the pain of the bone spur in his heel.” (Santiago, p.68)

“Never have I seen a greater, or more beautiful, or a calmer or more noble thing than you, brother. Come on and kill me. I do not care who kills who.” (Santiago, p.92)

“My head is not that clear. But I think the great DiMaggio would be proud of me today. I had no bone spurs. Bu the hands and the back hurt truly.” (Santiago, p.97)

“Man is not made for defeat. A man can be destroyed but not defeated.” (Santiago, p.103)

“Perhaps it was a sin to kill the fish. I suppose it was even though I did it to keep me alive and feed many people. But then everything is a sin. It is much too late for that and there are people who are paid to do it. Let them think about it. You were born to be a fisherman as the fish was born to be a fish. San Pedro was a fisherman as was the father of the great DiMaggio.” (Santiago, p.105)

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. In Ernest Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea*, what is the author saying about the relationship between man and nature? In what ways is that relationship one of harmony and in what ways is it one of conflict? How can it be both? What does the Bible say about the same paradox?
2. The typical hero in the novels of Ernest Hemingway is a man in isolation, struggling against the forces of man and nature and often failing in his quest. Compare and contrast Santiago in *The Old Man and the Sea* and Frederic Henry in *A Farewell to Arms* in the ways in which they illustrate the kind of man with whom Hemingway identified. Give attention to their characters, the nature of their isolation, and the ways in which they deal with their circumstances.

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4. Compare and contrast the quests of the fishermen at the center of Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. Consider the characters of the protagonists, the reasons for their quests, and especially the symbolism invested in the great marlin and the great white whale by the two authors. Should the two sea creatures be viewed as Christ-figures? Be sure to cite specifics from the two novels in your analysis.
5. Critics consider the enormous, powerful sea creatures in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* to be Christ-figures. Do you agree? What is Christlike about these two monsters of the deep? What does the symbolism in these two novels tell you about the authors' understanding of God and His relationship to man?
6. In Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, the author often draws comparisons between Santiago, the title character, and Christ, particularly with regard to his suffering. How valid are these comparisons? Consider not only the nature of the old fisherman's suffering, but also its causes, purposes, and consequences in your analysis. Be sure to cite relevant Scripture passages as well as specific quotations from the novel.
7. Is the quest of Santiago, the protagonist in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, ultimately a success or a failure? In what senses is it both? What is the author seeking to convey about human experience through the old fisherman's great struggle?
8. Throughout most of Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, the protagonist is alone far out at sea. Only at the beginning and the end do we find him in relationship with other human beings, both his protégé Manolin and the other fishermen from his village. What do those human relationships tell us about Santiago? How do they change over the course of the story, and what do these changes tell the reader about the author's view of the old man's struggle and its outcome?
9. Repeatedly throughout Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, the author refers to a dream that Santiago finds meaningful and comforting - a memory from his youth of lions playing on the beach along the coast of Africa. What is the meaning of this dream, and what role does it play in our understanding of Santiago and his battle with the great marlin?
10. Santiago, the protagonist in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, loves baseball. His favorite player is Yankees outfielder Joe DiMaggio. What does the old man respect about the great Yankees hitter? In what ways does he succeed in being like his hero?

11. The central figure of Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* is a man of paradoxes. He is both strong and weak, both proud and humble, and he both loves the marlin and wants to kill it. How do these contrasts enable the author to use Santiago as a portrayal of the human condition?
12. Ernest Hemingway once described the chief quality he valued in his protagonists as "grace under pressure." How does Santiago, the central figure in *The Old Man and the Sea*, demonstrate this quality? Be sure to go beyond the almost inhuman perseverance that he displays during his three-day battle with the great marlin in your analysis.
13. In Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, in what ways are Santiago and the great marlin he catches similar to one another? The fisherman sometimes addresses the fish as his brother and clearly feels a sense of kinship with it. What qualities do they share? Why does the author value these qualities?
14. The title character in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* claims that he is not a religious man, yet often during the course of his adventure he prays, either to God or to the Virgin Mary. What does this indicate about the true nature of his religion? Do you think he really believes in God? Why or why not?
15. Scripture teaches that man is unique among the creatures of God because he is made in God's image, yet he also has much in common with the lower sentient beings. To what extent are these qualities - the uniqueness of man and his kinship with the rest of creation - observable in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*? Focus your attention on the relationship of Santiago to the marlin he catches and be sure to cite specific passages from the novel in your analysis.
16. During his days alone far out at sea, the protagonist of Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* engages in much self-examination. Part of his introspection involves raising the ethical question of the legitimacy of killing the noble marlin he has hooked. He wonders whether killing the great creature is a sin or not. What does he conclude? Do you agree with him? Why or why not? Be sure to support your argument with specifics from the novel and relevant passages of Scripture.
17. Sportswriter Grantland Rice once wrote, "For when the great scorer comes to write against your name, He marks not that you won or lost but how you played the game." To what extent is Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* an illustration of this now-famous saying? Would the author have agreed with this sentiment? Do you agree with it? Why or why not?
18. Explain the symbolism of the sharks in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. Why can Santiago identify with the marlin but not with the sharks? Why does he reluctantly kill one but eagerly kill the others? What is the author saying about man, nature, and the relationship of the two through this symbolism?

19. Discuss the title of Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. Why did he not instead call it *The Old Man and the Fish*? Consider the symbolism of the sea and its relationship to the fisherman in writing your essay, and be sure to incorporate relevant quotations to support your arguments.
20. Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* tells a story that goes against the typical societal definition of success. What does the author see as the hallmarks of success? Why is his definition superior to that followed by most people? How does his definition of success compare with that of Scripture? Give particular attention to II Peter 1:5-11.
21. Manhood is an important theme in the writings of Ernest Hemingway. Discuss his concept of true manhood as it appears in his novella *The Old Man and the Sea*. What are the leading qualities of a man? How does the author illustrate these qualities? Support your argument with quotations and incidents from the story.