

# **Old Man and the Sea Book Notes**

## **Old Man and the Sea by Ernest Hemingway**

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## Author/Context

Ernest Hemingway was born in Oak Park, Illinois, in 1899. His father, Ernest Miller, was a doctor and also an avid hunter and fisherman. Ernest Senior introduced his son to the outdoors and took him to the Michigan woods on summer vacations. Hemingway was educated in the public schools and never continued his education past the high school level. At age 17, after he finished high school, Hemingway took a job as a reporter for the *Kansas City Star*.

Hemingway wanted to enlist in the army, but was rejected due to an eye injury he suffered when he was younger. Despite his rejection, Ernest still wanted to go to war and decided to travel overseas as a Red Cross ambulance driver. Hemingway was wounded in Italy during his duties with the Red Cross, just before he turned 19 years old. He was honored by the Italians for his bravery.

When Hemingway returned to the United States, he spent time in the Michigan woods, recovering from his war wounds, and later ended up in Toronto, where he worked as a reporter for the *Toronto Star*. Hemingway soon became dissatisfied with North American life and moved to Paris as a foreign correspondent for the *Star*. In Paris, he was taken under the wing of fellow Americans Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound. Under their influence, Hemingway focused his attention on creative writing rather than reporting. It was during his time in France that he wrote his first published collection of short stories, *In Our Time* (1925), and his first novel, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). He was only 27 when he published the novel and achieved fame.

After his first success in the literary world, Hemingway married and divorced three times. His fourth wife was Mary Welsh. During the 1930s he spent time in Spain and Africa and resided in Key West, Florida, where he gained a reputation as a sportsman and athlete. He fought bulls in Spain, hunted in Africa and fished in Florida. The main character of Santiago in *Old Man and the Sea* was based on someone he encountered during his fishing adventures on the Gulf Stream. While on his boat, he and his friend Carlos Gutierrez (the first skipper of his boat the *Pilar*) encountered a fisherman and a boy being dragged through the sea in a rickety boat, struggling against a big fish. The old man refused any help from Hemingway and his skipper. The story first appeared as an anecdote in an article in *Esquire* called "On the Blue Water," in April 1936.

The tale of the old, courageous fisherman is also said by critics to reflect the author himself. Gary Brenner described Santiago as the aging author Hemingway and the Marlin as his noble and beautiful published works. Others recognize Hemingway's love of gallantry. Sean O' Faolain is quoted by Carlos Baker as saying that Hemingway trotted the globe "in search of the flame of the spirit in men and beasts." In *Old Man and the Sea*, this flame is a characteristic of both Santiago and the Marlin.

In 1942, Hemingway volunteered himself and his fishing boat for Navy projects off the west coast of Cuba - a suicide mission to destroy U-Boats there for two years. He was also a correspondent on the loyalist side in the Spanish Civil War. In 1944 he went to

England, where he worked as a correspondent and went on missions with the RAF (Royal Air Force). After D-Day, he joined the First Army. He suffered several injuries during World War II.

After the War, Hemingway lived in Havana until Fidel Castro's revolution forced him out of the country. *Old Man and the Sea* (1952) was Hemingway's last published work, and he received the Nobel Prize in 1954. After being kicked out of Cuba, he returned to Spain for one last rendezvous at the bullfights. Towards the end of his life, Hemingway suffered a lot of pain - high blood pressure, enlarged liver and faintness, depression and withdrawal. He bought a house in Ketchum, Idaho in 1961 where he planned to finally settle down. Ultimately, he was unable to endure his pain. Ernest Hemingway was driven to suicide on July 2, 1961.

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# Plot Summary

In a small fishing village in Cuba, Santiago, an old, weathered fisherman has just gone 84 days without catching a fish. On the 85th day, he is determined to catch a big, impressive fish.

For years, Santiago has been fishing with a young boy named Manolin. Manolin started fishing with the old man when he was only 5 years old. Santiago is like Manolin's second father, and has taught the young boy everything about fishing. Manolin is extremely loyal to Santiago and makes sure that the old man is always safe, fed and healthy. Manolin's parents, however, force the boy to leave Santiago and fish on a more lucrative fishing boat.

Manolin does not want to leave Santiago, but must honor his duty to his parents. On the new boat, Manolin catches several fish within the first few days. Santiago, meanwhile, decides to head out on the Gulf Stream alone. He feels the 85th day will be lucky for him. He sets out on his old, rickety skiff. Alone on the water, Santiago sets up his fishing lines with the utmost precision, a skill that other fisherman lack.

Finally, he feels something heavy tugging at one of his lines. A huge Marlin has found Santiago's bait and this sets off a very long struggle between the two. The Marlin is so huge that it drags Santiago beyond all other boats and people - he can no longer see land from where the fish drags him. The struggle takes its toll on Santiago. His hands become badly cramped and he is cut and bruised from the force of the fish.

Santiago and the Marlin become united out at sea. They are attached to each other physically, and in Santiago's case, emotionally. He respects and loves the Marlin and admires its beauty and greatness. He sees the fish as his brother. Despite this, Santiago has to kill it. He feels guilty killing a brother, but after an intense struggle in which the fish drags the skiff around in circles, Santiago harpoons the very large fish and hangs it on the side of his boat. He feels brave, like his hero Joe DiMaggio, who accomplished great feats despite obstacles, injuries or adversities.

After enjoying a few moments of pride, a pack of sharks detects the blood in the water and follow the trail to Santiago's skiff. Santiago has to fend off each shark that goes after his prized catch. Each shark takes a huge bite out of the Marlin, but the old man fends them off, himself now bruised, but alive. He sails back to shore with the carcass of his Marlin. He is barely able to walk and slowly staggers back to his hut, where he falls into bed.

The next morning, the boy finds his mentor and cries when he looks at Santiago's bruised hands. He promises he will reject his parents' wishes and vows to fish with Santiago again.

# Major Characters

**Santiago:** The hero of the story. He is an old Cuban fisherman who is a perfectionist when it comes to fishing. Despite his precise methods, he has no luck at sea. Santiago wants to be unique: a greater and stranger person than his peers out at sea. He loves baseball and dreams of lions. He is alone, except for the company of Manolin. He is determined to catch one big fish.

**Manolin:** The young boy who is a disciple of Santiago and who takes care of him. His parents prefer that he work with more successful fishermen, but as he becomes his own man, he chooses to be loyal to Santiago.

**Marlin:** The Marlin is the big fish that Santiago desperately wants and needs to catch. It is an awesome fish that impresses the old man. Because of the fish's greatness, he becomes like a brother to Santiago

## Minor Characters

**Manolin's Parents:** The parents of the young boy. They want their son to abandon Santiago and fish with fishermen who are more successful and will earn more money. Manolin is torn between his duty to them and his loyalty to the old man.

**Local Fishermen:** The fishermen in town who either laugh at or pity Santiago. They are not as precise in technique as the old man, but they catch more fish.



## Objects/Places

**Skiff :** The old, rickety boat on which Santiago sails.

**Joe DiMaggio:** Santiago's idol. A New York Yankee (whose father was a fisherman) who always performed his best, despite injuries and obstacles.

**lions:** The great creatures on the beaches of Africa about which Santiago dreams. Santiago loves great and majestic animals and considers them as his peers.

**sea:** Santiago thinks of the sea as a feminine creature because it is temperamental and emotional. Santiago is at one with nature.

**sharks:** Creatures that attack Santiago, his skiff and the Marlin as they head back towards the shore. They tear up the flesh of the Marlin and take some of the glory of victory away from the old man.

# Quotes

Quote 1: "Everything about him was old except his eyes and they were the same color as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated." Page 10

Quote 2: "There are many good fishermen and some great ones. But there is only one you." Page 23

Quote 3: "He no longer dreamed of storms, nor of women , nor of great occurrences, nor of great fish, nor fights, nor contests of strength, nor of his wife. He only dreamed of places now and of the lions on the beach. They played like young cats in the dusk and he loved them as he loved the boy." Page 25

Quote 4: "But the old man always thought of her as feminine and as something that gave or withheld great favors, and if she did wild or wicked things it was because she could not help them. The moon affects her as it does a woman, he thought." Page 30

Quote 5: "Now is the time to think of only one thing. That which I was born for." Page 40

Quote 6: "I wish I had the boy." Page 45

Quote 7: "He is wonderful and strange and who knows how old he is, he thought. Never have I had such a strong fish nor one who acted so strangely... He cannot know that it is only one man against him, nor that it is an old man. But what a great fish he is and what will he bring in the market if the flesh is good." Page 48

Quote 8: "My choice was to go there and find him beyond all people. Beyond all people in the world. Now we are joined together and have been since noon. And no one to help either of us." Page 50

Quote 9: "Fish, I love you and respect you very much. But I will kill you dead before this day ends." Page 54

Quote 10: "But I must have the 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." Page 68

Quote 11: "The fish is my friend too. I have never seen or heard of such a fish. But I must kill him. I'm glad we do not have to kill the stars." Page 75

Quote 12: "A man is never lost at sea..." Page 89

Quote 13: "You are killing me, fish, the old man thought. But you have a right to. 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." Page 92

Quote 14: "I think the great DiMaggio would be proud of me today." Page 97





Quote 15: "But a man is not made for defeat. A man can be destroyed but not defeated."  
Page 103

Quote 16: "You did not kill the fish only to keep alive and to sell for food, he thought. You killed him for pride and because you are a fisherman. You loved him when he was alive and you loved him after. If you love him, it is not a sin to kill him. Or is it more?" Page 105

Quote 17: "To hell with luck. I'll bring the luck with me." Page 125

# Topic Tracking: Fraternalism

Fraternalism 1: Santiago sees the sea as having human characteristics. His relationship with the sea is as deep as brotherhood.

Fraternalism 2: Santiago and the fish are equal adversaries. They have been tied together - both literally and figuratively. They are both alone, with no one to help them, out in the middle of the Gulf.

Fraternalism 3: Santiago feels guilty about killing the fish. He thinks of the fish as a fellow brother out at sea and has to convince himself to kill a brother.

Fraternalism 4: In its last moments of life, the marlin looks majestic. The old man appreciates the fish's greatness and majesty. Santiago feels sad about killing his brother.

Fraternalism 5: Santiago contemplates why he killed the marlin, whom he loved and respected. This troubles him throughout his struggle and throughout his journey back to land.

# Topic Tracking: Paternalism

Paternalism 1: Santiago is a father figure to Manolin. Manolin is very loyal to Santiago, despite his bad luck. He recognizes the old man's knowledge and skill and wishes to learn from him, regardless of his success.

Paternalism 2: Santiago feels sorry for the Marlin and has almost father's sympathy for the fish after it attacked by sharks. He has been through so much with the fish that the sharks' attack on it is like an attack on his own child.

Paternalism 3: Manolin finds Santiago face down on his bed and starts to cry when he sees the old man's hands. He cares for Santiago like a father cares for a young son. Their roles are reversed.

Paternalism 4: The old man has recaptured his role as the boy's tutor and role model. The boy is eager to learn from the old man again. He ignores his biological father's wishes and pledges his loyalty, trust and admiration to Santiago.

## Topic Tracking: Pride

Pride 1: Manolin makes sure that Santiago's pride is never wounded. An old man who has been fishing all of his life, and who believes his destiny is to fish, Santiago's pride in his ability and skill as a fisherman is all he has. The boy knows this and tries to protect the old man's pride.

Pride 2: Santiago always thinks of his hero Joe DiMaggio because of his greatness. Santiago would like to believe that he stands out like his hero. The boy points out that Santiago is not necessarily great, but is definitely unique.

Pride 3: One way that Santiago stands out from other fisherman is his attention to detail. He has a thorough method he uses for fishing and though he doesn't have the same success rate as other fishermen, he sticks to methodology.

Pride 4: Santiago takes his boat beyond all the others. He wishes to separate himself from everyone else and be unique.

Pride 5: Santiago relies on his former glory to give himself the self-esteem and feeling of greatness necessary to endure his struggle with the Marlin. As *El Campeon*, Santiago feels that there is no way he can be defeated, despite all the obstacles.

Pride 6: When Santiago and the Marlin head back to shore, the fish hangs towering on the side of the skiff. Santiago is proud of his victory as he looks at his catch.

Pride 7: Santiago's pride is wounded when the sharks tear into his Marlin. It is as if the sharks have wounded him.

Pride 8: Once again, Santiago feels guilty about killing the fish. He wonders if he was motivated by pride or love to kill the fish that he had so much respect for.

## Section 1 (pg. 9-28)

An old man named Santiago has gone 84 days without catching a fish. During the first 40 days of his unlucky streak, he fished with a young boy named Manolin, who had been with the old man ever since he was five years old. Due to Santiago's bad luck, however, Manolin's parents told their son not to fish with the old man. They forced him to join up with a more lucrative boat, which ended up catching three good-sized fish in its first week.

Santiago is a well-worn man. His face and body show the signs of aging, but inside he is young and alive: "Everything about him was old except his eyes and they were the same color as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated." Page 10

After making a comfortable amount of money on the new fishing boat, Manolin tells Santiago that he wants to fish with him again. He feels bad because he never wanted to leave Santiago, his mentor, but had to honor his duty to his parents to earn some money. Santiago knows that the boy is loyal to him and never becomes upset by his decision to leave.

Topic Tracking: Paternalism 1

Manolin takes good care of Santiago. He makes sure the old man eats and remains in good health. He tries to give the old man positive encouragement and makes sure his ego is never wounded. Other local fishermen either make fun of or pity Santiago.

Topic Tracking: Pride 1

Santiago tells the boy that he will go out into the Gulf in his skiff because the current will be strong. Superstitious about numbers, Santiago also believes the 85th day will bring him good luck. Manolin brings the old man some food and asks him to talk about baseball. Santiago loves the New York Yankees because his hero, the great Joe DiMaggio, is on the team. Santiago and the boy talk about other greats in baseball. The boy then tells Santiago that he is the greatest fisherman: "There are many good fishermen and some great ones. But there is only one you." Page 23

Topic Tracking: Pride 2

Manolin flatters Santiago and admires his strength. Santiago concedes that he is not as strong as he once was, but he can catch a great fish due to his resolution and tricks. Manolin puts Santiago to sleep. Santiago has the same dream he has every night. In his dreams, he drifts off to Africa where he spent some time as a child. Santiago's dreams used to be more exciting. However:

*"He no longer dreamed of storms, nor of women, nor of great occurrences, nor of great fish, nor fights, nor contests of strength, nor of his wife. He only dreamed of places now*

*and of the lions on the beach. They played like young cats in the dusk and he loved them as he loved the boy."* Page 25

After waking up, Santiago feels confident about his fishing journey. Manolin sees Santiago off into the Gulf.

## Section 2 (pg. 28-41)

Late in the night, Santiago sets into the silent Gulf on his skiff, all by himself. Santiago notices the creatures around him and is familiar with their company. Santiago has a special relationship with the sea and its creatures. He thinks of the sea as a human entity. He notes that younger fishermen think of the sea as *el mar*, masculine, their enemy.

*"But the old man always thought of her as feminine and as something that gave or withheld great favors, and if she did wild or wicked things it was because she could not help them. The moon affects her as it does a woman, he thought."* Page 30

Topic Tracking: Fraternalism 1

The old man is determined to capture one big fish. He uses his thorough methodology to place his lines in the water. Other fishermen are not as careful as he is and haphazardly throw their lines into the sea. Santiago, regardless of his bad luck, has never been anything less than precise.

Topic Tracking: Pride 3

The old man talks aloud to himself while he is out alone on the water. He is not worried that others will think he is crazy. In fact, for Santiago, being strange is a way for him to feel special. A bird helps the old man locate a large albacore tuna, which is a straggler from a larger school of fish. He begins to think about baseball, but tries to concentrate on his task: "Now is the time to think of only one thing. That which I was born for." Page 40. He thinks the tuna will lead him to a great fish.



## Section 3 (pg. 41-82)

One of the sticks on Santiago's lines dips down deep. A fish pulls on it and Santiago immediately knows which fish he has hooked: a giant marlin, 100 fathoms below, which is eating the sardines around the line. The fish begins to drag the skiff far out into the northwest of the Gulf. As he's towed by the fish, the old man says: "I wish I had the boy." Page 45

Santiago thinks this fish might kill him, but four hours later, he is still being towed. Havana is no longer visible in the distance. Night is falling, and Santiago begins to admire the marlin and to contemplate catching him: "He is wonderful and strange and who knows how old he is, he thought. Never have I had such a strong fish nor one who acted so strangely." Pages 48

Santiago repeats his wish that the boy was with him. He has made a decision to go far out alone into the Gulf, a decision like the marlin's - to go beyond the traps and snares. He feels a sense of equality with his catch:

*"My choice was to go there and find him beyond all people. Beyond all people in the world. Now we are joined together and have been since noon. And no one to help either of us."* Page 50

Topic Tracking: Fraternalism 2

Topic Tracking: Pride 4

Santiago has to remind himself that he does not have the boy with him and must struggle against the fish himself. The marlin pulls the line and cuts Santiago's eye. He announces to the fish that he will struggle against him until he is dead. The fish continues to pull Santiago further into the Gulf. The greater and longer the two struggle, the more Santiago respects his adversary: "Fish, I love you and respect you very much. But I will kill you dead before this day ends." Page 54

Santiago begins to talk to the birds and hopes for their company. The old man is lonely, tired and in pain. His hand begins to cramp from all of the tension of the line and he has to force himself to eat the tuna he caught to alleviate his pain and give himself strength. He talks to his hand as if it is a friend. The marlin continues to pull the line. Santiago realizes that the fish is two feet longer than the skiff. Though the man has seen great fish in his day, he has never seen one this big by himself.

Santiago, who was never religious, begins to pray so that he may catch and kill the fish. He begins to feel guilty about his struggle with the fish, but wants to prove to himself and the fish what he can endure. He wishes he could fall asleep and dream of the lions. He begins to wonder why he only dreams of lions at this stage of his life, but quickly refocuses on the marlin. He starts to think about the Big Leagues in baseball and is motivated by thoughts of his hero DiMaggio: "But I must have the 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." Page 68

To give himself confidence, Santiago recalls a time when he was in Casablanca and challenged a man to an arm wrestling match. After a very long struggle, he became *el Campeon*, the champion. From that experience, he knows that he can take on any competitor, if he wants victory badly enough.

Topic Tracking: Pride 5

The old man catches a dolphin and has food for the evening. His hand begins to hurt less and he feels prepared to make it through the night. Santiago gets some rest on the boat. He thinks to himself:

"The fish is my friend too. I have never seen or heard of such a fish. But I must kill him. I'm glad we do not have to kill the stars." Page 75

He starts to imagine impossible feats like killing the moon or the sun and feels lucky that his task, in relative terms, is much simpler. Though he is sad to kill the fish, it doesn't stop him from doing it. The marlin and other sea creatures, according to Santiago, are his brothers and he has to kill his brother.

Topic Tracking: Fraternalism 3

Santiago forces himself to eat the dolphin he caught to give him the strength to endure the battle. He falls asleep, still cramped, and waits for the lions to appear in his dreams. He is happy when he sees the lions in his dreams again.

## Section 4 (pg. 82-100)

Santiago is awoken by a strong pull from the line and hits his face with his fist. His left hand becomes numb and the fish jumps from the ocean and falls back in hard. His jumps pull the skiff quickly along. His hands are cut badly, but he anticipated this move by the marlin and does not allow the line to slip from his hands. He endures and ignores the pain. He waits for the marlin to start circling, and when the fish does, Santiago begins to see black spots before his eyes, the salty sweat from his forehead dripping into his eyes and cuts. He again prays to God for his help in surviving this battle against the marlin. He is very fatigued and the fish has dragged him far out into the Gulf. But he knows he will return: "A man is never lost at sea..." Page 89

Santiago tries to get close to the fish to harpoon and kill him. He will no longer be able to endure the turns of the circling fish and tells the fish that it is killing him:

*"You are killing me, fish, the old man thought. But you have a right to. 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."* Page 92

Santiago has to remind himself to keep his head clear and suffer like a man, or fish. Finally, after a few more circles, the fish gently swims up by the side of the skiff and Santiago plants a harpoon in it. Though it is dying, the marlin comes alive for its last moments and proudly jumps out of the water and falls back in, spraying the old man and the skiff. Santiago says he has killed his brother.

Topic Tracking: Fraternalism 4

His head is still unclear and he still has pain, but feels good about his victory: "I think the great DiMaggio would be proud of me today." Page 97

He is still in disbelief about catching the fish. The fish and Santiago sail back towards land, side-by-side, as the marlin is latched on the side of the skiff. This way the two share a proud moment as they return to land. After only an hour, Santiago encounters his first shark.

Topic Tracking: Pride 6

## Section 5 (pg. 100-119)

The shark detected the blood from the marlin and followed the trail to the skiff. After struggling with the approaching shark, the old man maims him. However, the shark has already torn apart and devoured 40 pounds of Santiago's marlin. In the process, the shark also takes the old man's harpoon and rope. It is difficult for Santiago to look at his mutilated marlin. He sympathizes with his adversary and feels like the shark attacked him as well. Though he is proud he hooked the big marlin, he begins to wish it were all a dream.

Topic Tracking: Pride 7

Topic Tracking: Paternalism 2

Santiago says: "But a man is not made for defeat. A man can be destroyed but not defeated." Page 103 He starts to question whether he killed his adversary because of his intelligence or because he was better armed. He convinces himself not to think, to continue his journey back and take what comes to him. Santiago still questions his bravery and wonders if he can be compared to his hero DiMaggio. He also wonders whether he has committed a sin by slaying the fish. He cannot stop thinking and contemplating because he has no other diversions, alone out at sea. He wonders what motivated him to kill the fish and whether this motivation was worthy or sinful:

*"You did not kill the fish only to keep alive and to sell for food, he thought. You killed him for pride and because you are a fisherman. You loved him when he was alive and you loved him after. If you love him, it is not a sin to kill him. Or is it more?"* Page 105

Topic Tracking: Pride 8

Topic Tracking: Fraternalism 5

More sharks approach Santiago's skiff. He stabs another one and repeats his wish that he had never caught the marlin, that this was all a dream. By now, the two sharks have already consumed the best parts of the marlin. Santiago talks to the fish, apologizing for going too far out into the sea. He knows that the fish could have challenged the sharks. As Santiago begins to see the lights of the city, he acknowledges that if a shark were to attack him, he would be helpless. He is alone, in the dark and without any weapons. He is fatigued and hopes not to fight again.

Around midnight, a pack of sharks swims over to his skiff and Santiago begins to club at the sharks' heads. They eat the last pieces of the marlin and Santiago loses his breath. He tastes a strange taste in his mouth and is convinced that he will die. He spits into the ocean and at the sharks.

## Section 6: (pg. 119-127)

Santiago's sailing becomes much easier now, without the marlin attached to the skiff. He acknowledges his defeat as he sails toward land. He is exhausted and as he docks the boat, he falls over and lies with the mast on him. He has to stop and sit five times before he reaches his shack.

Manolin finds Santiago in the shack face down on his bed. He checks to see if he is breathing and starts to cry when he sees Santiago's hands.

Topic Tracking: Paternalism 3

The other local fishermen go out and look at Santiago's skiff and measure the length of the marlin's skeleton. Manolin takes care of Santiago and reassures him that he was not defeated. Santiago tells Manolin that he missed him. Manolin has caught four fish in Santiago's absence, but asks the old man if they can fish together again. Santiago warns him that he has no luck, and Manolin replies: "To hell with luck. I'll bring the luck with me." Page 125 Santiago asks what Manolin's family will think, and the boy tells Santiago he does not care and that he still has much to learn.

Topic Tracking: Paternalism 4

The fish is now just garbage waiting to be thrown away. A waiter tries to explain Santiago's heroic tale to tourists who don't comprehend the story. In the shack, Santiago is asleep, dreaming of lions.