The Old Man and The Sea

By

Ernest Hemingway

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Winner of the Pulitzer Prize 1953

Winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature 1954
The Old Man and the Sea
Study Guide

Section 1
1. How long has the old man gone without catching a fish?

2. Why did the boy’s parents tell him he couldn’t fish with the old man anymore?

3. What does the old man look like?

4. What can you tell about the boy’s parents from his conversation with the old man?

5. Why does the boy care so much about the old man?

6. Although the young fishermen make fun of Santiago, he is not angry with them. What does this reveal about him? Why do you suppose the old men don’t make fun of him?

7. Explain the statement, “He was too simple to wonder when he had attained humility. But he knew he had attained it and knew it was not disgraceful and it carried no loss of true pride.”

8. What are Santiago’s living conditions like?

9. What small lie does the old man tell the boy? Why doesn’t the boy confront Santiago and make him admit he is in dire straits?

10. The boy assures the old man that he is the greatest fisherman, but the old man says, “I hope no fish will come along so great that he will prove us wrong.” This is an example of what technique? What might it predict?

Section 2

11. In what way is Santiago technically superior to other fishermen?

12. How does the man-of-war bird help the old man? What does this reveal about his relationship with nature?

13. Hemingway’s style has been criticized and even satirized because it is simple and direct. How does the style of the long paragraph on page 35 differ from his usual style?
14. What is Santiago’s reaction to the Portuguese-Man-of-War? How is his reaction different from any we have seen so far?

15. Why do you think Santiago talks to himself?

16. Why does Santiago wish Manolin was with him?

17. The sun sets and it begins to get cold. What might happen to Santiago during the night?

18. Santiago says on page 46, “tried not to think but only to endure.” What does this mean?

19. Santiago begins to pity the fish, and he remembers a sad time when he killed a female marlin in front of her mate. What does this tell you about him?

20. What vow does Santiago make regarding the fish?

21. Why was the slight injury to the old man’s right hand important?

22. What does Santiago call the fish on page 59?

Section 3

23. On page 61, the old man says the light will make better weather for him than the fish. What do you think he means by this?

24. Santiago was finally able to see the fish. Describe what he saw.

25. Why do you think Santiago likes to sleep and dream about the lions?

26. Could the line, “Unless the sharks come, God pity him and me,” be foreshadowing? What would happen if the sharks came?

27. Compare the great arm wrestling match described on page 69 with the match between Santiago and the fish. How are the two matches similar?

28. How does Santiago know the fish is getting tired?

29. What do you think Santiago means by his comment on page 75, “I’m glad we do not have to kill the starts”?

30. Why couldn’t Santiago ever really get comfortable in the boat?

31. On page 84, why didn’t Santiago’s pain matter?
32. Summarize Santiago’s plan for harpooning the fish.

33. As Santiago dozes in the boat, he has three dreams. What are they, and what do you think they mean to Santiago and/or symbolize in this novel?

34. Santiago often expresses pity for the fish and calls it his friend. Why then, does he want to kill it so badly?

Section 4

35. On page 91, Santiago pleads, “Last for me, head. Last for me. You never went.” Is this true as far as you know? Has Santiago been clear-headed throughout the novel?

36. Notice the contrast in the sentence on page 94, “Then the fish came alive, with his death in him.” How can someone or something come alive as it is dying?

37. Consider the image on page 99 of Santiago side by side with the fish. What does this represent?

38. On page 101, the author says, “He was full of resolution but he had little hope.” What does this mean?

39. Discuss Santiago’s statement on page 103, “A man can be destroyed but not defeated.” How can this be true?

40. Hemingway describes the shovelnose shark attacking the fish, “He came like a pig to the trough.” What makes this simile effective?

41. On page 119, Santiago knows finally that he is beaten. Is his reaction one of despair?

42. What is Manolin’s reaction when he finds Santiago asleep in the morning?

43. How does Manolin comfort Santiago?

44. Most critics feel that Santiago is a hero. Define “hero” and explain whether or not you think Santiago is one.

45. “Grace under pressure” and “fighting the good fight” are themes found in most of Hemingway’s novels and stories. Explain how these themes are treated in The Old Man and the Sea.