

Old Man and the Sea
by Ernest Hemingway

About the author

Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) was an American sportsman, journalist, novelist and short story writer who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954. He was born in a suburb of Chicago and began to write while still in high school. After graduating, he longed for his freedom and moved to Kansas City where he worked as a reporter for a local paper. Though he tried several times to enlist in the military, eye problems kept him out of service. He finally served his country by joining the Red Cross and working as an ambulance driver in World War I. In 1918, while only 18 years old, he was injured while in the war zone and was hospitalized in Italy. While there, he fell in love with a nurse who rejected his marriage proposal. These experiences stayed with him throughout his lifetime.

After the war, Hemingway moved quite frequently, but he always kept writing. He worked as a reporter at times, and he even worked as a foreign correspondent for France. In 1926, he published *The Sun Also Rises*, a novel which brought him recognition as a published author. Hemingway termed the phrase “iceberg theory” to describe his style. He believed in the using fewer words and leaving a lot to the imagination of the reader. He only revealed the tip of the iceberg in each story, leaving readers to uncover what was unseen in his writings.

Shortly after the publication of *The Old Man and the Sea* in 1952, Hemingway went on a safari to Africa where he survived two near-fatal plane crashes, though he never fully recovered. He took his own life in 1961 while living in Idaho.

Type: Novella

Genre: Parable/Tragedy

Point of View: Third person narrator

Themes

Friendship

Santiago is an elderly fisherman who has gone 84 days without catching a fish. Hemingway explores the friendship between the fisherman and a boy named Manolin who worked with Santiago until his parents forced him to stop. Manolin offers to return even though he will not be financially successful. Their dinner ritual builds the friendship theme. The man also develops a friendship of sorts with the fish.

Youth vs. Age

Santiago's body fails him, but his mind is sharp. He still has his youthful determination and spirit. The lions on the beach symbolize his youthfulness.

Man vs. Nature; Determination vs. Defeat

Santiago must battle the sea and the fish. He also battles the rumors of others. The marlin is a worthy opponent for the fisherman. Santiago shows a reverence for nature and the animals he encounters though he does have to kill in order to survive himself. The sea and the animals reveal the destructive powers of the natural world.

Human Pride

Santiago knows that he is being talked about in the village. He does not want to admit his weaknesses or his inability to provide for himself and take care of himself like he used to be able to do. His pride also provides him with a determination to survive.

Symbolism

The number 40: This number is significant in the Bible and adds to the religious imagery in the story.
Example: Santiago's 40 days of bad luck mirrors Christ's 40 days in the desert.

The paintings and his wife's picture: Christian symbolism.

Baseball: it's like fishing—based on both skill and luck.

Wounds on his hands: Christ-like imagery

Santiago's journey: reflects many aspects of the New Testament

Questions

1. Describe the relationship between Santiago and the marlin. How does this relationship relate to at least one of the themes?
2. What are the physical conflicts in the story? What are the emotional conflicts?
3. Did the story end as you expected it to? Why or why not?
4. How do the dreams of the old man relate to the themes?
5. How does the man's view of the fish change throughout the story?