

The Old Man and the Sea

by Ernest Hemingway, 1952

WORK AND AUTHOR

The Old Man and the Sea:

1. Published in 1952, 24 years after his first novel, *The Sun Also Rises*.
2. His last novel — “his finest work.”
3. Told through simple and concise use of language that marked his previous works.
4. The book was begun as a short story — “a novella.”
5. To critics, this is the book in which Hemingway perfected his balance of style and content, his philosophy and language.

Ernest Hemingway:

1. This book was published nine years before his death by suicide.
2. In 1954, he was awarded the Nobel prize for literature.

THEME AND CONTENTS

1. This book focuses on manliness, courage, action, will, and the inevitable confrontation with death.
2. Here, a lone man squares off against the forces of death and emerges victorious.
3. Though a man dies, he can achieve a spiritual victory that transcends his physical destruction.
4. Hemingway’s consuming fear had never been death but the loss of will and the inability to act.

5. Even in defeat, we can achieve a spiritual victory by confronting and seeking challenges, taking courageous action, enduring pain and suffering, and demonstrating a humble regard for the world and its inhabitants.

MAIN CHARACTERS

1. An old Cuban fisherman named Santiago, the hero — a man who though older, possesses great strength and endurance, is active and asserts his will, and seeks arenas which often are in nature, where he can express and prove his virility.
2. Manolin, a young boy who is Santiago’s companion and protege.
3. The fish, an enormous 18-foot marlin.

STORY

1. *The Old Man and The Sea* is based on the true story of an old Cuban fisherman named Santiago, who sets out toward deeper waters where he hooks an enormous marlin, the largest fish he or anyone in his village has ever seen.
2. For three days he endures hardship and pain to land the fish and bring it back to port. Eventually he loses his prize when it is attacked and devoured by voracious sharks.
3. He returns home with only a gigantic skeleton tied to the side of his boat.

4. Exhausted and beaten, he proclaims: “A man can be destroyed but not defeated.”
5. The greatest death of all was death of manhood. In *The Old Man and The Sea*, the hero, now an old man, maintains his manhood and exercises his will and initiative.

LASTING IMPACT

1. Santiago is more intimately linked with all other life forms than any previous Hemingway hero.
2. There is communal bonding, mutual recognition, and respect.
3. *The Old Man and the Sea* addresses the aging process.
4. An aging man, failing in body and mind, lives up to the “Hemingway Code” — avoiding weakness, passivity, inaction, and fear.
5. The book is a moving experience because of its purity and dignity.
6. Santiago loved and respected the sea and its inhabitants, including the grand fish he eventually defeated.
7. The value of the story is its suggestion to us that there is more to life and more to our struggles — the struggle itself and the way we deal with it.
8. This work may be a Christian allegory with Santiago as the Christ figure; it may be an allegory for the artist and his work.