



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Old Man and the Sea

Ernest Hemingway

READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Old Man and the Sea

Ernest Hemingway

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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PLOT SUMMARY

Santiago is a very old and very poor Cuban who earns his meager living by fishing. When the story opens, he has gone for 84 days without catching a fish. On the 85th day, he goes farther out into the Gulf than usual, and he hooks the largest fish he has ever caught, a marlin that is even longer than his fishing boat. In spite of his age, Santiago has the courage and determination to play the fish properly and to finally kill it. It seems that his dreams have come true until sharks begin attacking the marlin, which is tied alongside the boat. Santiago loses his harpoon, knife, club, and part of his boat's rudder in his valiant efforts to fight off the sharks. It is only after the scavengers have reduced the marlin to a skeleton that the old man realizes he could have used the sharp spear on the marlin's head as a weapon, and that they could have fought off the sharks "together." Back home, the boy Manolin, who has been taking care of Santiago in appreciation of the old man teaching him to fish, tries to appear cheerful and optimistic as he relates plans to fish with Santiago again now that his spell of bad luck has been broken. Santiago sinks into an exhausted sleep, dreaming of the brave, beautiful lions he saw on the shores of Africa so many years ago.

ANALYSIS

The Old Man and the Sea is a classic studied by thousands of students in high schools and colleges each year. Although it is Hemingway's shortest novel, it provides a forum for the study of the major themes of his work. It is a story about the survival of the self—not physical survival, but one which leaves pride intact and allows the survivor to say that he fought the fight well, did the right thing, and can hold his head up with pride. The theme of Man against Nature is the basis of the plot, yet Nature is not seen as an enemy. Instead, the natural world is beautiful and mysterious. It has given the old man sustenance for years; it gives him the fish of his dreams—and then sends the marauding sharks to take it all away. But even though Santiago returns to the harbor with only the great fish's skeleton, even though he has lost much of his gear and must rely on the charity of others for a meal—he emerges triumphant because he did all any man could do against the forces of nature. Like all Hemingway heroes and heroines, Santiago exhibits "grace under pressure"—and this is the only measure of a human being that really counts.

If you are using a whole-language approach in your study of literature, you will find a number of topics related to *The Old Man and the Sea*: fish, sharks, and other sea life; sailboats; the fishing industry; Cuba; poverty in the tropics; and baseball greats of the late 1930s and early 1940s. Extension activities can include drama, music, and art.

SECTION ONE: PAGES 9-30

Vocabulary

Students will discover that Hemingway used many Spanish words and phrases in *The Old Man and the Sea*. Point out that he often defined these Spanish words in the context of the sentence. Ask the students to find the words listed below in the text, and to guess at their translations. Have a Spanish-speaking student verify meanings, or check a Spanish-English dictionary. (Definitions are supplied for teacher information.)

| | | |
|---------|---------------|---------------------|
| page 15 | <i>guano</i> | palm tree |
| page 17 | <i>bodega</i> | store |
| page 23 | <i>qué va</i> | "How about it?" |
| page 29 | <i>la mar</i> | the sea (feminine) |
| page 30 | <i>el mar</i> | the sea (masculine) |

Discussion Questions

1. What can you tell about the boy's parents from his conversation with the old man? (They are superstitious; they depend on the boy to bring in some money for the family.)
2. List some adjectives to describe the old man. (thin, gaunt, wrinkled, hands scarred, skin blotchy from cancers, lonely—but his eyes are cheerful and undefeated)
3. Why does the boy care so much about the old man? (He taught him how to fish.)
4. Although the young fishermen make fun of Santiago, he is not angry with them. What does this reveal about him? (He has seen too much of life to be concerned with the jokes of young men; he has enough pride and confidence to remain unaffected.) Why do you suppose the old men don't make fun of him?
5. Discuss the statement on page 13, "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." (Answers will vary.)
6. Discuss the qualities of humility and pride. Give examples of situations when you might feel each one. Can humility be a good as well as a bad quality? Can pride?
7. What are Santiago's living conditions like? (He lives in a shack with a dirt floor; his mattress is a stack of newspapers. He has no running water and would not have food if the boy didn't bring it.)

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8. What small lies does the old man tell the boy? (He tells him he has some yellow rice and fish for dinner when he actually has nothing, and that he “only needed time to wash” when he was actually napping and did not leave the shack.) Why doesn’t the boy confront Santiago and make him admit he is in dire straits? (The boy has an instinctive understanding that the old man’s pride must be saved; he is willing to look after him and even feels guilty that he is not doing a better job of it.)
 9. Does it surprise you that Santiago is interested in baseball? Do you think he has ever seen a baseball game? (Answers will vary.) Which player does he admire most? (Joe DiMaggio)
 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? (foreshadowing) What might it predict?
- **Discuss Prediction Charts** with the students, and have them make their first predictions at this point. You might ask some of the following questions to help them channel their thinking: What is the old man’s main problem? What attempt will he make to solve it? What might the results of this attempt be? Will Santiago be able to handle catching a very big fish? (On page 23, Santiago says, “I may not be as strong as I think, but I know many tricks and I have resolution.”)
 - **Writing Assignment:** Have students consider the line on page 26, “It is what a man must do.” Have the students write a paragraph describing something they do because they must, and ask them to identify the main reason they do it. (Answers might be as simple as “I take out the trash because I won’t get my allowance otherwise” or on a higher plane, such as “I take care of my little brother after school because we all work together in our family to help one another.”)
 - **Symbolism.** Define (or have students define) symbolism. Many critics have found Hemingway’s writing to be rich in symbolism, and this novel in particular has even been called a “parable.” The most current thinking on symbolism is that it is not a cut-and-dried science, but a useful way for readers to study and discuss a piece of literature. Tell the students to watch for recurring symbols as they continue reading *The Old Man and the Sea*.
 - **Attribute Webs.** Have the students begin an attribute web for Santiago. (See pages 12 and 13 for a description and a reproducible form.)

USING CHARACTER ATTRIBUTE WEBS

Attribute webs are simply a visual representation of a character's traits. They provide a systematic way for students to organize and recap the information they have about that particular character. Attribute webs may be used to recapitulate information after reading the story, or completed gradually as information unfolds—done individually, or finished as a group project.

One type of character web uses these categories:

- How a character acts and feels (What do his/her statements reveal about feelings? What does his/her behavior show you about him/ her?)
- How a character looks (What do clothing and physique tell you about this character?)
- Where a character lives (In what country, state, neighborhood, does this character live? During what time period?)
- How others feel about the character (What do others' statements and actions show about their attitude toward the character?)

In group discussion about students' attribute webs for specific characters, the teacher can ask for supportive evidence from the story.

Attribute webs need not be confined to characters. They can also be used to organize information about a concept, object, or place.

Attribute webs are a kind of semantic mapping. Students can move on from attribute webs to other creative kinds of mapping. They can be encouraged to modify attribute webs—use subdivisions, add divisions, change connections—in whatever ways are useful to them personally. It is important to emphasize that attribute webs are just a graphic way to record ideas and remember concepts. They provide students with a tool for helping them generate ideas and think about relationships among them.

ATTRIBUTE WEB

The attribute web below is designed to help you gather clues the author provides about what a character is like. Fill in the blanks with words and phrases which tell how the character acts and looks, as well as what the character says and what others say about him or her.

