

Advanced Placement in
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

The Old Man and the Sea

by Ernest Hemingway

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The Old Man and the Sea

Objectives

By the end of this unit, the student will be able to:

1. analyze the differences between the novella and the short story.
2. trace the development of the major themes presented:
 - Man can be destroyed, but not defeated.
 - Pride and determination are the sources of greatness.
 - A worthy opponent brings out the best in a warrior.
 - Fortune plays a significant role in one's life.
 - People should depend on themselves, not outside forces.
3. trace the development of Manolin as a dynamic character.
4. construct interpretations of motifs and symbols (e.g. Joe DiMaggio, crucifixion imagery, lions on the beach).
5. analyze the extent to which *The Old Man and the Sea* reflects Hemingway's life.
6. explain the traditional Aristotelian model of tragedy and examine the character of Santiago as a twentieth-century tragic hero.
7. analyze how the omniscient viewpoint works in *The Old Man and the Sea*.
8. examine literary conflicts as well as their resolution.
9. interpret *The Old Man and the Sea* as a parable.
10. analyze Hemingway's choice of allusions and explain why they work.
11. examine Hemingway's style on tone, mood, and theme.
12. respond to multiple-choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition Exam.
13. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition Exam.

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Background Lecture

Ernest Miller Hemingway (1899 – 1961)

A timeline of his life and major writings:

- Ernest Hemingway was born in Oak Park, Illinois.
- Although his mother had great hopes that he would develop musical interests, Hemingway embraced hobbies more like his father's: hunting, fishing, and camping. He and his father spent much time together in the wilderness of Northern Michigan, where the family had a summer home.
- In high school, Hemingway excelled in boxing and football.
- After graduating from high school in 1917, he became a reporter for the *Kansas City Star*, where he learned the basics of news writing—construction of short sentences, use of short paragraphs, and formation of a positive outlook—that he carried with him into every level of his writing career.
- Hemingway wanted to join the Allied Forces during WWI, but was denied entry because of bad vision. He traveled to Italy and became a volunteer ambulance driver for the Red Cross.
- After sustaining an injury from a mortar shell, Hemingway returned to Oak Park.
- In 1920, Hemingway took a job at the *Toronto Star Weekly*.
- Shortly thereafter, he met and married the first of his four wives. They moved to Europe where Hemingway became the European correspondent for the *Toronto Daily Star*.
- Hemingway published *Three Stories and Ten Poems* in Paris in 1923. In 1925, he published *In Our Time*, a collection of short stories.
- In 1924, Hemingway's first son, John, was born.
- Hemingway became interested in bullfighting after the Pamplona fiesta of 1925. The rituals and almost religious practices of bullfighting fascinated him. Although Hemingway showed some aptitude in the sport, he decided his true profession was writing.
- *In Our Time* was re-published in New York and included fourteen new stories. He also published *The Torrents of Spring*.

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Questions for Discussion or Essay

1. Examine the character of Manolin. Categorize him as a static or dynamic character, and support your position with details from the text.
2. If *The Old Man and the Sea* is read as a tragedy, what is Santiago's fatal flaw? Cite portions of the text to explain how Santiago compares to the idea of a tragic hero. Compare him with the traditional, literary tragic hero.
3. This tale is about external and internal conflicts. What is the main conflict of this novella, and how is it resolved? Is the solution believable? What is the secondary conflict of this novella? How is it resolved?
4. Choose one of the major themes of the novella and trace its development.
5. Examine the setting. How does the setting set a believable stage for a tale such as this?
6. Interpret the significance of the marlin and the shovel-nosed sharks. How is it that the reader believes one to be a worthy opponent while the other has little worth?

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1. Interpret the simile describing Santiago's scars: "They were as old as erosions in a fishless desert."

2. How many days has Santiago gone without catching a fish?

3. What is significant about *when* the boy's parents made him fish on a different boat?

4. What is significant about the number of fish Manolin's new master caught the first week Manolin fished with him?

5. What other occurrence of the number three presents itself in the opening pages of the novella?

6. List some Judeo-Christian associations with the number three.

21. How does the role of luck in an individual's success or failure lead to another of Hemingway's themes: People should depend on themselves, not outside forces.

22. Explain the ways in which Hemingway equates Santiago and the marlin.

23. What does the simile that Santiago's "left hand was still as tight as the gripped claw of an eagle" emphasize about his character?

24. How does Hemingway convey Santiago's religious ideals and how they reflect society of the novella?

25. Who is Joe DiMaggio? Why does Hemingway refer to Joe DiMaggio throughout the book?

26. How does the story about the contest in the Casablanca bar add to the credibility of the main plot?

27. What is the significance of the anthropomorphism "...that he [the fish] is up against something that he does not comprehend is everything"?

42. Might this story be considered a parable?

43. Hemingway describes both the marlin and the shark. How do the descriptions differ? How does one suggest a worthy opponent while the other suggests an unworthy opponent?
