

Reflections:

*A Student Response Journal for...*

# *The Old Man and the Sea*

*by Ernest Hemingway*

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*The Old Man and The Sea*

**Pages 9 – 24** (until Santiago goes to sleep)

1. The narrator tells us that the old man was considered “the worst form of unlucky.” The sail of his skiff was patched with flour sacks and looked like “the flag of permanent defeat.” The man is gaunt, and his hands have deep scars. In spite of this, we are told, “Everything about him was old except his eyes and they were the same color as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated.” Describe a person you know is unlucky but refuses to give up. How does this person affect you?
2. The old man tells the boy that he is “a strange old man.” Do you agree?
3. In your opinion, should the boy help the old man to the extent he does? Who in your life do you help? What about this person makes you want to help him or her?
4. The boy believes that the old man is the best fisherman. When the old man tells him there are better fishermen, the boy says, “There are many good fishermen and some great ones. But there is only you.” How do you think the boy would explain his devotion to the old man?

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**Pages 25 – 43** (until the fish actually takes  
the bait)

8. What is your feeling toward the boy? What would you like to tell the boy's father about the boy?
9. The old man dreams of "lions on the beach." What are some dreams you have?
10. Re-read the discussion of the sea as masculine or feminine. If you were a fisherman, how would you think of the sea?
11. Hemingway gives the reader a detailed explanation of the careful and exact way the old man baits and drops his fishing lines. Then, we are told the old man's philosophy about keeping his lines. He thinks to himself, "Everyday is a new day. It is better to be lucky. But I would rather be exact. Then when luck comes you are ready." What is your philosophy about luck; do you depend on luck, or are you careful about details all of the time so that you are ready for every opportunity? Do you think the events of life can be explained completely by luck, or do you think that humans can influence some of life by being ready for luck?

Tell a story from your own experience, something that you have observed or experienced directly, that illustrates your viewpoint.

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*Response Journal*

**Pages 44 – 61** (until Santiago notices the clouds)

18. After the man has definitely hooked his great fish, what image or mental picture do you have in your mind of the old man?
19. The narrator tells us that, as the man and his skiff are being towed out to sea by the huge fish, the man rested “and tried not to think but only to endure.” Tell about a difficult time in your life, when you tried to endure it by not thinking about your situation, but by just resting.
20. Imagine that you are in the old man’s situation of being towed out farther and farther from land by a great fish you plan to bring back eventually. What would you do?
21. What is your opinion of this old man, who is allowing himself to be in this position? How would the situation be different in the modern world?
22. The old man remembers a time he caught a female marlin and her mate stayed with her until the end. How did this story make you feel? What image do you have of this scene, including the colors?

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*Response Journal*

**Pages 62 – 82** (until the marlin jumps)

26. What image do you have of the marlin? If possible, draw a picture of the fish, according to the description in the text.
27. When considering the greatness of the fish, the man thinks, “But, thank God, they are not as intelligent as we who kill them; although they are more noble and more able.” What is your viewpoint about the fish being more noble than humans?
28. Can you think of any animal that might be “more noble and able” than people are? Explain your reasons.
29. Search your memory for a time you were in a struggle with something much stronger and greater than yourself. Tell the story. Be certain to include the outcome.
30. During his struggle, the old man “commenced to say his prayers mechanically.” He even offers God a deal; he promises to pray and to make a pilgrimage if he can catch this fish. What would you like to say to this old man about prayer, God, deals, and promises?

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**Pages 83 – 94** (Santiago harpoons the marlin)

38. As America enters the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it seems that our society is more determined than ever to control human pain. We have pain management clinics and many medications to eliminate pain. Many Americans are interested by the idea of painless death and mercy killing to avoid pain. In contrast, Hemingway writes, “And pain does not matter to a man.”

“I must hold his [the fish’s] pain where it is, he thought. Mine does not matter. I can control mine. But his pain could drive him mad.”

“Keep you head clear and know how to suffer like a man. Or a fish, he thought.”

Consider the ways in which the old man is enduring his pain. Do you agree with Hemingway’s view of pain? Write an editorial for a newspaper on pain. State a position on the human capacity to endure pain, the appropriate attitude toward pain, or the ways to cope with pain.

39. Hemingway seems to be suggesting that a person achieves dignity by being able to control himself and stay calm in the midst of pain. “You are killing me, fish, the old man thought. But you have a right to. Never have I seen a greater, or more beautiful, or a calmer or more noble thing than you, brother....”

What is your reaction to Hemingway’s concept of dignity? How is the old man a brother to the fish?

Write the story of a time you were able to stay calm and strong while under intense stress, or a time you observed someone else maintaining dignity. Next, write the story of a person losing control and dignity.