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Advanced Placement in  
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

**The Old Man and the Sea**

by Ernest Hemingway

Written by Kay Hampson

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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.

# The Old Man and the Sea

## 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*.

- Introducing the world to “the lost generation,” *The Sun Also Rises* was published in 1926.
- In 1927, Hemingway divorced his first wife and married his second. *Men Without Women* was published the same year.
- His second son, Patrick, was born in 1928. The family moved to Key West, Florida.
- In 1929, *A Farewell to Arms* was published. Hemingway’s father committed suicide.
- Gregory, Hemingway’s third and last child, was born in 1931.
- In 1932, *Death in the Afternoon* was published.
- In 1933—at the height of the Depression—Hemingway published a collection of short stories, *Winner Take Nothing*. Despite the poor economy, the book sold well.
- The Hemingways left Florida for Africa where he developed a new interest in big game hunting.
- In 1935, Hemingway published an account of his travels, *Green Hills of Africa*.
- *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* and *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber* were published in 1936.
- In 1937, after publishing *To Have and Have Not*, Hemingway became a war correspondent for the Spanish Civil War.
- *The Fifth Column* and the *First Forty-nine Stories* were published in 1938 as well as a short film about the Loyalist cause called *The Spanish Earth*.
- After a four-year affair with Martha Gellhorn, Hemingway divorced his second wife and married Martha. They moved to Cuba.
- In 1940, Hemingway published *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.
- By 1946, Hemingway had divorced his third wife and married his fourth wife.
- Another affair began with a young woman, Adriana Ivancich in 1950. In this year, he also published *Across the River and Into the Trees*.
- Hemingway published *The Old Man and the Sea* in 1952, winning the Pulitzer Prize in 1953.

- In 1954, Hemingway and his wife survived a horrific plane crash in which they sustained many injuries. They returned to Cuba, and he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.
- In 1960, Hemingway and his wife returned to the states. He published *The Dangerous Summer* and began work on his memoirs, *A Moveable Feast*.
- After a long battle with alcohol and depression, Hemingway was admitted to the Mayo Clinic and treated for depression and paranoia. He received several treatments, including electro-shock treatment. These treatments erased much of his memory.
- Hemingway was particularly frustrated at the loss of memory, as his memories served as the basis for his literary work.
- In 1961, Hemingway took his own life, dying of a self-inflicted shotgun wound on the morning of July 2<sup>nd</sup>.

### The Lost Generation:

**The Lost Generation** is a phrase coined by American writer Gertrude Stein to refer to expatriate Americans who were bitter about World War I and disillusioned with American society. The lost generation resided primarily in Paris during the 1920s and 1930s. Hemingway, a major author during the two world wars, was known as a “writer of the lost generation.” Other prominent writers of this period were F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Steinbeck, and E. E. Cummings. This era was characterized by replacing romantic clichés with extreme realism and complex symbolism. Marxian social theory and other influences of new psychology became more evident in the writings. At times, the authors’ strong language and depictions of relatively graphic violence and sex created controversies regarding censorship and a writer’s First Amendment rights.

Hemingway incorporated realism and complex symbolism into *The Old Man and the Sea*. As a realist, he sought to reflect the ordinary lives of real people, much like a reporter would. In his desire for authenticity, he wrote about subjects he was familiar with. For example, *The Old Man and the Sea* is set in Cuba, where Hemingway spent two decades of his life, and contains detailed descriptions of the process of fishing, a sport he loved and practiced from his childhood. The complex symbolism is woven quite simply into his use of similes and his choice of characters. One simile states, “They [Santiago’s scars] were as old as erosions in a fishless desert.” Not only does this simile help the reader to picture the scars, but its meaning ties into the idea of the sea—a fishless sea for Santiago for months; in fact, so fishless that it may as well have been a desert. Hemingway was a realist quite capable of having his tale tell itself. He placed little emphasis on plot and much emphasis on psychological analysis.

### Hemingway's Style:

Hemingway's Style—described as *sparse*, *spare*, *austere*, or *pristine*—evoked a good deal of comment and controversy throughout his career. Marked by its simple, direct, and unadorned prose, the style was probably the result of his early training as a journalist.

When Hemingway was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature in 1954, his writing style was cited as one of his greatest achievements. The committee recognized his “forceful and style-making mastery of the art of modern narration.”

Hemingway's austere, clean, and forceful style, however, was by no means spontaneous. While his years as a journalist had taught him to report facts crisply and succinctly, he was also an obsessive revisionist. Legend has it that he rewrote portions of *The Old Man and the Sea* more than two hundred times before he was ready to release it for publication.

Here are some observations Hemingway made about his own style and the styles of some of his contemporaries:

“Prose is architecture, not interior decoration, and the Baroque is over.”

– *Death in the Afternoon*, 1932

“It wasn't by accident that the Gettysburg address was so short. The laws of prose writing are as immutable as those of flight, of mathematics, of physics.”

– *Selected Letters*

“Actually if a writer needs a dictionary he should not write. He should have read the dictionary at least three times from beginning to end and then have loaned it to someone who needs it. There are only certain words which are valid and similes (bring me my dictionary) are like defective ammunition (the lowest thing I can think of at this time).”

– *Selected Letters*

Poor Faulkner. Does he really think big emotions come from big words? He thinks I don't know the ten-dollar words. I know them all right. But there are older and simpler and better words, and those are the ones I use.

[F] Scott [Fitzgerald] took LITERATURE so solemnly. He never understood that it was just writing as well as you can and finishing what you start.

- All my life I've looked at words as though I were seeing them for the first time.
- There is nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and bleed.

- The first draft of anything is [expletive].
- We are all apprentices in a craft where no one ever becomes a master.
- My aim is to put down on paper what I see and what I feel in the best and simplest way.

### Joe DiMaggio:

Baseball has been an enormously popular game in Cuba since the 1860s, so popular, in fact, that, in the waning days of the Spanish Empire, the game was banned because attendance at bullfights was declining. After the Spanish-American War, Cuban baseball thrived almost as strongly as the game in the United States.

Given the game's popularity, it is no wonder that Santiago spends much of his time thinking about how the ball players have done. Likewise, given the time period of the novella, there is no more appropriate icon to represent both the popular sport and the Hemingway-esque hero than **Joe DiMaggio**—who, though not a fisherman himself—was the scion of several generations of fishermen in both Italy and the United States.

Joe DiMaggio was born on November 25, 1914, in Martinez, California. He was the eighth of nine children, and his father was a fisherman, as generations of DiMaggios had been before him. Giuseppe DiMaggio hoped all five of his sons would follow in his footsteps, but Joe had no desire to fish. When he was sixteen years old, he dropped out of high school, working for a time at a bottling plant and later at the San Francisco docks. In 1932, Joe's brother Vince made the roster of a minor league baseball team and, when a vacancy occurred at shortstop, the coach contacted Joe to play with them. DiMaggio proved to be a real slugger during his first full season with the San Francisco Seals, and by the end of his second season, he was sold to the New York Yankees under the condition that he be allowed to play the next year, 1935, with San Francisco. He led the Yankees to the World Series where they defeated the New York Giants. In February of 1943, DiMaggio enlisted in the U. S. Army and served until September of 1945. In 1949, he signed a \$100,000-a-year contract with the Yankees. They again beat the Giants in the World Series in October of 1951. That December, at age 37, DiMaggio announced his retirement. He was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1955.

DiMaggio's obituary in *USA Today* (March 1999) read: "Joe DiMaggio was the greatest living ballplayer. It said so in his appearance contracts. It was how he was to be introduced... DiMaggio was a symbol of our century, a son of immigrants who became a national emblem of elegance."

*The Sporting News* described him in this way: "Say the god's name [referring to DiMaggio] aloud and you know, if you know anything, the truth of what the rascalion/second baseman Billy Martin said of DiMaggio: 'When he walked into the clubhouse, it was like some senator or president walking in there.' Only, in DiMaggio's case, presidents invited *him* to dinner. Time

magazine put him on the cover. He married Marilyn Monroe...”

In his book, *Summer of '49*, Pulitzer-Prize-winning David Halberstam called DiMaggio “the perfect Hemingway hero, for Hemingway in his novels romanticized the man who exhibited grace under pressure, who withheld any emotion lest it soil the purer statement of his deeds.”

Although DiMaggio began his astounding career before World War II, he reached the peak of his celebrity in what is now called “The Golden Age of Baseball,” the period between 1946 when players returned from the War and 1957, when the Brooklyn Dodgers moved to Los Angeles, and Manhattan lost the New York Giants to San Francisco.

Given the man’s almost-mythic status, his role as an icon for a game beloved by men like Santiago, repeated references to Joe DiMaggio in the book connect the common man with the Great, the struggle for survival with the Conquest. They bring home the theme that pride and determination are indeed the sources of greatness.

Two notable facts about DiMaggio bear potential significance to *The Old Man and the Sea*. In the spring and summer of 1950, DiMaggio experienced a batting slump and was benched for the first time in his career for a reason that was not related to an injury. On September 10, he rebounded and hit three home runs in a single game. This is possibly what Santiago is referring to when he insists in his conversation with Manolin that, “The great DiMaggio is himself again.”

DiMaggio suffered throughout his life from painful bone spurs. One of the worst outbreaks of the condition occurred during 1948 and 1949. Despite the pain, he played through the 1948 season, but in 1949, he was unable to stand due to the pain, and he missed sixty-five games. On June 28, he rebounded and returned to hit four home runs in a three-game series. Santiago thinks about the pain over which DiMaggio triumphed when he himself struggles with his crippled and painful hand.

Both incidents in DiMaggio’s career emphasize Santiago’s inner strength and optimism. If DiMaggio could work through and triumph over his pain, so too could Santiago. If DiMaggio could come back from being benched for poor play, so too could Santiago redeem himself after eighty-four days without a fish.

### Cuba:

**Cuba** is a large island that lies approximately ninety miles south of Key West, Florida, near the mouth of the Gulf of Mexico. Cuba became an independent republic in 1899 under the protection of the United States of America. In 1900, Cuba drafted a constitution fashioned after the Constitution of the United States, but leaving no allowance for further U.S. involvement in its affairs. The U.S. balked; the government drafted the Platt Amendment stating that the Cuban government could not enter into any foreign agreements and must allow the U.S. to establish two naval bases on the island. The amendment further gave the U. S. the right to intervene in

Cuban affairs whenever necessary. The Platt Amendment was terminated by Cuba in 1934.

Cuba's capital and largest city, **Havana**, once boasted two casinos and a large racetrack that drew rich American visitors to the island. During the Depression, however, crooked bookies and fixed races caused a decline in the tourism trade. A notable American mobster, Meyer Lansky was called on in 1938 to help legitimize the casinos. It was not long before Havana became known as "Latin Las Vegas" with an increase in tourism and nightlife. For those involved with the casinos, living was easy. For the rest of the island, life remained a financial struggle.

The Great Depression, however, severely affected Americans' ability to travel and spend lavishly. The deprivations of World War II further weakened the poor nation's economy so that, by the time Hemingway was living on the island and writing *The Old Man and the Sea*, political and social unrest began to foment, eventually resulting in the 1959 Cuban revolution that expelled all United States interests, ended American tourism and trade, and put Fidel Castro in power.

### Notes on the Tragic Hero:

The **tragic hero**, according to Aristotle, was a man (god, demi-god, hero, high-ranking official) who rises to a high position and then falls from that high position—usually to utter desolation and/or death. Two forces seem equally powerful in classical tragedy: the tragic hero's tragic flaw (or hamartia) and fate.

Some tragic heroes clearly bring about their own downfall, as in the case of Creon in *Antigone*, whose downfall is due to his hubris (excessive pride)—he believes his Law holds precedence over the gods' sense of Right. Other tragic heroes seem to be more a pawn of Fate, like Oedipus who has done everything in his power (as had his parents before him) to prevent the fatal prophesy from coming to pass that Oedipus would murder his father and marry his mother. It is in the very act of trying to avoid destiny that the prophesy is fulfilled.

By the Renaissance, however, people generally felt themselves to be less pawns of fate and more in control of their own destinies. The Elizabethan tragic hero, therefore, is much more often responsible for his own downfall. This "waste of human potential" as it were, seems to be much more tragic to the Elizabethans than the vagaries of fate. Thus, in Shakespeare's tragedies, we have a Macbeth who is, by nature, a man of action and chooses a course of action that results in his being plagued by guilt, his wife's insanity and suicide, and eventually, his own death. We have a Hamlet, a man of ideas, who is called to action and, finding himself unable to act, watches while his entire society collapses around him, and he himself is killed.

By the middle of the twentieth century, however, the concept of what was at the root of the tragic situation was again being examined. In his article, "Tragedy and the Common Man," playwright Arthur Miller asserts that his character, Willie Lowman, is a tragic hero. According to Miller, the hero's tragic flaw is really nothing more than his attempt to gain, or regain, what he considers to be his rightful status in society.

Looked at in this way, Macbeth (following the prediction of the witches and Duncan's promise in Act I, Scene IV: "I have begun to plant thee and will labor to make thee full of growing...") believes it is his rightful place to be king of Scotland. When he is not named heir to Duncan's throne, he acts as he believes he must in order to become king and then he continues to act as he believes he must in order to remain king. His tragedy, then, lies in his desire to gain and maintain what he believes to be his rightful status. So, too, with Hamlet; he has been alienated from his mother's love. From his very first line in the play, Hamlet bemoans his mother's marriage to Claudius far more than he grieves for his father or for the loss of his throne. The madness, rebellion, and carnage that surround him are all the result of his desire—and inability—to find a way to reinstate himself in the affections of his mother.

In *The Old Man and the Sea*, catching the great fish is the deed that will restore Santiago to what he perceived to be his rightful position in society. The villagers will once again respect him, and the boy will be allowed to fish with him again. His downfall, he realizes too late, is the pride that made him travel out too far. The fruit of his last and greatest quest is a skeleton, which the indifferent Americans do not even recognize for the prize that it is.

### Allegory and Parable:

In literature, an **allegory** is a form of extended metaphor, in which objects, persons, and actions in a story, novel, play, or poem assume symbolic meanings that lie outside the piece itself. These symbolic meanings have moral, social, religious, or political significance. Characters are often personifications of abstract ideas. Thus an allegory is a narrative with two meanings, a literal meaning and a symbolic meaning.

Since all meaningful stories convey larger thematic ideas, it is often tempting to read allegorical significance into a story that was not intended to be read as such. A popular example is the assertion that *The Lord of the Rings* is an allegory for the World Wars, even though it was written *before* the outbreak of World War II. J. R. R. Tolkien himself, in his introduction to the second edition of the trilogy insisted, "It is neither allegorical nor topical...I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence."

Whether or not *The Old Man in the Sea* can accurately be read as an allegory is still an open question. When asked about the novella's symbolic significance, Hemingway himself responded, "There isn't any symbolism. The sea is the sea. The old man is an old man. The boy is a boy and the fish is a fish. The sharks are all sharks no better and no worse. All the symbolism that people say is [expletive]. What goes beyond is what you see beyond when you know." (1952)

It is Hemingway's closing sentence: "What goes beyond is what you see beyond *when you know*," that still invites some readers to look "beyond" for a "meaning" that they should "know" of the marlin, the sharks, the old man, etc.

A **parable** is a brief story that illustrates a moral or religious lesson. It is different from a fable in that fables use animals, plants, inanimate objects, and forces of nature as characters, while parables generally feature human characters.

The word “parable” comes the Greek term describing any narrative work of fiction. It later took on its morally instructive attributes.

A parable is one of the simplest forms of narrative, outlining a setting, describing an action, and then showing the results. It often involves a character facing a moral dilemma or making a questionable decision. The character then suffers the consequences. Like a fable, a parable usually relates a single, simple, and consistent action, without unnecessary detail or distracting sub-plots, obstacles, and reversals.

Parables are allegorical in that they are extended metaphors. Unlike fairy tales, that often involve kings and princesses and magical beings, parables are stories about ordinary men and women who find themselves involved in surprising events. The defining characteristic of the parable, however, is that the unexpressed subtext is of a moral or religious nature, usually prescribing how one should act.

H. W. Fowler, the noted English lexicographer, most famous for his *Modern English Usage* and his work on the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, wrote that, while the purpose of both the parable and the allegory is to instruct, the parable is more condensed than the allegory, introducing a single principle and arriving at a single moral.

Those who see *The Old Man and the Sea* as a Judeo-Christian allegory or parable point to the potentially significant occurrences of the numbers forty and three in the novella as evidence of that connection.

Most notably, at the beginning of the story, we are told that it was after Santiago went **forty days** without catching a fish that Manolin’s parents declared him “the worst form of unlucky,” and ordered their son to fish with someone else.

This new master caught “**three good fish**” the first week Manolin fished with him.

While discussing Santiago’s current unlucky streak, Manolin reminds him that he suffered a similar period once before. After that streak ended, Manolin claims Santiago caught big fish “every day for **three weeks.**” During this same conversation, both Santiago and Manolin insist that the boy never doubted; they likewise criticize Manolin’s father’s lack of faith.

Santiago finally bests the marlin on the **third** day of their struggle.

### The Judeo-Christian Significance of the Number Forty:

In the Genesis story of Noah's ark, it rains for **forty days and forty nights**.

According to the Book of Exodus, Chapter 24, Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Commandments from God for **forty days and forty nights**.

The Israelites wandered in the desert for **forty years** before being allowed to cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land.

Prior to the Israelites' crossing the Jordan, twelve spies explored the area for **forty days**.

In the New Testament Gospels, Jesus spent a period of **forty days and forty nights** fasting in the desert prior to beginning his ministry.

*Also according to the Gospels, the resurrected Jesus appeared on earth for **forty days** before ascending into heaven.*

### The Judeo-Christian Significance of the Number Three:

Noah had **three** sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

King Solomon states in the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes (Chapter 4: verse 12: "A **three**-ply cord is not easily severed."

The Israelite nation was founded by **three** Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The Hebrew Bible (the *Tanakh*) is composed of **three** sections: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.

The Christian concept of God is described as a Holy Trinity: God is both a single being and **three** persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' earthly ministry lasted for **three** years.

Jesus' resurrection occurred on the **third** day after his crucifixion.

In the Gospel accounts of the Passion, the apostle Peter **three** times denied being a follower of Jesus.

According to the account of the Nativity in the Gospel of Matthew, the Magi who visited Jesus after his birth brought **three** gifts.

During Jesus' forty-day fast in the desert, Satan offered him **three** specific temptations: turn stones into bread to end his hunger; jump from a high pinnacle to prove that God will save him from harm; and use his power as Son of God to claim dominion over the entire earth.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul established the **three** "theological virtues": faith, hope, and love.

# The Old Man and the Sea

## 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?

# The Old Man and the Sea

## Practice Free Response Questions

### Practice Free Response Question #1

Read the paragraph beginning with, “They sat on the Terrace and many of the fishermen made fun of the old man...” and ending with, “...their flesh cut into strips for salting.” This passage occurs near the beginning, after the boy and the old man arrive at the Terrace.

Then, write a well-organized essay in which you evaluate how Hemingway’s style, especially his use of polysyndeton and his lack of internal punctuation, contributes to the overall mood of the passage.

### Practice Free Response Question #2

Read the passage beginning with, “As the sun set he remembered...” and ending with “...But his left hand had always been a traitor and would not do what he called on it to do and he did not trust it.” This passage occurs the second day at sea.

In a well-organized essay, explain how Hemingway’s sharing this glimpse into the past is an important element in the development of Santiago’s character.

### Practice Free Response Question #3

Setting is an important means for the novelist to communicate characters’ ideals and attitudes. In a well-organized essay, explain how the setting of Ernest Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea* contributes to a reader’s understanding of the main characters.

### Practice Free Response Question #4

While some critics insist on a strict adherence to the Aristotelian model of tragedy, much contemporary literature expands the understanding of the tragic hero to include common persons. In a well-organized essay, defend or refute the thesis that Santiago can be interpreted as a twentieth-century tragic hero.

### Practice Free Response Question #5

“I always try to write on the principal of the iceberg. There is seven-eighths of it under water for every part that shows. Anything you know you can eliminate and it only strengthens your iceberg. It is the part that doesn’t show.”

– Ernest Hemingway, 1958

Write a well-organized essay in which you interpret the above quotation and analyze how Hemingway may have applied this technique in writing *The Old Man and the Sea*.

Do not merely summarize the plot.

### Practice Free Response Question #6

Style is determined by many contributing factors including word choice, sentence structure, point-of-view. In a well-supported essay, analyze Hemingway’s style, and explain how it controls the mood and tone, and produces the desired effect on the reader.

### Practice Free Response Question #7

Many readers and critics continue to consider this novella to be allegorical. Write a well-supported argument in which you support or refute that interpretation of the book.

# The Old Man and the Sea

## Practice Multiple-Choice Questions

### Practice Multiple-Choice Questions 1-5

Carefully read the passage beginning with, “He was an old man who fished alone in a skiff in the Gulf Stream...” and ending with, “Between Fishermen.” This is the opening passage of the novella. Then, answer the following multiple-choice questions.

1. “The brown blotches of the benevolent skin cancer the sun brings” is an example of a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ and is used for \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. allusion...unity.
  - B. assonance...rhythmic effect.
  - C. alliteration...irony.
  - D. aphorism...establishing truth.
  - E. analogy...comparison.
2. The reason that the old man fished alone was because
  - A. the boy’s parents had moved him to another boat.
  - B. the skiff was too small for both men.
  - C. the boy was concerned about being unlucky.
  - D. the tavern owner needed the boy to operate his boat.
  - E. the old man was concerned about being unlucky.
3. Hemingway’s description of the old man gives the reader the sense that he is
  - A. a man of integrity.
  - B. permanently defeated.
  - C. disgruntled and bitter.
  - D. a man who cannot be trusted.
  - E. a man of great courage.
4. From the passage one can infer that the old man and the boy
  - A. live together.
  - B. are estranged.
  - C. are rivals.
  - D. depend on one another.
  - E. resent the hardness of their lives.

5. The simile, “[Santiago’s scars] were as old as erosions in a fishless desert,” not only provides a visual image but also suggests the
- A. dry spell in Santiago’s livelihood.
  - B. completion of the boy’s apprenticeship.
  - C. difference between the ocean and the desert.
  - D. poverty of the village.
  - E. ruin of the old man’s reputation.

**Practice Multiple-Choice Questions 6-11**

Carefully read the passage beginning with, “Sometimes someone would speak in a boat.” and ending with, “Then when luck comes you are ready.” This passage occurs as the old man is just pushing his boat out to sea. Then, answer the following multiple-choice questions:

6. The fact that the old man always thought of the sea as *la mar* suggests that
  - A. he loved her even when she was “cruel.”
  - B. he believed a woman to be a fiercer competitor than a man.
  - C. he anthropomorphized the sea as a female.
  - D. he accepted and appreciated her changeable nature.
  - E. he loved her more than the young men.
  
7. The attention the old man paid to his lines demonstrates that he is \_\_\_\_\_ and not waiting \_\_\_\_\_
  - A. precise...for luck.
  - B. self-sufficient...for help.
  - C. dexterous...for assistance.
  - D. impatient...for sunset.
  - E. morganatic...for gifts.
  
8. The passage clearly suggests that Santiago believes
  - A. capturing a fish is the highest form of reward.
  - B. being exact is better than being lucky.
  - C. preparing for the fish is all that is needed.
  - D. being lucky requires little preparation.
  - E. preparedness coupled with luck is best.
  
9. The sentence, “Each bait hung head down with the shank of the hook inside of the bait fish tied and sewed solid and all the projecting part of the hook, the curve and the point, was covered with fresh sardines.” contains an example of
  - A. onomatopoeia.
  - B. litotes.
  - C. asyndeton.
  - D. alliteration.
  - E. verisimilitude.
  
10. In the course of this passage, Hemingway involves the reader by using all of the senses EXCEPT
  - A. sight.
  - B. taste.
  - C. smell.
  - D. touch.
  - E. sound.

11. In the opening of this passage, what is Hemingway attempting to emphasize?
- A. utter silence
  - B. Manolin's absence
  - C. potential danger
  - D. Santiago's aloneness
  - E. stifling darkness

### Practice Multiple-Choice Questions 12-16

Carefully read the passage beginning with, “Some time before daylight something took one of the baits that were behind him.” and ending with, “Let us hope so, he thought.” (This passage is a little less than halfway into the book.) Then answer the following multiple-choice questions:

12. Why does Santiago utter the wish that he had the boy?
  - A. The loneliness was overcoming Santiago.
  - B. Santiago had never fished alone before.
  - C. Santiago needed help.
  - D. The boy could help cut the line.
  - E. Santiago feared for his life.
  
13. In the sentence, “I will have lost two hundred fathoms of good Catalan *cardel*...,” *cardel* probably means
  - A. fish.
  - B. hooks.
  - C. leaders.
  - D. rope.
  - E. bait.
  
14. Santiago’s declaration to the fish: “I’ll stay with you until I am dead.” is evidence that Santiago is
  - A. fatalistic and defeated.
  - B. unconquerable.
  - C. exhausted to the point of collapse.
  - D. proud and unyielding.
  - E. vulnerable.
  
15. The one good thing that came with the morning sun was the realization that the fish was
  - A. heading east.
  - B. swimming nearer the surface.
  - C. swimming toward the south.
  - D. finally tiring.
  - E. preparing to jump.
  
16. All of the following are suggested by the final line of the passage (“Let us hope so, he thought.”) EXCEPT:
  - A. Santiago cannot spend another day at sea.
  - B. Santiago fears the fish may best him.
  - C. The fish is tiring.
  - D. The fish is a worthy opponent.
  - E. Santiago is still optimistic.

**Practice Multiple-Choice Questions 17-20**

Carefully read the passage beginning with, “This is the second day now that I do not know the result of the *juegos*, he thought.” and ending seven paragraphs later with, “But his left hand had always been a traitor and...he did not trust it.” Then answer the following multiple-choice questions:

17. Santiago’s references to “the great DiMaggio” suggest that Santiago
  - A. feels inferior.
  - B. feels superior.
  - C. empathizes with his hero.
  - D. is fascinated with baseball.
  - E. reveres DiMaggio.
  
18. Santiago was known as *The Champion* because he
  - A. won an arm wrestling match.
  - B. had been a great athlete.
  - C. never succumbed to hardship.
  - D. had caught a huge fish.
  - E. was himself a baseball player.
  
19. “Blood came out from under the fingernails of both his and the negro’s hands and they looked each other in the eye and at their hands and forearms and the bettors went in and out of the room and sat on high chairs against the wall and watched.” is an example of \_\_\_\_\_ and is used to \_\_\_\_\_
  - A. verisimilitude...disquiet the reader.
  - B. alliteration...lull the reader.
  - C. parody...to make an exaggeration.
  - D. polysyndeton...intensify the pace.
  - E. metaphor...compare the men.
  
20. Why is the memory of the “hand game” in the *Casablanca* critical to the narrative at this point?
  - A. It prepares the reader for Santiago’s ultimate failure.
  - B. It establishes credibility for Santiago’s strength.
  - C. It gives Santiago confidence.
  - D. It gives the reader a glimpse into the past.
  - E. It passes the time while Santiago struggles with the fish.

**Practice Multiple-Choice Questions 21-25**

Carefully read the passage beginning with, “They sailed well and the old man soaked his hands in the salt water and tried to keep his head clear.” and ending six paragraphs later with, “He hit it without hope but with resolution and complete malignancy.” Then, answer the following multiple-choice questions:

21. In the sentence, “He hit it without hope but with resolution and complete malignancy.” the best definition of the word “malignancy” is
  - A. cancer.
  - B. hopelessness.
  - C. kindness.
  - D. harmful intent.
  - E. rebellious response.
  
22. The shark’s threatening Santiago’s catch shocks the reader. How does Hemingway produce this effect?
  - A. He foreshadowed the arrival of the first shark.
  - B. The alliterative effect of “Santiago” and “shark” create tension.
  - C. The first mention of the shark is buried in an unrelated paragraph.
  - D. The sentence structure changes after the first mention of the shark.
  - E. He allows the first shark to be the mightiest.
  
23. What notion does Hemingway suggest by comparing the shark’s teeth to human fingers?
  - A. a realistic visual image
  - B. a reference to Santiago’s injured hand
  - C. the equal nobility of man and fish
  - D. the identification of man as a weaker predator
  - E. the natural food chain
  
24. Which of the following traits has been characteristic of Santiago until the arrival of the shark?
  - A. optimism
  - B. determination
  - C. physical strength
  - D. sympathy for nature
  - E. skill in his craft
  
25. The two ideas Hemingway most wants to associate with the shark are
  - A. cruelty and stupidity.
  - B. beauty and craftiness.
  - C. fear and agility.
  - D. size and power.
  - E. speed and sharpness.

**Practice Multiple-Choice Questions 26-30**

Read the passage near the end of the book beginning with, “When he sailed into the little harbour the lights of the Terrace were out and he knew everyone was in bed.” and ending with, “But we will fish together now for I still have much to learn.” Then, answer the following multiple-choice questions:

26. The carrying of the mast and Santiago’s sleeping position are examples of
- A. allusion.
  - B. personification.
  - C. conduplicatio.
  - D. zeugma.
  - E. epistrophe.
27. This passage establishes Manolin as a(n)
- A. static character.
  - B. flat character.
  - C. animated character.
  - D. round character.
  - E. dynamic character.
28. Manolin’s boat’s not sailing the day of Santiago’s return illustrates
- A. the role of luck in everyone’s success.
  - B. his devotion to the old man.
  - C. the village’s compassion for the old man.
  - D. his reliance on the old man.
  - E. the arrogance of successful fishermen.
29. Manolin cries when the proprietor mentions his two fish because
- A. he believes he is now a greater fisherman than Santiago.
  - B. his success intensifies Santiago’s failure.
  - C. the proprietor is mocking him.
  - D. he’d hoped for Santiago to see the fish.
  - E. he cannot express his pride in any other way.
30. “He sailed up onto the little patch of shingle below the rocks.” In this sentence “shingle” probably means:
- A. a small piece of roof.
  - B. a series of overlapping rows.
  - C. a small, pebbly beach.
  - D. a small beach of coarse, black sand.
  - E. a small signboard.

# The Old Man and the Sea

## Multiple-Choice Answers with Explanations

1. (A) is eliminated, as there are no apparent allusions in the passage. Assonance (B), the repetition of a vowel sound, has little to do with “rhythmic effect” and does not occur in the sentence quoted. Aphorism (D) is a terse statement of truth and can therefore be ruled out. This excerpt does not compare two things and therefore rules out answer (E). Alliteration (C) is the repetition of the beginning sounds and is most evident in the phrase, “brown blotches of the benevolent.” The effect is ironic as it is skin cancer that is being called “benevolent” and is de-emphasized in the musical lilt of the sentence.
2. This is a very low-level comprehension question. The boy’s parents had moved the boy to another boat (A). Although the skiff was a small boat (B), they had previously traveled in it together. The boy was not the one concerned about being unlucky (C); that was his parents’ problem. The tavern owner had nothing to do with the boats and can be ruled out completely (D). Although the old man may have been concerned about being unlucky (E), his concern was not why he fished alone. (A) is the correct answer.
3. (B) is tempting if students focus on the description of the furled sail looking like a “flag of permanent defeat,” but the fact that Santiago’s eyes are later described as “cheerful and undefeated” eliminates this choice. The old man is tired, but his apparent understanding of the boy and the boy’s motives for leaving his boat do not support an interpretation of disgruntlement or bitterness (C). There is no indication about him being someone who could not be trusted (D). (E) is likewise tempting, as the description is clearly more positive than negative, but, while the passage does suggest optimism and does not rule out courage, it does not specifically suggest courage. The man, however, is very kind to the boy, insists he understands the boy’s reason for having to fish on another boat, encourages the boy to obey his parents, and allows the boy to be his equal and buy him a beer. Clearly, (A) is the best answer.
4. The old man and the boy are close and indeed seem to spend a great deal of time together, but it is clear that the boy lives with his parents whom he is bound to obey. Thus, (A) is eliminated. (B) is not supported at all. The boy can no longer fish with the old man, but he still loves the old man, and the old man is not bitter. (C) is likewise eliminated. Nothing in the matter-of-fact way they talk about the details of their lives suggests (E). The boy, however, clearly takes care of the man and watches out for him, while the man clearly supports the boy in difficult decisions that are nonetheless in the boy’s best interest. Thus, (D) is the best answer.

5. (B) is eliminated by the fact that the boy is apprenticed now to another fisherman; he is not yet independent. (C) is superficially tempting, but there is no reason to introduce the topic of the desert into this narrative. (D) is also superficially tempting, but the simile and image apply to Santiago personally, not the village collectively. (E) is tempting, as the passage does suggest that the old man is not the subject of pity and scorn, but this simile is more focused on the dryness of the desert and the lack of fish. **(A), however, explains the visual and thematic connection of the lifeless desert and the sea—for the past eighty-four days—, and the old man’s dry and rugged appearance.**
6. (A) is tempting, but misleading because Santiago does not admit to believing the sea is “cruel.” (B) would be based on a misread of the reason the younger fishermen use the masculine to refer to the sea. (C) is too broadly obvious and merely repeats the stem. (E) is also probably true, but is not the best answer. **Only (D) is fully supported by the context in which Santiago does not blame the “feminine” sea for behaving in the often mysterious and erratic ways of a (stereotypical) female. Thus, (D) is the correct answer.**
7. (B) might be tempting if the student tries to infer beyond what is explicit in this passage, but in this passage, the old man is alone, and no help is expected or wanted. (C) is superficially tempting, but being dexterous and having assistance are not mutually exclusive as the sentence in the stem implies. (D) is simply not supported by the passage. (E) is easily eliminated if the student knows that morganatic refers to a marriage between different social and economic classes. **(A), however, is clearly the best answer, especially in the context of the passage in which Santiago himself says that to be prepared is more essential than to be lucky.**
8. (A) is the only answer that does not deal with Santiago’s beliefs as addressed in this passage. The other four answers are concerned with measures of luck and preparedness. (B) is eliminated due to the fact that Santiago says it is *better* to be lucky. (D) might be true, but does not exemplify Santiago’s belief. While Santiago knows that preparation is important (C), **he also recognizes that along with preparedness, one also needs a little luck. Thus, (E) is the best answer.**
9. The student should be able to rule out (A), as there are no “sound” words. It is not a positive suggested by a double negative (B). Each item in the list is connected to the next by the appropriate conjunction, thus eliminating (C). There is no repetition of beginning sounds (D). **The details of the shape of the hook, baiting and setting it, etc. are absolutely realistic and create a sense of verisimilitude. Thus, (E) is the correct answer.**
10. The passage starts out with Santiago’s seeing the phosphorescence of the Gulf weed (A), smelling the land receding (C), hearing the dip of the oars (E), and “feeling” the morning coming (D). **Only taste (B) is not mentioned.**

11. All of the answers are somewhat true. It is mostly silent (A), but there is the occasional voice and the sound of the oars in the water. Manolin is absent (B), but he is not a specific concern suggested by this passage. (C) is tempting, but is only vaguely suggested. (E) is eliminated by the fact that Santiago is aware of the coming of dawn, so the darkness is not stifling. **Santiago, however, is alone (D), and every detail in this passage points to that aloneness.**
12. (A) is probably a part of his spoken desire, but as it is the loss of one of his baits and line that incites the utterance, loneliness cannot be the only—or even the primary—cause. (B) is not at all suggested by the passage. In fact, all of the evidence in the passage suggests that Santiago is a skilled and experienced fisherman. (D) is certainly tempting, but is too limited and not, therefore, the best answer. Nothing in the passage suggests (E). (C), **however, is the most likely reason. Santiago mentally lists everything he must do to protect this great catch, acknowledges the challenge of having to work in darkness (and the inability to wait until daylight), and he wishes he had the boy. (C) is clearly the best answer.**
13. (B) and (C) are clearly eliminated by the fact that Santiago lists them along with the *cardel* that he has lost. (A) is eliminated by the fact that it was cutting an unwanted fish loose that caused the loss of the *cardel*, and Santiago’s goal is clearly to save the great fish he has caught. (E) is eliminated by the fact that Santiago’s loss has more to do with the “line” the unwanted fish has taken. **Thus, (D) is the best answer.** Santiago has lost a great deal of good rope.
14. The point of the passage is that Santiago does not believe he will be defeated. His declaration is a cry of challenge, not of defeat (A). (C) is probably true of the old man, but is not reflected in the challenge he issues to the fish. (D) is also true, but is too broad and general to be the best choice. (E) is likewise true of Santiago, but is not what he is declaring to the fish. **Clearly, Santiago is declaring that the fish will not defeat him. Therefore, (B) is the best choice.**
15. Santiago notices that, while the current has drawn them eastward, the fish is swimming northward, thus eliminating (A) and (C). Santiago also muses that *if* the fish were to swim with the current, *that* would indicate that the fish was tiring (D). The new depth of the fish suggests that he *might* be preparing to jump (E), but this is not a certainty. **Only (B) is certain: “There was one favorable sign. The slant of the line showed that he was swimming at a lesser depth.”**
16. The silent “hope” is expressed immediately after Santiago’s determined statement that he will kill the fish before the end of the day. The “hope” can refer to either actually killing the fish, thus eliminating (B), (D), and (E), or how long it will take to kill the fish (A). **Only (C) is not suggested.**

17. (A) is tempting, since Santiago admits that DiMaggio would probably stay with the fish even longer because he is younger and that he—Santiago—has never suffered bone spurs, but the old man’s obvious hero worship goes beyond merely feeling inferior. (B) is simply not suggested by the passage. (C) is likewise tempting, but Santiago does admit that he, not knowing what a bone spur is, cannot know DiMaggio’s pain. (D) is certainly true, but Santiago’s reverence for DiMaggio goes far beyond a mere interest in baseball. (E) is the best answer. Santiago’s first mention of DiMaggio is his desire to “be worthy.” He claims that DiMaggio “does all things perfectly,” almost as if he were speaking of his deity.
18. (C) and (D) are both true statements but not the reason for Santiago’s title. (B) might tempt some students, but all we know of Santiago’s “athleticism” is this one arm-wrestling victory. Nothing in the passage suggests (E). Santiago was named *The Champion* because (A) he won the match at the Casablanca against the negro, who was “the strongest man on the docks.”
19. Despite the mention of blood, this scene is not graphic enough to elicit too strong a reaction from the reader, so (A) is eliminated. There is no alliteration (B), and the scene is a sincere description of Santiago’s earlier triumph, not a parody (C). The comparison between the competitors is direct, not metaphoric (E). The correct answer is polysyndeton, the use of conjunctions between every item in a list to intensify the rate at which the reader reads it. Thus, (D) is the correct answer.
20. (A) is eliminated in that the reader does not yet know whether Santiago will fail, and the memory of this past triumph is more likely to foreshadow Santiago’s success with the fish. (C) is true, but this would be a matter of character development, not plot. (D) is also true, but the exposition still has more to do with character development than plot. (E) is tantamount to saying there is no significance; the passage is merely filler. (B), however, validates that Santiago can actually perform the feats he has already performed, and foreshadows that he might actually succeed. (B) is the best answer.
21. (A) is one of the primary denotations for the word, but clearly does not fit in this context. (B) is eliminated by the fact that the sentence says Santiago hit the shark “without hope.” (C) is reminiscent of Santiago’s killing the albacore in an earlier passage, but is almost an antonym for *malignancy*. He also has no reason to want to be kind to the shark that is threatening his prize. (E) likewise does not fit in the context and is neither a denotation nor connotation of the word. (D), however, is an accepted denotation, and fits in the context as the motive for Santiago’s killing the shark.
22. (A) is clearly untrue. If the event had been foreshadowed, it would not be so surprising. The fact that Santiago’s name and the word “shark” alliterate (B) is coincidental and has no bearing on the emotional impact of the story. (D) and (E), if they were true, would be knowable only *after* the moment of surprise. The first mention of the shark (“It was an hour before the first shark hit him.”), however, occurs at the end of a paragraph emphasizing Santiago’s prize in his catch. Thus (C) is the best answer.

23. (A) is tempting, but is not the strongest answer available. (B) is eliminated because it requires information that cannot be found in this passage. (C) is tempting, but ultimately the shark is Santiago's enemy, not a noble opponent as the fish was. (E) is tempting, but weak. The shark is a predator, and there is no mention of *his* predator. (D), however, **takes into account Santiago's role in killing his prize and also his knowledge that he is powerless to stop the sharks.**
24. Throughout the novella, and even in this passage, **Santiago exhibits each of the traits listed except optimism (A).** Twice we are told that the old man acted without hope. In both of those instances, however, we are told that he was still acting with resolution (B). He still has the strength (C) to hurl the harpoon hard enough to kill the shark. He still expresses admiration and pity for the fish—his great opponent—and almost admires the efficiency of the shark, even while hating the shark (D), and he is able to land a mortal blow on the shark on his first attempt (E). **Thus, (A) is the best answer.**
25. The *reader* may infer that the shark is cruel and/or stupid (A), but Hemingway does not use any words to suggest such a judgment. The shark simply is what it is. The description of the blue shark in the sunlight establishes beauty—in fact, Hemingway says the shark was beautiful—but there is nothing to suggest cunning (B). (C) is eliminated by Santiago's realization that this shark had no fear. Likewise, the shark is large and fast, but the passage indicates nothing about power (D). **The speed of the shark, however, and the sharpness of its teeth, and the description of its "knifing" through the water or "cutting" the water, clearly establish (E) as the right answer.**
26. Santiago is a human performing human actions, and no non-living things are performing in unexpected ways, so (B) is clearly eliminated. (C) is a rhetorical device involving repetition of key words. This does not occur in the passage in question. (D) is a unique linking of two objects to a single preposition, which is also not present. (E) is another rhetorical device involving repetition. **Santiago's carrying of the mast—and falling under its weight—is reminiscent of Christ carrying the cross, and Santiago's sleeping position resembles the position of Christ on the cross. Therefore, (A) is the correct answer.**
27. **Manolin is a dynamic character (E), and it is not until this passage that the reader witnesses the growth that has occurred.** He has changed in that he will make his own choice about the person with whom he will fish. In short, Manolin has grown up. That Manolin is a round character (D) and an animated character (C) are true, but are not established in this passage. (D) and (E) being true automatically excludes (A) and (B).

28. Manolin's boat did not go out the day of Santiago's return because of the wind. **That is clearly a cost of their being unable to practice their livelihood because of luck (A) or chance.** He is devoted to the old man (B) and looks on him as he always did, but, even if Manolin had refused to sail with his boat, he would not have had the power to prevent the boat from sailing. (C) has no bearing on whether Manolin's boat would sail or not. (D) might be tempting for some students who might want to conclude that, since the old man wasn't there to wake Manolin, he slept too late. This interpretation, however, ignores the fact that Santiago has been gone for several days, and it also requires knowledge not available in this passage. There is nothing in the passage, or the novella as a whole, to suggest (E).
29. (A) is probably true, but no thought like this is expressed or even implied in the passage. (C) is eliminated by the context in which the proprietor is expressing admiration for Manolin's fish, but *wonder* for Santiago's. (D) is a nice sentiment, but, again, not supported by the text. (E) is eliminated by the boy's verbal response, "Damn my fish!" before he starts crying. **Clearly, however, the boy's new success stands in stark contrast to the old man's most recent failure and makes Santiago's loss of his fish all the more painful (B).**
30. The passage is about a boat and a beach, so (A), (B), and (E) are easily eliminated. One definition of "shingle" is a pebbly beach. Beach can easily be inferred from the context. **As the shingle where Santiago comes ashore is "below the rocks", (C) is a better choice than (D).**

## The Old Man and the Sea

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

*This simile emphasizes both Santiago's age and hard life and his lack of luck with fishing. Santiago is physically scarred and might literally look like an eroded desert. Also, ironically, the ocean has, for him, been as fishless as a desert. Thus, the simile combines the two ideas.*

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

*Eighty-four*

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

*Manolin's parents forbid him to fish with Santiago after forty days. Forty days is a significant number in both the Old and the New Testaments: Moses' time on Mount Sinai, the Israelites' in the desert, the number of days of rain for Noah, Christ's time of fasting and temptation in the desert, the number of days between the Resurrection and the Ascension, etc.*

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

*The new master caught "three good fish" the first week Manolin was with him. Three is also a significant number in Judeo-Christian culture and tradition.*

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

*After Santiago's earlier dry spell, he caught big fish every day for three weeks.*

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

*Answers will vary, as there are several. Three is the number of the Trinity, the number of Hebrew Patriarchs, the number of parts of the Hebrew Bible, the number of gifts brought by the Wise Men, the number of times Peter denied Christ. The Resurrection occurred on the third day after the Crucifixion. Jesus' earthly ministry lasted three years, etc.*

7. What might be suggested by the occurrences of these significant numbers in the text?

*As three and forty are both significant numbers in Judeo-Christian culture and tradition, Hemingway is possibly suggesting that this novella is an allegory or parable pointing toward a biblical interpretation.*

8. What effect does Hemingway create with the polysyndeton in the paragraph that begins, “They sat on the Terrace and many of the fishermen made fun of the old man...”?

*The use of the polysyndeton lulls the reader into a sense of torpor or calmness. It has the effect of the waves of the ocean washing onto the shore and down again and onto the shore and down again. The rhythm of the sentence imitates the rhythm of the sea and the rhythm of the fishermen's lives.*

9. Why does Hemingway direct the reader's attention to Santiago's eyes? What do they reveal about his personality?

*Though his exterior physique and his surrounding circumstances seem weathered and hopeless, his eyes reveal the character of the inner man. They are honest, hardworking, “cheerful and undefeated.” Though everything about him on the outside looks destroyed, one can see that inside he is not defeated.*

10. The theme that man can be destroyed but not defeated is already being developed. How?

*In the physical description of Santiago there is much of his old body that is destroyed, but one look into his eyes affirms that he is not defeated. The drive for greatness has never left him.*

11. After reading the first conversation between the boy and the man, what can you discern about their relationship?

*Simply put, “The old man had taught the boy to fish and the boy loved him.” A great respect and a great faith were shared between the two. The old man viewed the boy as a friend, and the boy viewed the old man as a friend. The boy helped to carry the man's equipment and offered him a beer. The old man gladly accepted his friendship “between fishermen” and treated the boy as his equal.*

12. Why does Manolin's offering to buy Santiago a beer cause the old man to reflect on his humility? What is ironic about this reflection?

*Santiago's allowing Manolin to buy the beer reveals his humility because he probably cannot afford to buy beer for himself. The irony is that, while reflecting on his newfound humility, he also admits to still being proud.*

13. Describe the setting.

*The story is set in Cuba outside of the capital city of Havana. It is a small fishing village that sports a Terrace where the old fishermen gather to share their tales and drink their beer or coffee. Across the harbor lies a shark factory, and often the smell of the butchered remains permeates the docks. The homes are less than modest and described by Hemingway as shacks. Inside the old man's house is very little by way of food or furniture.*

14. Why would Hemingway have chosen this setting?

*Hemingway believed that, in order to write truthfully, the writer must be acquainted with the subject. Cuba was Hemingway's place of residence for almost two decades. Hemingway was also an avid fisherman, acquainted with many kinds of fish and their behaviors. The simplicity of the setting will make a believable stage for his thematic ideas.*

15. What does Hemingway suggest about Santiago's wife? How does he lead to this conclusion? What is significant about this mention?

*First, the suggestion is clear that Santiago's wife was a Catholic and a woman of faith. This is suggested by the items of hers that Santiago keeps in his shack: a picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and a picture of the Virgin of Cobre, the patron of Cuba. Also, these items are called "relics of [Santiago's] wife." The ambiguous term relic denotes both any artifact—something old and outdated—from a previous era, as well as a sacred or venerated item closely associated with a Saint or Martyr. This is significant because it establishes that Santiago was once married and is now a widower, and it also emphasizes the suggestion that this story is to be read with an eye toward an allegorical meaning.*

16. Contrast the boy's feelings toward the fisherman he now works for and his feelings for Santiago.

*The boy dislikes the fisherman that his parents are making him work for; he understands the fisherman has no respect for him. He hates that the other fisherman treats him as a child, not even trusting him enough to allow him to carry the equipment. The boy feels humiliated if the fisherman awakens him. On the other hand, the boy respects Santiago since Santiago treats him like a son—even as an equal. They drink together and eat together. The boy appreciates the responsibilities that Santiago delegates to him when they sail together. He appreciates that in the early hours of the morning, Santiago slips down to awaken him from his slumber.*

17. When he was younger, what did Santiago dream about? What does he dream about now? What is the significance of this dream?

*In the past, Santiago dreamed of storms, women, great occurrences, great fish, fighters, contests of strength, and his wife. Now he dreams only about the coast of Africa and the young lions playing on the beach. Because this dream appears three times in the story, some critics suggest that the dreams carry significant meaning, but there is little agreement on what it actually does signify. On the surface, however, it seems safe to assume that the dream is a pleasant one for the old man. Although the lions are fierce predators, in the dreams they are always playing. Perhaps they reflect a harmony between opposing forces: life and death, love and hate, destruction and regeneration. The fact that they "played like young cats" is indicative of Santiago's past, his memory, and his youth, which are all part of him, but not of his present life, as he is no longer young.*

18. Why is there such detail about the preparation of the skiff for the day?

*Hemingway includes many details on the preparation of the boat to create a sense of verisimilitude. The attention to such small details by a man who has been eighty-four days without a fish proves the character of the man. Santiago will do “what a man must do.” Even if the sea has let him down, even if all circumstances let him down, he will not let himself down. This passage alludes to the theme that people should depend on themselves, not outside forces. The pride in his preparation furthers the theme that pride is the source of greatness.*

19. Explain the paradox about “hitting the head (of the tuna) for kindness.”

*Although hitting the tuna in the head seems cruel, in reality, hitting the tuna kills it quickly, saving it from much suffering.*

20. The significant role that luck plays in a person's life is a theme of this novella. How do Santiago and society feel about luck?

*Santiago believes in luck. He has gone eighty-four days without a fish, and he claims that eighty-five is a lucky number. He desires to play the lottery, with a ticket ending in the number eighty-five. He says he would like to take Manolin gambling—presumably because he views the boy as lucky. He does not, however, rely on luck. He meticulously prepares for each day and carefully watches every line. He thinks: “It is better to be lucky. But I would rather be exact. Then when luck comes you are ready.” Society, on the other hand, places much greater emphasis on luck, even to the extent that they believed that one man's luck might rub off on another and vice versa. Manolin's parents did not let him fish with Santiago any longer because Santiago's luck was bad, and they did not want the old man's bad luck to rub off on their son.*

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.

*Though Santiago spoke of luck and to some degree believed in it, he still worked constantly and consistently preparing his boat each day. He understood the concept of hard work. He prepared for situations. He wanted to be sure he had the correct bait, the lines hanging at just the right depth. He did not want to leave anything to outside chance.*

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

*Earlier in the book, Santiago describes himself as strange; he now uses the same word to describe the fish. Santiago speaks of the fish as his brother, a statement of equality. He decides that the fish must be a male because he has no panic; neither does Santiago. Santiago comments, “I can do nothing with him and he can do nothing with me,” in other words, they are equal opponents.*

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?

*Contrasting the eagle's unyielding claw to Santiago's weak, cramped hand highlights the idea that the hand still has strength. Santiago may be old, but he has no intention of giving in or giving up. Whatever strength he possesses will be put to use. He will not be defeated.*

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

*Earlier in the story, Santiago says that he is not religious, yet when confronted with the difficulties of killing the fish, he prays to Mary for help. He recites the "Hail Mary." He does not necessarily believe, but he is responding to the situation as society has trained him to.*

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

*Joe DiMaggio was a "hero" of baseball during the 1940s and 1950s. He overcame several hardships through the course of his career. Also, DiMaggio came from a generations-long line of fishermen—another fact to which the simple and sincere Santiago would relate. There was a month during the baseball season when DiMaggio was hitless, but he came to work every day and eventually the hitless streak was broken. Santiago knew that if he just kept fishing, he would eventually land a fish that could end his fishless season.*

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

*The contest demonstrated that, even as a young man, Santiago had a great deal of physical strength and endurance; the contest lasted a full day. Because he was the strongest man and the best arm-wrestler in the area, he earned the nickname "The Champion." This memory makes his strength and endurance as an old man more believable. This scene also contributes to the theme that a worthy opponent brings out the best in a warrior, as the fish is bringing out the best in him.*

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

*While Santiago understands that the fish cannot comprehend his current situation—caught on a fisherman's line and about to die—the reader knows that Santiago cannot comprehend his current situation—aging, trapped in a long "dry spell," being pulled farther and farther out to sea by the powerful fish, approaching death.*

28. In what way did Santiago consider himself to be "better" than the fish?

*After the fight of many days, Santiago feels that he is one with the fish and in fact is "only better than him [the fish] through trickery." The fish in all other ways is his equal.*

29. What is significant about the day Santiago finally bests his opponent, the fish?

*The fish succumbs on Santiago's third day at sea. The number three is very significant in Judeo-Christian culture and tradition and has occurred earlier in the book—the number of fish caught in a week, the number of weeks of successful fishing. Santiago triumphing over the fish on the third day might suggest the Resurrection that occurred on the third day after the Crucifixion.*

30. Why does the appearance of the sharks have such an impact on the reader?

*An abrupt announcement by the narrator: "It was an hour before the first shark hit him," takes the reader by surprise. Though some slight foreshadowing of trouble occurs earlier in the book, there is nothing that prepares the reader for this turn of events. The simplicity of the statement is in stark contrast to the complexity of the problem.*

31. What is the possibly allegorical significance of Santiago's reaction to the sharks?

*Santiago cries out with a cry that has no translation, but is "perhaps...a noise such as a man might make, involuntarily, feeling the nail go through his hands and into the wood." This is clearly an allusion to the nailing of Christ's hands to the cross.*

32. Interpret Santiago's statement: "But man is not made for defeat...A man can be destroyed but not defeated."

*Santiago makes this statement shortly after the shark attack. He is greatly disappointed that the sharks will get some of his noble fish. He feels sorry for his friend and wishes that the whole episode had been a dream. But it was not a dream so he must act. Though his fish may be eaten, though it may be destroyed, Santiago will not be defeated. This is a major theme of Hemingway's work.*

33. What does Santiago's insisting, "A man can be destroyed but not defeated" emphasize about his character?

*As was suggested earlier, Santiago is a determined and optimistic man.*

34. If Santiago is a tragic hero, what is his flaw?

*Santiago's flaw is pride. Hemingway begins building the case early in the book and uses the term hubris. For instance, he writes that the old man "was too simple to wonder when he had attained humility...but he had attained it...and it carried no loss of true pride." Second, Santiago and Manolin have a verbal exchange about the cast net and the dinner of yellow rice, neither of which exist. Even though Santiago doesn't have either, the boy plays along. He leaves and returns with dinner later. Pride keeps Santiago from admitting there is no food.*

Finally, as Santiago contemplates how to break the change in his luck, he decides to sail a distance far beyond the others. Many times during the trip, he indicates that he has to sail “too far.” He is willing to risk everything, even if it might be viewed as prideful. Santiago expresses remorse that, as a result of his pride, he and the fish will suffer.

35. What is suggested by the image of Santiago stumbling up the hill toward his home and falling to the ground under the weight of the mast he is carrying?

*The imagery suggests Christ climbing the hill of Golgotha, stumbling under the weight of his cross.*

36. What is further suggested by Hemingway’s description of how Santiago fell asleep on his bed?

*Santiago “slept face down...with his arms out straight and the palms of his hands up.” This image very closely approximates common depictions of the position of Christ on the cross.*

37. When he hears about Santiago’s return, Manolin cries several times. What does this emotion reveal about the character of Manolin?

*Initially, Manolin is overcome with relief that his friend has returned. He feels great sympathy towards the old man: first, because Santiago has had to suffer so much; second, he cries because he was not there to help Santiago. He is disappointed in his decision to “abandon” the old man, even though it was not really his decision. This emotionally charged situation pushes Manolin to make the biggest decision of his life: to follow Santiago despite his parents’ objections.*

38. Which, if any, of the characters are dynamic characters? Support your choice.

*Manolin is a dynamic character. In the beginning of the book, he is an obedient lad who does just as he is expected to do. He has resigned himself to sailing with another fisherman. After Santiago’s return, Manolin no longer is resigned but makes his own decision, as a young man, to fish with Santiago. It is as though the episode brought him from youth to manhood.*

39. Why does Hemingway choose the third-person omniscient point of view for this tale?

*No other viewpoint would work. If Hemingway were to choose the first person POV, the only character he could focus on would be Santiago. While Santiago would certainly be able to narrate his days at sea and his thoughts and feelings during his struggle with the fish and the sharks, he would not be able to describe his own ironies, the contrast between his broken exterior and his undefeated inner self. He would not be able to show the reader his ironic mix of humility and pride. Ultimately, in order for the reader to empathize with Santiago, we need the distance and objectivity that only a third-person narration can provide.*

40. Identify the main and secondary conflicts. What is the significance of their resolutions?

*The main conflicts of this novella are external conflicts. As indicated by the title, the conflicts are between the old man and the sea, protagonist versus nature. The sea has withheld its treasure, its fish, for eighty-four days, yet the old man sails every day in search of a marlin. The conflict is resolved when the old man finally reels in and kills his prize. The protagonist versus nature conflict is not yet resolved however, and the man finds himself fighting the sharks. When he arrives at the shore, all he has left is a skeleton, proving he had a great catch, but the ugliness of nature, the sharks, had conquered it. Nature has ultimately won in this conflict.*

*The secondary conflicts are internal conflicts, protagonist versus himself. Throughout his eighty-four-day dry spell, Santiago never gives up hope that the spell will end. At the beginning of the book, his eyes are described as “cheerful and undefeated.” During his three days at sea, Santiago struggles within himself to control the cramping left hand and to will his body to victory with little sustenance and virtually no water. At the end of the story, he is exhausted, but, in his sleep, he dreams of the lions. He is indeed physically broken, but his spirit is not defeated. The next day, he begins again to plan to fish with the boy.*

*Manolin is the other character who is in constant inner turmoil. While desiring to be an obedient son to his parents, he cannot quiet his feeling that he has betrayed his friend and his desire to serve the old man. In the end, he resolves his inner conflict by choosing to sail with Santiago.*

*In both of the inner conflicts, then, the characters’ better qualities win—the qualities that indicate loyalty, hope, and optimism.*

41. What makes this story a novella instead of a novel or a short story?

*The Old Man and the Sea is a novella because it is relatively short and presents a single major incident rather than a series of events with sub-plots. It is too long to be considered a short story, and the characters of Santiago and Manolin are more fully developed than characters in a short story typically are.*

42. Might this story be considered a parable?

*Answers will surely vary. Hemingway himself claimed that the story was not a parable—that the fish was a fish. So, it would not be wrong for some students to insist that the story is simply a tale of the unconquerable human spirit. On the other hand, many of the clues suggesting a Judeo-Christian reading are indisputable, and other students will want to base their interpretations on them.*

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?

*Hemingway uses words of positive connotation to create the idea of a worthy opponent. When he writes of the marlin, he indicates the marlin has great strength and is very beautiful, a fish such as Santiago has never seen. Hemingway's tone towards the marlin creates a likeable fish. He also uses personification to say that the fish is always thinking of his next move, can comprehend the problem. There is an equality developed between Santiago and the fish. Santiago indicates the fish's back must surely hurt as much as his own. He indicates the fish must surely be tiring out as he is. When Hemingway writes of the shovel-nosed sharks, he uses words of negative connotation. Their very name is base. They are mindless. They don't think about their moves, they just smell blood and do what is instinctive for them. They are not worthy of one's attention.*

# The Old Man and the Sea

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

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

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

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

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

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

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7. What might be suggested by the occurrences of these significant numbers in the text?

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8. What effect does Hemingway create with the polysyndeton in the paragraph that begins, "They sat on the Terrace and many of the fishermen made fun of the old man..."?

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9. Why does Hemingway direct the reader's attention to Santiago's eyes? What do they reveal about his personality?

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10. The theme that man can be destroyed but not defeated is already being developed. How?

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11. After reading the first conversation between the boy and the man, what can you discern about their relationship?

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12. Why does Manolin's offering to buy Santiago a beer cause the old man to reflect on his humility? What is ironic about this reflection?

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13. Describe the setting.

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14. Why would Hemingway have chosen this setting?

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15. What does Hemingway suggest about Santiago's wife? How does he lead to this conclusion? What is significant about this mention?

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16. Contrast the boy's feelings toward the fisherman he now works for and his feelings for Santiago.

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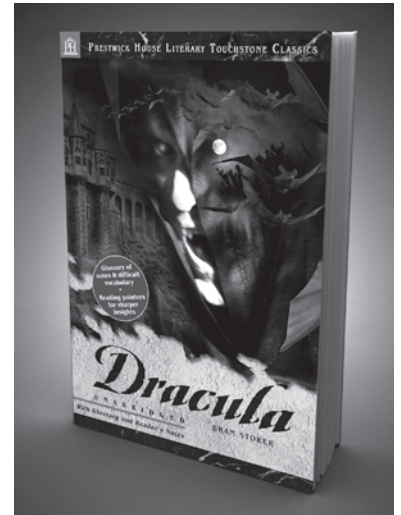
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