

The Old Man and the Sea

Extract from The Old Man and the Sea by Ernest Hemingway

Set in the Gulf Stream off the coast of Havana, this magnificent fable is the story of an old man, a young boy and a giant fish. It is a unique and timeless vision of the beauty and grief of man's challenge to the elements in which he lives.

It made the boy sad to see the old man come in each day with his skiff empty and he always went down to help him carry either the coiled lines or the gaff and harpoon and the sail that was furled around the mast. The sail was patched with flour sacks and, furled, it looked like the flag of permanent defeat.

The old man was thin and gaunt with deep wrinkles in the back of his neck. The brown blotches of the benevolent skin cancer the sun brings from its reflection on the tropic sea were on his cheeks. The blotches ran well down the sides of his face and his hands had the deep-creased scars from handling heavy fish on the cords. But none of these scars were fresh. They were as old as erosions in a fishless desert.

Everything about him was old except his eyes and they were the same colour as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated.

'Santiago,' the boy said to him as they climbed the bank from where the skiff was hauled up. 'I could go with you again. We've made some money.'

The old man had taught the boy to fish and the boy loved him.

'No,' the old man said. 'You're with a lucky boat. Stay with them.'

'But remember how you went eighty-seven days without fish and then we caught big ones every day for three weeks.'

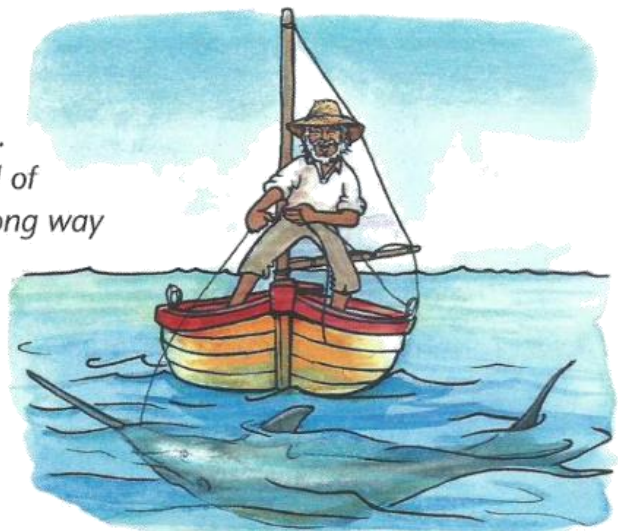
'I remember,' the old man said. 'I know you did not leave me because you doubted.'

On the eighty-fifth day Santiago set out alone. An eighteen-foot marlin took his bait. After three excruciating days the old man finally killed the fish. But his painful journey was not yet over. The blood of the marlin attracted sharks, and Santiago was a long way from home... Finally he reached the shore...

He unstepped the mast and furled the sail and tied it. Then he shouldered the mast and started to climb. It was then he knew the depth of his tiredness. He stopped for a moment and looked back and saw in the reflection from the street light the great tail of the fish standing up well behind skiff's stern. He saw the white naked line of his backbone and the dark mass of the head with the projecting bill and all the nakedness between.

He started to climb again and at the top he fell and lay for some time with the mast across his shoulder. He tried to get up. But it was too difficult and he sat there with the mast on his shoulder and looked at the road. A cat passed on the far side going about its business and the old man watched it. Then he just watched the road.

Finally he put the mast down and stood up. He picked the mast up and put it on his shoulder and started up the road. He had to sit down five times before he reached his shack.



Comprehension

Inside the shack he leaned the mast against the wall. In the dark he found a water bottle and took a drink. Then he lay down on the bed. He pulled the blanket over his shoulders and then over his back and legs and he slept face down on the newspapers with his arms out straight and the palms of his hands up.

He was asleep when the boy looked in the door in the morning. It was blowing so hard that the drifting boats would not be going out and the boy had slept late and then come to the old man's shack as he had come each morning. The boy saw that the old man was breathing and then he saw the old man's hands and he started to cry. He went out very quietly to go to bring some coffee and all the way down the road he was crying.

A

- 1 Name the three main characters in the story.
- 2 What was the old man's job?
- 3 Describe Santiago's appearance.
- 4 Was the old man optimistic? How do you know?
- 5 How long had it been since the old man had caught fish?
(Choose one sentence from the story that indicates this.)
- 6 What type of fish did Santiago catch?
- 7 Did he manage to bring the fish safely to shore?
- 8 Why was the boy crying?



B

- 1 In what country is the story set? Find it in your atlas.
- 2 Give two examples from the story which show that the old man was poor.
- 3 Describe the old man's way of life.
- 4 Choose one phrase/sentence that made an impression on you.
- 5 Think of another possible title for the book.
- 6 Explain how the boy might have felt when he saw the old man sleeping.
- 7 How, do you think, did the story finish?
- 8 What challenges might face people because of where they live?



C

Dictionary Work

Choose the word most similar in meaning to the underlined word in each sentence.

- 1 It looked like the flag of permanent defeat.
(a) unfortunate (b) lasting (c) unusual (d) short
- 2 The old man was thin and gaunt.
(a) haggard (b) quiet (c) hungry (d) ravenous
- 3 The brown blotches of benevolent skin cancer were on his cheeks.
(a) unusual (b) dangerous (c) rare (d) kindly
- 4 An eighteen-foot marlin takes his bait.
(a) rod (b) lure (c) oar (d) knife

