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The Old Man and the Sea

The Old Man and the Sea, short heroic [novel](#) by [Ernest Hemingway](#), published in 1952 and awarded the 1953 [Pulitzer Prize](#) for fiction. It was his last major work of fiction. The story centres on an aging fisherman who engages in an epic battle to catch a giant [marlin](#).

Summary

The central character is an old Cuban fisherman named Santiago, who has not caught a fish for 84 days. The family of his apprentice, Manolin, has forced the boy to leave the old fisherman, though Manolin continues to support him with food and bait. Santiago is a mentor to the boy, who cherishes the old man and the life lessons he imparts. Convinced that his luck must change, Santiago takes his skiff far out into the deep waters of the [Gulf Stream](#), where he soon hooks a giant [marlin](#). With all his great experience and strength, he struggles with the fish for three days, admiring its strength, dignity, and faithfulness to its identity; its destiny is as true as

Santiago's as a fisherman. He finally reels the marlin in and lashes it to his boat.

However, Santiago's exhausting effort goes for naught. [Sharks](#) are drawn to the tethered marlin, and, although Santiago manages to kill a few, the sharks eat the fish, leaving behind only its skeleton. After returning to the harbour, the discouraged Santiago goes to his home to sleep. In the meantime, others see the skeleton tied to his boat and are amazed. A concerned Manolin is relieved to find Santiago alive, and the two agree to go fishing together.

Analysis and reception

The Old Man and the Sea contains many of the themes that preoccupied Hemingway as a writer and as a man. The routines of life in a Cuban fishing village are evoked in the opening pages with a characteristic economy of language. The stripped-down existence of the fisherman Santiago is crafted in a spare, elemental style that is as eloquently dismissive as a shrug of the old man's powerful shoulders. With age and luck now against him, Santiago knows he must row out "beyond all people," away from land and into the [Gulf Stream](#), where one last drama would be played out, in an empty arena of sea and sky.

Hemingway was famously fascinated with ideas of men proving their worth by facing and overcoming the challenges of nature. When the old man hooks a marlin longer than his boat, he is tested to the limits as he works the line with bleeding hands in an effort to bring it close enough to [harpoon](#). Through his struggle, Santiago demonstrates the ability of the human spirit to endure hardship and suffering in order to win. It is also his deep love and knowledge of the sea, in its impassive cruelty and beneficence, that allows him to prevail. The essential physicality of the story—the smells of tar and salt and fish blood, the cramp and nausea and blind exhaustion of the old

man, the terrifying death spasms of the great fish—is set against the [ethereal](#) qualities of dazzling light and water, isolation, and the swelling motion of the sea. And through it all, the narrative is constantly tugging, unreeling a little more, and then pulling again, all in tandem with the old man's struggle. It is a story that demands to be read in a single sitting.

The Old Man and the Sea was an immediate success and came to be regarded as one of Hemingway's finest works. It was cited when he won the [Nobel Prize for Literature](#) in 1954. A hugely popular film [adaptation](#) starring [Spencer Tracy](#) was released in 1958.