

THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA

OVERALL OBJECTIVE: To provide teachers with instructional materials that will enhance their students' understanding of the novel through development of skills in the area of vocabulary, reading comprehension, literary analysis, writing, and appreciation of Ernest Hemingway's novel, *The Old Man and the Sea*, via a multi-level instructional approach.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THIS PACKET:

To help students:

1. build vocabularies based on the language used in the novel.
2. develop reading comprehension skills of understanding character relationships, recognizing sequence of events, inferring the main idea, understanding cause and effect, and reading critically.
3. develop the literary analysis skills of understanding characterization, recognizing values, understanding symbolism, and recognizing theme.
4. practice writing skills of describing place and action.

APPROACHES TO *THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA*

Hemingway's late masterpiece, though different in many ways from the bulk of his writing, is both a remarkable novel in its own right, and a valuable introduction to its author's style and outlook. The simplicity of its style and the universality of its subject make the book accessible even to very young readers, yet it raises issues of technique and substance that can challenge far more mature students. The novel lends itself, in short, to a great range of approaches, dependent only on the teacher's goals and the class's needs.

On the level of plot, *The Old Man and the Sea* is a gripping narrative that students will often read in a single sitting. Its pace is almost leisurely at first, yet the suspense of wondering whether the old man will have any luck, and the prolonged struggle to harpoon the marlin, will hold a reader's attention from the beginning, while Santiago's futile battle against the predatory sharks will surely engage the sympathies of all students.

Hemingway's famed narrative style is shown to good effect in this story, where his terseness and command of simple yet pregnant sentence structures is matched with a dramatic subject. Students will have no difficulty reading the text, yet imitating its laconic, efficient style will prove both challenging and salutary for young writers. In particular, the teacher can focus on Hemingway's effective use of specific detail, from the appearance of the fish Santiago catches to the methods of fishing and sailing. Students whose writing is short on detail and long on generalizations can be helped

by following Hemingway's model. At the same time, the story's adventure and the depth of Hemingway's expertise about his subject will make students eager to try their own stories in imitation of his.

There are really only two characters in Hemingway's story, one major and one minor. But Santiago's portrait is so carefully drawn, and his relationship with Manolin so succinctly sketched, that no larger cast is needed. Students will learn a great deal from Santiago about the humanity of older people, while the gentleness and trust of the boy - man relationship counters the machismo cult too often found in both Hemingway and his lesser imitators who write about men in action. Much of this quality is conveyed in the novel's dialogue or in Santiago's words and thoughts while alone; both these elements form excellent models for students' creative writing.

Just as the Santiago - Manolin relationship modifies familiar stereotypes, the theme of the novel represents a balancing of the heroic and the humane. Santiago embodies the will to succeed, to test oneself against natural (the marlin) or human (the arm wrestling) opponents. But he is also in harmony with the world where he earns his living and his status. His pity for the birds, affection for the turtles, and respect for the great fish all suggest a vision of life often found in American Indian or other non-Western literatures. Discussion of these two interwoven themes will provoke serious thought on the part of young people. In addition, Hemingway uses a series of evocative images in furthering his theme — Joe DiMaggio, the African lions, Santiago's thoughts about the stars and the sun, his meditations on sin and crucifixion. These images raise the story above the literal level on which it functions so successfully, and provide another direction for discussion and analysis.

Despite its brevity, *The Old Man and the Sea* deserves extensive study on its own. However, the teacher who wishes to relate Hemingway's book to other texts, or to place it in a thematic unit, will find many useful ways to do so. The book's theme of survival can be looked at in such parallel texts as *The Cay* (which shares similarities of setting and character with Hemingway's book), *Alive*, or *Walkabout*. The topic of conflict with nature leads easily to that of conflict between individuals, which can be examined by reading *Deathwatch*, *Deliverance*, or *Lord of the Flies*, each of which combines human conflict with some form of wilderness survival. Novels such as *The Light in the Forest*, *Laughing Boy*, or *When the Legends Die* can show students' views on nature that have much in common with Santiago's ideas. Finally, such works as *The Red Pony* or Neill Gunn's *Young Art and Old Hector* bear similarities to *The Old Man and the Sea* in both their human relationships and

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